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(Re)positioning black: Negotiating racial subjectivities in white discursively constructed spaces

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(Re)positioning Black:

Negotiating Racial Subjectivities in White Discursively Constructed Spaces

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Abstract

This thesis is both a personal and social inquiry of the experience of Black students at a predominantly white university. Within this inquiry, I extend Nakayama and Krizek's (1995) concept of whiteness as having "no true essence" to conceptualizations of blackness to assert that blackness is "a pattern of negotiation that takes place in conditions generated by specific discursive formations and social relations" (McLaren, 1999, pg. 40) rather than a fixed, essential category. Viewing blackness as encounter means that it is emergent through specific social and discursive conditions that are constantly constructed and negotiated through interactions with whiteness. I approach my project from a postmodern, poststructural, critical perspective that holds central questions of power, hegemony, and domination, as well as the discourse(s) that may play in the perpetuation of these power dynamics (Ono and Lacy, 2011). Thus, a Foucauldian analysis (per the lens of Holstein and Gubrium) is helpful in uncovering discursive practices around black (and white) individuals and bringing awareness of the discourses that dominate understandings within the university setting. More specifically, it provides a glimpse into the very different ways of understanding and explaining what is distinctive about the experience of Black students at a predominantly white institution. This method resonates with my own understandings of the way in which "we" as subjects construct our everyday realities in relation to our race and the various contexts and situations in which "we" are involved.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Introduction

In her narrative "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action," black-feminist writer Audre Lorde (1984) recounts and reflects on her position in life and society as one of regret for the times and moments she was voiceless, unspoken, and unexpressed. Reminiscent on these, Lorde writes:

I was going to die, if not sooner then later, whether or not I had ever spoken myself. My silences had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you. What are the words you do not have yet? What do you need to say? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them still in silence? We have been socialized to respect fear more than our own need for language. […] And of course, I am afraid – you can hear it in my voice – because the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation and that always seem fraught with danger…I began to ask each time: "What's the worst that could happen to me if I tell this truth?"…Our speaking out will irritate some people, get us called bitchy or hypersensitive and disrupt some dinner parties. And then our speaking out will permit [others] to speak, until laws are changed and lives are saved and the world is altered forever. Next time, ask: What's the worst that will happen? Then push yourself a little further than you dare. Once you start to speak, people will yell at you. They will interrupt you put you down and suggest it's personal. And the world won't end. And the speaking will get easier and easier. And you will find you have fallen in love with your own vision, which you may never have realized

you have […] and at last you'll know with surpassing certainty that only one thing

is more frightening than speaking your truth. And that is not speaking (pp. 41-42).

"…*your silence will not protect you*" (Lorde, 1984, p. 41). It is in these words I find

solace. I empathize with Lorde, in fact I feel her speaking to me, whispering, freedom is

voice. Silence, whether forced, or self-imposed is damaging, constraining, and

oppressive, but voice and diversity of voice is liberating.

The standpoint, or "privileged location" from which she writes is one similar to

my experience navigating and negotiating my racial identity (Allen, 1998; hooks, 1994).

For most of my life (including the present), I have been compelled on many occasions to

define my identity for others and myself. Mixed, ethnically ambiguous and multiracial, I

grew up in a multicultural household - my father from the Caribbean and my mother

Korean. Within the home, I was accepted, comfortable and proud. I saw nothing wrong

with the "world" in which I lived and the people that surrounded me. But my father was

instrumental in reminding me that my faith in the "world" that I knew was unfounded in

comparison to the one that existed beyond my immediate walls. My perception of the

"outside world" was based solely on the fact that I had yet to really "see" it, or inversely

that I hadn't yet been exposed to how the world "sees" me.

My experience growing up as a member of a multicultural and biracial family

made me keenly aware of my "difference." I had to navigate two worlds- one dictated by

my parent's traditions and expectations and the other regulated by the broader and

culturally inflicted frameworks of a singular black identity (hooks, 1990; Hall, 2000). For

example, my father commanded that I speak 'proper English.' In his opinion, doing so

was the mark of an educated individual. On the contrary, the people I encountered outside

of my home, they were surprised, noting that I spoke to the liking of a 'white' individual. This culturally inflicted encounter further implies that there exists black and white ways to speak. Among these family and social projections, I struggled with issues of identity and belonging, with asserting my worth and value, with finding my voice, place and individuality in a society that only identified me by my exterior, a society where I became the racialized "other." I soon became more aware that within the black/white binary, how much of my identity I could actually construct. And even then, I never felt fully "black."

If you ask me to name the time when the spores of blackness really crept into my heart, my answer will be when I first entered university. I started to feel culturally and socially slighted and then I had never felt more "black." In this land of overwhelming whiteness; I could only be "black." This awareness manifests itself in response to the innocuous questions people ask about my "blackness." I've heard it all. "Do you like fried chicken?" "Is Watermelon your favorite fruit?" "Why do you talk like you're white?" "Do you only date black guys?" "I bet your hair is nappy, huh…can I touch it?" Questions that limited who I could be, the kind of "black" I could be. Black became my identity and my experience (not solely a part of it).

It became a device for them to simplify me, subsuming my individuality and agency. Within this social context, I occupied a space of subordinate status because I was a racial minority. I was pushed to the margins, outside of the dominant culture, outside of the dominant discourses circulating around me but immersed within the discourse as well. I became an object, my experience became objectified, and I left without a voice. And yet, I yearned. A word used by hooks (1990) to describe, "a common psychological state shared by…those whom such narratives have silenced" (p. 25). She contends, "the

yearning […] is the longing for critical voice" (p. 25). I yearned for a voice, a voice of

my own experience, and a voice of subjectivity. I desired my own identity, one not

confined or rather externally imposed by the limits and constraints that constitute and

compartmentalize blackness (Johnson, 2003). I share this, because though I do not intend

to add to a collective identity of being black or essentialize the black experience, I desire

to voice my truth and allow the space to affirm and assert the possibility for multiple

black identities and experiences (hooks, 1990) and the ability to move from the objective

to a "liberatory space to construct black subjectivity" (hooks, 1990, p. 36).

    Ultimately this project as an attempt to understand the experience of navigating

my own racial identity against a backdrop of whiteness brought together the personal and

the academic. But more specifically, it became a quest for voice.

    In this thesis, I will examine how blackness is constructed and negotiated in the

local context of the university setting. To do so, I will problematize my own experience

navigating a black racial identity as well inquire about the experience of other individuals

at the university racially self-identify as Black per the use of focus groups. I will analyze

the focus groups texts interpretively and then supplement that analysis per a post-

structural and postmodern lens to examine how the self is discursively produced.

    Continuing this chapter, I will situate this project and review past literature on

race as a communicative construct, black racial identity, and whiteness. This chapter will

also situate my argument of blackness as a point of negotiation, as encounter and

challenge traditional frameworks that characterize blackness as substantial and fixed. I

will also discuss post- structural, postmodern frameworks guiding my analysis. I will

discuss how Foucauldian discourse analysis (via Holstein and Gubrium's Analytics of

Discursive Practice) is used as a methodological framework. Foucauldian discourse analysis provides a lens that interrogates the intersections of power, knowledge and discourse.

Chapter Two will present my interpretive analysis of the focus group transcripts, illuminating how whiteness is enacted at the university at the individual and institutional level, how the black subject is constituted by whiteness encounters, and further the response of black subjects within the encounter. In this chapter, I examine several discourses that emerge from the enactments with whiteness and how it will relate to my supplementary analysis and research questions.

Finally, Chapter Three presents a reflective analysis of my own experience in negotiating blackness, highlighting personal tensions incorporated in the struggle of negotiating encounters with whiteness. This chapter situates the project more theoretically through the use of Holstein and Gubrium's (2000) *Analytics of Interpretive Practice* with attempts to gain a deeper understanding about the experience of the other subjects within this inquiry and my own.

Context

In a section of her novel, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*, entitled "Chitlin Circuit," bell hooks (1990) calls attention to the crisis individuals face in discussions of black identity. Commenting on the "narrow and constricting" concept of the black experience traditionally expressed, she states that:

> Rather than assume that a black person coming from a background that is not
> predominantly black is assimilationist, I prefer to acknowledge that theirs is a
> different black experience, one that means that they may not have had access to

life experiences more common to those…raised in racially segregated worlds. It is

not productive to see them as enemies or dismiss them by labeling them "not

black enough." Most often they have not chosen the context of their upbringing,

and they may be suffering from a sense of "loss" of not knowing who they are as

black people or where they fit in (p. 37).

There is, as implied by hooks, at the core of descriptions of black identity, an inescapable

tendency to constrain, limit or generalize definitions of blackness as constructed by

dominant discourse. As such, she later asserts that the benefits of, "facing the reality of

multiple black experiences enables us [...] to take into account the specificity and

diversity of who we are" (hooks, 1990, p. 37). On the same hand, however, through all of

this, a critical characteristic of the black experience that is impervious to contemporary

theorizing is "the ways in which "living of blackness" becomes a material way of

knowing" (Johnson, 2003, p. 8).

Such enumerations can be recounted in the autobiographical narratives of black

individuals struggling with their 'blackness' and retention of identity while moving

through and occupying a white discursively constructed space (Simmons, Lowery-Hart,

Wahl, & McBride, 2013). The narratives we tell about ourselves provide a framework for

"experiencing the material world" connecting our lives "with larger, social, historical and

political processes" (Cruikshank, 1998, p. xii). This can prove useful when examining the

situated experiences of these black students. A study conducted by Simmons, Lowery-

Hart, Wahl, and McBride (2013) examined the situated experiences of black students

enrolled at three predominantly white institutions. One quote from a student within the

study captured the unique standpoint that this "outsider-within" status can generate. In

describing her experience struggling between her *blackness* and the perceived *whiteness* of her university, she noted:

> There is a war going on inside of me between my Blackness and your Whiteness. When I see myself in the mirror, I see a competent, talented Black woman. Then I go to class, look around, and realize that I need more. My Blackness seems too…um…Black, like I need to be more than who I am. I need what you have. I need an understanding of how things work, you know, politically. My blackness, my personhood isn't enough. I need to whiten myself to succeed (p. 377).

What is offered here is an illustration of what Williams (1998) suggests occurs as black individuals navigate blackness in the context of a predominantly white institution. In this instance, a dialectical tension is forged between the dialogic relationship between blackness and whiteness and suggests as Williams metaphorically describes, the need for "two chairs at the table [of whiteness], one for you one for your blackness" (Williams, 1998, p. 27). More specifically, this provides insight how whiteness co-constructs blackness and further black identities. Such a framework takes into consideration how contemporary constructs of black identity are informed by the context surrounding the individual and how black identity negotiation is locally situated. In order to better understand how this negotiation takes place, it first requires an understanding of the role race plays within this process as race fundamentally, according to Giroux (2003) is a critical factor not only determining how power, material privileges, and resources are distributed, but also a prime determinant in how identities are organized.

Race as a Communicative Construct

Contemporary studies of race seek to move away from the quintessential focus of race as biological and toward the claim that race is a social construct (Allen, 2007; Alley-Young, 2008; hooks, 2012; Jackson & Garner, 1998; Lewis, 2001). When people make the assertion that race is a social construction, or more specifically one that is communicatively constituted, what kind of argument are they making? At minimum, to assert such a claim is to reject the conception of race as a biological marker and to suggest that race instead is purely human invention.

There are several ways to examine the constructed nature of race. First is to explore the evolving significance of race and its function in both historical and modern discourse (Jackson & Garner, 1998; Leonardo, 2014). Race, a simple word, a linguistic utterance becomes a social construction when it enters the world of discourse (Solomon, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005; Bonilla-Silva, 2003). The definition, or rather interpretation of the word, "race" has varied over time, contingent on contexts and certain situations in the past. Even presently, racial categories or constructions of racial identities change from one society to another (Jackson & Garner, 1998; Solomon, Portelli, Daniel & Campbell, 2005; Omi & Winant, 1986). Socially, it's constantly in flux. To illustrate I'll proceed anecdotally, inserting an experience I had in October 2015. For the past two years, James Madison University has hosted the iRwanda Debate Team and as a graduate student within the School of Communication Studies, we were presented with the opportunity to join them at dinner. I jump at the opportunity of interacting with other cultures and people, so I accepted. At dinner, I was immediately fascinated by their tales and adamant about learning and hearing the experiences and stories about Rwanda. The

individual I was sitting next to began to describe her country. Her words became the brush and my mind the canvas, only imagining the vibrant and colorful depictions of the terrain and forestry she was so artfully illustrating. As she continued her description, and I, still imagining how much I would like it there, she mentioned, "In Rwanda, they would call you *mzungu*." It was then that I, perplexed, carefully asked, "what does that mean?" in which she simply replied, "white person." As previously mentioned, I am multiethnic and the daughter of two immigrant parents. While I engage in the cultural practices on both sides of my family, I consider, and self-identify racially (or verbally that is) as Black, for mostly reasons of simplicity. In the space of a discourse, I changed from Black to *mzungu*, or in other words white.

Is race then purely a social construct? Perhaps yes, as this is illustrative of how the understanding or meaning of race is relational and constantly subject to redefinition in different cultures. It is indeed apparent that differences exist, but what is truly significant are the systems of thought and language we use to make sense of that difference (Allen, 2004). It is important to note, however, the function of language is vital to understanding the implication of race. We as human beings, as social beings rather, incessantly construct the abstract significance of race throughout constant interaction with others and ourselves. Leonardo (2002) contends that categories such a "white people" are representative of a "socially constructed identity, usually based on skin color" (p. 30) and that we are simply born with bodies "that are inscripted with social meaning" (p. 31). But to say that race is a social construct tells us relatively nothing about the role race plays or has played within society. Historically, race has often been treated objectively and constructed using pseudoscientific theories that depict race as a naturally occurring

phenomenon (Allen, 2007; Jackson & Garner, 1998). While these supposedly scientific

categories were used in the past and present as a strategy to assign or classify individuals

on the basis of phenotypic characteristics, these categories failed to conceive or account

for the genetic differences between individuals or groups (Omi & Winant, 1986). But as

previously noted, it is our role as sense-making entities to assign value to these groups,

identities or categories.

Often times an attempt is made to oversimplify the understanding of race or view

it one-dimensionally, but it should be acknowledged that race is a complicated concept

with many analytic dimensions. Central to the theoretical work of race is the attempt to

confront the existence of persistent inequities within society (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; hooks,

2012). Omi and Winant assert that:

> [E]fforts to explain racial inequality as a purely social phenomenon are unable to
>
> account for the origins, patterning, and transformation of racial difference.
>
> Conversely, many examinations of racial difference – understood as a matter of
>
> cultural attributes, *al la* ethnicity theory, or a society wide signification system, *a*
>
> *la* poststructuralist accounts- cannot comprehend such structural phenomenon as
>
> racial stratification in the labor market or patterns of racial segregation (p. 56).

Here the authors reflect on the socially dependent nature of race by stating that the

function of race is threefold. First they identify race as centered in oppression on the basis

of a racial hierarchy, centralizing issues of power and hegemony. Second, they describe

race as grounded in structure of institutionalized discourses. Third they describe that a

definition of race that is strictly social or communicative doesn't take into account the

multifaceted nature of race. Extending the authors' insights on race, I argue that race is

discursive in nature and inherently power-laden and that it plays systematically in shaping identities and social relations. My intent, like Omi and Winant is to suggest a more nuanced view of race – one that seeks to synthesize disparate and incongruent concepts to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the inherent complexities that race encompasses. Thus understanding what is meant by *race as a communicative construct* is vital to understanding the capacity race has in affecting other aspects of our lives, such as our racial identity.

Black Racial Identity

Communication plays a vital role in the study of identity due in part to the apparent obscurity of identity – that has many different understandings and theoretical perspectives (Barhan & Orbe, 2012). Bardhan and Orbe (2012) contend "identity […] is complex since the very concept of identity, and the ways it is experienced in various cultures, tend to differ philosophically" (p. xiv). The development of an individual's identity is not only greatly influenced by culture, but identity is also relational, therefore constantly subject to negotiation with and against other people, values, and is locally situated (Barhan & Orbe, 2012; Drummond & Orbe, 2009, Allen, 2008). This highlights the fact that identity is not only constructed in relation to oneself but rather in relation to the social world more broadly and the *other* more specifically (Bardhan & Orbe, 2012; Drummond & Orbe, 2009; Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau, 1993).

Navigating identity can be even more complex for individuals of color. Tatum (1997) describes navigating a racial identity as the process of examining the "personal significance and social meaning of belonging to a particular racial group" (p. 16). Reflection upon these two authors suggests that Black identity is complex and intensely

contested. Often times, Black individuals have to construct their identity against

historically established structures of race and cultural constructions of blackness defined

and viewed through the lens of Western values and experiences (Allen, 2007; Giroux,

1997).

DuBois (1903) provides a theoretical language to speak of the experience of being

a Black individual in America. In *Souls,* he introduces the concept of the veil, which he

describes is worn by all African Americans, as a visual and metaphorical representation

of the color line, a symbol of displacement from society because of the color of their skin

(1903). The veil affords African Americans the ability to see the world and society

differently than their white counterparts. "Black folks," according to DuBois (1903), are

"gifted with second sight in this American world – a world which yields him no true self-

consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the eyes of others, measuring one by

the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (p. 38). This "double-

consciousness" or "two-ness," if you will, is a constant negotiation of two identities

within African Americans, the sense of being both an "American [and] Negro" (p. 38).

This identity that W.E.B. DuBois promotes is not an attempt to essentialize the black

experience, but rather shed light on a commonality that may affect many. Similarly,

Fanon (1967) reiterates this, by stating that Black individuals negotiate their identities on

a daily basis, even to the point that they may feel a split sense of self.

Much of the literature on black racial identity fails to acknowledge the

complicated relationship between race (i.e. Black) and ethnicity (i.e. African American)

and conflates the two (Carby, 2009; Jackson & Garner, 1998; Giroux, 1997). This lack of

acknowledgement implies the existence of an authentic Black identity that essentializes

those living in a racialized body, undermining the possibility of variation in experience

(hooks, 1994). Employing blackness as both racial and ethnic becomes less a matter of

creating a new form of identity politics than an attempt to rearticulate blackness as part of

a narrow and constricting discourse of cultural, social, and political nationalism (Giroux,

1997). Many of the ways we imagine blackness are constructed in the rigid context of

black American history, engendering the creation of a singular black identity fueled by

U.S. American political discourses (hooks, 1994; Johnson, 2003). In the United States,

"black" or blackness indicates an inferior and marginalized status in society due in part to

the historicized, institutionalized structures of hegemony and oppression enacted through

systems of colonialism, imperialism, patriarchy, white supremacy etc. (Breaux, 2003;

Bonilla-Silva, 2005; Orbe, 1998; hooks, 2012; McPherson & Shelby, 2004).

Traditionally, for those individuals living in a black body, the agency of defining their

identity is arrested by members of the dominant culture and predicated on power and

privilege (Drummond and Orbe, 2009; Jackson and Simpson, 2003; Martin, Krizek,

Nakayama, & Bradford, 1996).

These representations of Blacks in the white imagination are grounded in racist

stereotypes that call into question a person's authenticity. This questioning is one based

not merely on phenotype but also on the symbolic relationship between skin color and the

performance of a culturally inscribed language or dialect associated with essentialist

notions of blackness or whiteness (Johnson, 2003; hooks, 1995). Such examples are

chronicled through the narratives of black individuals who find themselves in the

company of whites, who see them as "exceptional" or a "credit" to their race or those

perceived as "acting or talking white" (Harper, 2006; Johnson, 2003). According to

Fordham and Ogbu (1986), Blacks perceive "acting white" as an act of crossing cultural boundaries and assimilating within the dominant culture by "embracing White attitudes and behaviors." This suggests the belief that ways of thinking and knowing constitute black identity and white identity further restrict and constrain the possibility of agency. These beliefs lay claim to what is and is not considered 'black.' Deploying this thought, one that defines the performance of an authentic black experience, confines and constructs the limits to which one can be "Black" (Johnson, 2003).

Moreover, while blackness in the United States can be described as inherently disadvantaged because of the legacy of historical or political conditions and because of the ways blackness has been viewed under the constructions of whiteness (McPherson & Shelby, 2004; Johnson, 2003), it is certainly not monolithic. I would suggest that this view is opposed (at a minimum) by a shift in perspective that allows for more agency and voices of difference (a perspective that – following hooks 1994 – we might refer to as "Postmodern Blackness") and a perspective that exceeds an "authentic" performance through the articulation of the racial experience(s) of Black individuals. Therefore, I use the term blackness and black racial identity to conceptualize the social constructedness of these categories to divert focus to the situated experiences of self-identified Blacks located in white discursive spaces.

In conceptualizing blackness and whiteness as socially constructed, we can begin to see how black identity is not fixed in some essential category or defined by any essential content, but subject to constant negotiation and re-negotiation through specific encounters. Viewing blackness as encounter means that it is emergent through specific social and discursive conditions that are constantly constructed and negotiated through

interactions with whiteness. The social construction is not power-neutral, but rather the black body becomes a site where white normative values and discourses shape and enable meaning systems that define, organize and regulate how one navigates the social world.

Whiteness

Research on race relations and racism in America continues to fight many assumptions that we have entered a "post-racial era" (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). Today, Black Americans and other persons of color have to contend simultaneously with institutionalized, covert racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2010) and the contradicting belief that race just does not matter anymore (Leonardo, 2004). Color-blindness – this claim that race no longer "matters in society"- suggests that "everyone is a unique individual and that skin color and racial or ethnic identities are not salient markers of lived experiences" (Alley-Young, 2008). This further reinforces a belief that all privileges are earned, but doesn't account for the structural inequalities that pervade society. Moreover, it suggests that the persistence of these inequalities is not due to race or the privileges inscribed with being white (Alley-Young, 2008). This discourse can be better described as whiteness or one that values and insists on racial neutrality.

The study of whiteness is a multidisciplinary area of inquiry that attempts to criticize, investigate, and examine the ways whiteness and white privilege have become institutionalized, unmarked and unearned. (Solomon et al, 2005; Allen, 2008; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995; Shome, 1996; Simpson, 2008; Jackson, 2008). It also "identifies the systemic factors that underscore its continued dominance" (Solomon et al, 2005, p. 148). Whiteness, as cited by Leonardo (2002), "is characterized by the unwillingness to name the contours of racism, the avoidance of identifying with a racial experience or group, the

minimization of racist legacy, and other similar evasions" (p. 32). Furthermore,

Whiteness is defined by what it is not rather than what it is, and within the discourse this

means not "being of color." Shome (1996) speaks of the irony of color-blind racism by

stating that though color is constructed to be invisible, the reality of it is that the only

color construct that is invisible and remains unnamed/unmarked is Whiteness.

While the literature on whiteness offers insight on the understanding of white

privilege and white racial identity, scholars such as hooks (1995), Nakayama and Krizek

(1995) examine whiteness with a more critical eye. bell hooks argued in 1995, that many

scholars that engaged in studies of whiteness did so without taking into account the actual

experience of those affected by whiteness and rather were only concerned with

perspectives of race or racial identity in the white imagination. While this isn't

necessarily true today, I extend this notion in the field of communication to address the

scarcity of literature within this field when viewing perspectives of whiteness in

constructing blackness and consideration of blackness as encounter.

Colorblindness has become a phenomenon that counters notions of "old" racism

in modern American culture by ironically claiming to not "see" race (Neville et al., 2008;

Bonilla-Silva, 2010). It is with this sentiment that Bonilla-Silva (2003) asks, "how is it

possible to have this tremendous degree of racial inequality in a country where most

whites claim that race is no longer relevant?" (p.2). The answer lies in the evolution of

this racial oppression in which he defines "color-blind racism…the ideological armor for

a covert and institutionalized system" (p. 25). Believers of a "color-blind" or "post-

racial" ideology advocate that racism is a thing of the past and presume race irrelevant.

But what this discourse fails to conceive, or perhaps cannot conceive is that the ideas,

procedures, and ways of thinking that are perceived as neutral are more than likely the

most oppressive (Leonardo, 2002). Colorblindness hinders, constrains and limits

dialogues of race and can inadvertently perpetuate systems of hegemony and oppression

(Leonardo, 2002; Simpson, 2008). While Bonilla-Silva (2010) has called attention to the

fluid nature of a color-blind racial ideology, there is a general tendency among

researchers to focus upon the structure of color-blindness rather than the ways it adapts

and changes (Leonardo, 2002). The dangers of a colorblind racial perspective or

worldview are contingent on the subject who takes up this particular position, as

whiteness can be performed, regardless of skin color. In so far as whiteness is a

performance, black individuals can "live their life through whiteness" (Leonardo, 2002,

p. 31). Leonardo (2002) asserts that though whiteness can be considered a racial

discourse, it can be also be characterized as a racial perspective or world-view. In this

sense, whiteness is not necessarily a culture but a social concept that is supported by

material practices and institutions. When considering university environments, whiteness

can permeate and create chilly or hostile climates (Leonard, 2002; Lacy & Ono, 2011;

Lewis, 2001). This is best identified by Gusa as "white-institutional presence," the ability

for white culture to permeate the language, traditions, and learning requirements of

schools. Whiteness is productive of racialized environments. WIP, she contends comes

from the mix of white ascendancy, monoculturalism, white blindness and white

estrangement, all concepts productive of whiteness. White ascendancy refers to the

thoughts and behaviors that result from white authority and privilege. It can be further

broken down into feelings of superiority and entitlement, racialized discourses and white

victimization. Monoculturalism is the expectation that all individuals conform to one

worldview. White blindness is grounded in ideals of colorblindness, which promotes the

idea that race and differences exist, but we choose not to see it. White estrangement

refers to white subjects distancing themselves (physically and socially) from people of

color. Ascribing to the belief of colorblindness can create a racist or "chilly" climate for

individuals not avowed as white because it may invalidate or deem devalue their racial

experience by constructing race as irrelevant. It is within these practices that further

marginalize or oppress groups (Solomon, Portelli, Daniel & Campbell, 2005).

Scholars have dedicated a considerable amount of time researching and critiquing

whiteness in the social contexts such as classroom settings (Hardiman, 2001; Helms,

1990; Warren, 2001). For example, Warren examines the ways whiteness becomes

normalized and reified through communicative acts in the classroom. According to

Warren (2001), the performative approach to whiteness assumes that meanings of

whiteness are socially and relationally constructed. Here he suggests that whiteness is

concretized through repeated stylizations of the body, such as dress, vernacular, etc, but

also, these said stylizations are contextualized within historical discourses and structures

of power. Warren (2001) states, "the fact that white skin exists is not accidental – it is an

accomplishment of a history of discursive normalized moments that worked together to

make that skin tone" (p. 96). Thus, the notion of what constitutes "black" and what

constitutes "white" is a product of a "particular discursive practice" (p. 56) and action

(Omi & Winant, 1986) grounded in historical, social, and political processes. Sometimes

the participation in these practices- knowingly or unknowingly- reinforce the hegemonic

structure from which it is birthed. The variable discursive meanings and changing impact

of how 'race' is understood bear upon the functionality of systemic racism in America (Allen, 2007; Omi & Winant, 1986).

Despite the failed attempts to cure racism by proposing colorblind or racial neutral discourses, I ruminate on the constitutive nature in which we are brought into being as racialized subjects. Holstein and Gubrium (2000) illustrate, in the *Self We Live By*, how "our lives are storied." Our selves and identity (in multiple forms) are narratively constructed and (re)constructed through discourse. Similarly, as Foucault (1986) asserts that the subject is produced through the power of discourse and is subjugated through discourse, this project implicitly draws on each of these theoretical frameworks to examine the ways Black people are positioned by the discourse of whiteness and how the discourse constrains and enables identity construction and reproduces power relations through these positions. It will be an attempt to discover how black individuals who attend predominantly white institutions negotiate their race and racial identity against these broader discourses and culturally inflicted frameworks of blackness as constructed by whiteness.

This project will be guided by one question:

1. How is blackness constructed through and negotiated in everyday interactions, particularly in contexts that are dominated by whiteness?

Theoretical Perspective

My project inquires about the situated experiences of black students enrolled at a predominantly white institution. I approach my project from a postmodern critical perspective that holds central questions of power, hegemony, and domination, as well as

the discourse(s) that may play in the perpetuation of these power dynamics (Ono and

Lacy, 2011).

I align with a Postmodernist view that the world is created by discourses(s) and

assumes that identities are regulated and constructed through discourse. I extend this

further by drawing upon the work of Foucault (1986) and Holstein and Gubrium (2000)

to argue that subjectivity or further subject position is made available to take up through

the discourses employed. Given these assumptions about the discursive constitution of

the subject, it is necessary to examine the circulation, production, and influence of power.

Foucault proffered an alternate framework to study the relationship between power

producing the self. This alternate method of analyzing the self is inspired by the

genealogical analytics of Michel Foucault. It should be noted that though this project

doesn't fully deploy a Foucaultian genealogical inquiry, a very basis of my method is

based on a thorough understanding of his concepts of power, knowledge, and

subjectivity. Or more simply how discourse(s) and power interact in order to address the

"social mechanisms and the discursive understandings through which subjectivity is

constructed" (Foucault, 1986; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000, p. 13). Garland (2014)

suggests that the intent of genealogical analysis "is to problematize the present by

revealing the power relations upon which it depends and the contingent processes that

have brought it into being" (p. 372). His claim points to the role of historical power

struggles and the systems of domination that shape and continue to shape, contemporary,

present-day practices, thus, reestablishing, "the various systems of subjection" (Foucault,

1991, p. 83). Power is then seen to work through discourse constituting what is taken to

be "true" or "normal" and this constitutes the conditions possible for subjectivity. Within

this genealogical framework Foucault examines the concepts and operation of discourse, power, knowledge and the subject.

Discourse

The Foucauldian perspective of discourse provided in Holstein and Gubrium's (2000) chapter titled *Analytics of Interpretive Practice* provides a useful lens with which to further investigate identity and constructions of selves or subjectivity. It is in the analysis of discourse(s) (macro and micro) where we are able to "trace the variable social constructions of the subject" (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000, p. 93). Discourses, "put words into action, constructs perceptions, and formulates understanding" and simultaneously constitutes subjects "that are meaningfully embedded in the discourse itself " (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000, p. 93). This further implicates how communication enables certain individuals and/or groups of people to create and formulate ideas about the world, which may inadvertently turn into "truths" and normative beliefs. Thus, a Foucualdian analysis of discourse focuses on how language positions or constructs individuals or groups in particular ways. Defined broadly, discourse through a Foucauldian lens refers to the

> Ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern (Weedon, 1987, p. 108).

Ultimately, here the author affirms Foucault's (1987) focus on how some discourses have shaped and enabled meaning systems that dominate how we define, organize and regulate

the social world, and ourselves and how these discourses police the mind and body of an

individual.

Identity/Subjectivity

Foucault (1987) rejected the notion of a person having a static, fixed, or rigid

"essence" that in the past would be considered a person's identity. Further, he identified

the self as confined by a continuing discourse and shift in communication between

oneself and others. If subjects, and further, black subjects are created through the

discourse, then it is within these historically constituted discourses that produce identity.

Identity, in this view becomes a process, an on-going construction, and further a strategic

and positional concept (Hall, 2000). Foucault conceptualized the self in terms of

subjectivity or subject position, which are specific positions of agency in relation to

particular forms of knowledge and discourse. The discourses make available various

subject-positions that are made for us as individuals to take up within the discourse.

When we become the subject within the discourse, we are then "subjected" to the

meanings, power, regulations or regimes of truth constituted by the discourse.

Power/Knowledge

Approaching racial identity and whiteness from a critical-postmodern perspective

means understanding how power is viewed from within this paradigm. From this

perspective, power is viewed as relational and productive in contrast to other perspectives

that view power as simply repressive. In particular, Foucault asserts that only seeing

power as repressive is limiting, as power exists in every relation. Since power is

relational, individuals do not lack power, but that power can be seen as a different

manifestation. While, Foucault believes power to be something not simply exercised to

dominate or oppress, the presence of power disciplines the self, concretizes rules and institutions. On describing this relational and productive form of power he states that it

> Categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power, which makes individuals subjects (Foucault, 1983, p. 212).

In this sense, power is capable of regulating our bodies, forming knowledge and producing discourse. One of the purposes of examining the discourse is to discern how the discourse may reproduce and perpetuate power relations. Much of Foucault's work is concerned with uncovering how power has historically operated and how it is also inextricably linked to knowledge or as Foucault would consider it power/knowledge (1980). Foucault asserts that power is omnipresent and is not something we can rid ourselves of, and rather it is ever present in the discourses we engage (1980). Foucault uses the term "power/knowledge" to signify that power is constituted through knowledge, understanding and "regimes of truth." Regimes of truth, or corpuses of knowledge engenders true or false statements, techniques, procedures, ways of knowing, doing things. Within particular "regimes of truth" or discourses (whether institutional, cultural, social, societal, etc.) the self is constituted through self-subjection (Foucault, 1980). This is important for this project because it provides the foundation for understanding how discourse produces subjectivities.

Methodology

At the crux of my investigation lays an interest in understanding how discourse(s), specifically those that are falsely perceived as racially-neutral, shape black individual's

construction of selves. In addition to asking *how* reality was talked into being and uncovering *what* discursive resources were available to individuals constructing their reality and selves, I was particularly concerned with how these reality and self-constructing practices reproduced, subverted or challenged racism. This emphasis on the ways individuals made sense of these discourses placed this study firmly within a qualitative research strategy (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2015).

This project used a qualitative approach to research that holds that individuals have subjective experiences and multiple realities (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2015). Within the qualitative paradigm, there is a general trend, toward interrogating and criticizing the standards of absolute truths, objectivity and universal experiences. This project focused on how knowledge was socially constructed through human interaction assuming social experience was created and meaning was assigned (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). This emphasized non-objective realities and questioned partial representations of events or reality. This further allowed the opportunity to explore the deeper emotional grounds of the self and constitution of self by way of focus groups.

In the context of postmodern and poststructuralist approaches, meanings are dialectically constituted, discursively produced and more broadly enactments of social life. I employed a poststructuralist framework to conceptualize the relationship between discourse, social institutions, and power and the use of postmodern framework to theorize the relationship between discourse and the construction of the fragmented self.

Theoretical Framework

Holstein and Gubrium's (2000) *The Self We Live By: Narrative Identity in a Postmodern World* offered a discursive analytic approach in which this research was

grounded. Analysis within this methodological tradition is interested in examining

language and the ways it constructs and constitutes social life. Thus, language "works in

relation to what is taken to be real, evident, and significant," (p. 94) and how people

make sense of the world and themselves can be discerned from the discourses they

engage (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). Foucauldian discourse analysis, as described by

Holstein and Gubrium (2000) was the main analytical frame for analysis of the research.

For Foucault, "power operates in discourse," but since his view of discourse focused

more on the historical or cultural, Holstein and Gubrium, situated the discourse in a local

and present context by defining it as "discourses-in-practice" (p. 94). This view centered

the project on social practice or the practice of everyday life, as a local construction of

social structures. The contributors contend, that "the analytics of discourses-in-practice

accentuates the discursive possibilities for, and resources of, self construction at

particular times and place" (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). Fusing the aforementioned

authors, the methodological framework presented here drew from two basic interpretive

analytics for studying the "self":

1. an analysis of the day-to-day discursive practices developed out of the

    ethnomethodological tradition through which social reality is actively constructed

    and locally situated; and,

2. an analysis of historical or institutionalized discourses informed by a

    poststructuralist and Foucauldian perspective, that is constitutive and productive

    of subjects (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Foucault, 1986).

The focus of inquiry as "interpretive practice," defined by Holstein and Gubrium (2000)

is the "constellation of procedures, conditions, and resources through which reality (in

this case subjectivity) is apprehended, understood, organized, and represented in the course of everyday life" (p.94). Interpretive practice stands at the junction of ethnomethodology and Foucaultian notions of discourse to provide a deep insight in understanding the *hows* and the *whats* of reality construction (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Gubrium & Holstein, 1998). Analysis within this perspective, therefore, extends in two directions covering questions relating to *how* participants construct reality and *what* discursive resources, institutional conditions, and related discourses they draw upon in this reality construction (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Foucault, 1986).

It is within the interplay between "discourses-in-practice" and "discursive practice" where identity is produced and selves are constructed that is the focus of this method. Discursive practice refers to how participants construct their reality through everyday talk and narratives. Discursive practice as defined by Holstein and Gubrium (2000) is the "interactional articulation of meaning with experience" and "the artful procedures through which selves are constituted" (p. 94). Holstein and Gubrium (2000) contend that analysis of discursive practice should address how social actors construct their reality and "how members 'do' the self" (p.90). Applied to this project, this means analyzing how black individuals enrolled at a predominantly white institutions use discursive practices for identity construction. Discourses-in-practice refer to the discursive resources, institutional conditions, and related frameworks individuals draw upon in the reality construction.

Holstein and Gubrium's (2000) method for analyzing discourse provides the basis for understanding "who and what we are" (p. 104) and investigates the question "what discursive practices effect the process by which available images and understandings are

assumed into accountable identities?" (p. 103). It is through narrative practice that we

"characterize simultaneously the activities of storytelling, the resources used to tell

stories, and the auspices under which stories are told" (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998, p.

164). Thus, the interview, as a narrative practice, provides the opportunity for the narrator

or the interviewee in this case to tell his or her story in his or her own words. It provides

the opportunity to explore the deeper emotional grounds of the self and constitution of

self by way of focus groups. It also provides the opportunity to vocalize the stories that

one has about themselves in relation to the others.

Research Context

The university setting incites a valid space for participants to construct their

stories. Holstein and Gubrium (2004) assert that "schools, clinics, counseling centers,

correctional facilities, among other expanding sites for storying experience, provide

occasion for conveying selves – for what is taken to be relevant in our lives and why the

lives or experiences in question developed the way they did"**.** As such since universities

are social institutions, according to Allen (2007), they become "prime sites of identity

construction" (p. 262). The research was carried out at James Madison University (JMU).

My first reason for choosing JMU as a research location was the issue of cultural/racial

diversity, or lack there of. James Madison University, for the 2015-2016 school year, was

cited with an enrollment of 21,227 students with the university reporting the demographic

makeup as 4.43% black, 77.7% white, 3.89% 2 or more races, and 4.35% Asian. While

racially and culturally the school is lacking in diversity, within the 4.43% of those self-

identified as black, great ethnic diversity exists. From my own personal experience, I

acknowledged and recognized the variegated stories and experiences that existed within

individuals in the black community. The school, as deduced from the reported

demographics, remained a predominantly white institution (PWI). I was specifically

interested in how black individuals interpreted their experience at James Madison

University and how black identities were socially constructed when encountered with

whiteness.

Recruitment and Participants

Since I was interested in examining the situated experiences of black individuals

at a predominantly white institution, participants in this inquiry will be those who self

identify racially as black. Patton (2015) asserts that qualitative researchers should choose

a sample that "consists of information rich-cases that manifest the phenomenon of

interest intensely" (p. 234). Thus, recruitment for this inquiry was purposive. Participants

were recruited using people in my personal network of graduate student colleagues and

through SONA. Participant inclusion criteria was designated to maximize recruitment

and obtain a diverse sample of self-identified persons of color enrolled at a

predominantly white institution. Inclusion criteria is, (a) 18 years or older, and (b) self-

identification as black. According to Ward and Besson (2012), purposive sampling

allows flexible decision making about the specific individuals being sampled, the number

of those being sampled and the form sampling will take. Purposive sampling

accommodates snowball sampling as well, which is when participants' give their

recommendations for individuals that could be used in the study as well (Creswell, 2014;

Ward & Bessom, 2012). Once participants were recruited, they were broken up into focus

groups. Two focus groups were used, all of which contained individuals who self-

identified as black.

Procedure

After Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained, focus group participants were recruited. Since participants came from a small community of persons of color an effort was made to protect participant's privacy and confidentiality. As the primary investigator, it was my responsibility to inform those participating in the study, the purpose, procedures, risk, description and assured confidentiality. The individuals agreed to participation in the focus groups, maintain group confidentiality and allow audio-taping of the session. Written consent was obtained and assured/informed that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. Focus group interviews were conducted with participants in groups of 3 to 4 participants per group. Given the nature and focus of this inquiry the focus groups were appropriate because it allowed for a deeper examination of their specific experiences and centered the voices, perspectives, and subjectivities of the participants. I used a semi-structured interview protocol with questions focusing on discourse, race, and identity. Semi-structured protocols assume that the interview is a co-constructed active experience (Heyl, 2001). There were four male and three female participants. One student identified as a graduate student – making his collegiate experiences significantly different than other students in the study, one student was a senior, two students were juniors and three students were freshmen. The focus groups ranged from 60 to 90 minutes, were recorded, and transcribed verbatim. The question and sample interview guide are included in Appendix C. In the open-ended, semi-structured focus groups, I asked students to talk about their experiences at the university. I constructed the questions to explore their own personal experiences and understandings of their racial identities, as well as how they made sense

of them. I also asked students to reflect on their interactions with peers, faculty, staff at the university. Students brought up instances about their past and recent experiences at the university that revealed their understandings of their racial identities.

Data Collection

According to Holstein and Gubrium (2000), "the group interview …can be a veritable swirl of subject positions and opinion construction, as participants share and make use of story material from a broader range of narrative resources than a single interview might muster on its own" (p. 39). In this view, subjectivity can be elaborated and constructed more deeply in experience because it is crucial for the method to align with the general theoretical framework grounding this study which is why these narratives will be analyzed using a Foucaultian discourse analysis as provided by Gubrium and Holstein (2000). I build from Foucault to examine how power influences and is productive of identity. Hereby, it becomes possible to see the necessity of using focus groups and narrative inquiry as a method of data collection for this project.

Data Analysis

The focus group transcripts were read over several times to gain a deeper and more complete understanding of participants' experiences and to ensure that any potential themes were grounded in the data (Charmaz, 2006) and analyzed the data interpretively, focusing on major ideas and meaning, rather than specific speech turns or phrases (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010). The transcribed texts were analyzed in order to gain further insight on how subjectivity is discursively produced. In order to code the text, I followed Charmaz's recommendations for coding qualitative data. Charmaz recommends using a process of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding to focus and interpret the

significance of the data. These phases are most often associated with analyses aimed at producing inductive or constructivist grounded theory, as well as those broadly defined as "thematic analysis."

The first phase of analysis (open coding) involved an initial exploration of the data that was co-produced between the researcher and the members of the focus group. The unit of analysis in this case was discourse (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). I then named these different practices, broke them into sub-categories and identified the property of the codes. The second phase (axial coding) was a more-in depth focus of the initial codes. During this phase I specified the unique conditions associated with each codes, explored the codes, and examined the relationships between the codes in greater detail. The final phase was selective coding, which involved identifying the core codes central to the analysis (Charmaz, 2006). This three-phase process was located at the intersection of the post-modern and critical.

The point of this chapter was to situate and contextualize the project by highlighting the gaps in the literature and introduce the theoretical frameworks and philosophical underpinnings guiding this inquiry. The next chapter will provide an interpretive analysis of the individuals participated in the inquiry in order to gain further insight into the lives and experiences of Black students at a predominantly white school.

Chapter 2

Analysis

Introduction

I use the theoretical framework outlined in the previous chapter to help supply the rationale for a social constructionist, anti-essentialist and discursive understanding of blackness to suggest that the racialized subject is constituted through encounters with whiteness. Since blackness and whiteness, according to McLaren (1999) exist "symmetrically" and "as a dependent hierarchy," I extend Nakayama and Krizek's (1995) explanation of whiteness as having "no true essence" to conceptualizations of blackness and black identity. I use the data generated from the focus groups to demonstrate the assertion that blackness is "a pattern of negotiation that takes place in conditions generated by specific discursive formations and social relations" (McLaren, 1999, pg. 40) rather than a fixed, essential category.

The analysis of focus group transcripts generated a number of discourses regarding the situated experiences of the seven self-identified black students enrolled at a predominantly white institution. The findings that emerged are organized into three sections all describing the politics of encounter. The first describes the various ways whiteness is enacted and sustained at both the individual and institutional level within the university. The second section specifically examines the ways these individuals responded to being constituted as a racial subject and the strategies employed in response to "conflictual encounter" (Allen, 1998). The third section, extends the second and describes the desire of these individuals to be seen as just that – individuals, as persons, as subject, rather than objectified by the markedness of their body (Yancy, 2008).

Enactments of Whiteness

Whiteness, as stated by Nakayama and Krizek (1995) is supported and maintained by social, discursive, material and institutional practices. As discussed in the literature review, whiteness manifests in many forms as a performance, as a culture, as a discourse etc. Whatever the form whiteness takes, "whiteness works to constitute and reconstitute itself through everyday embodiments and practices" (Warren, 1999, pg. 187). With that in mind, although the participants were never asked directly about whiteness, the topic emerged as they discussed their specific and situated experiences as black students enrolled at a predominantly white institution. Whiteness functions as a structure that constrains and enables how black individuals make sense of their everyday lives and identities and this can be better understood in the ways whiteness is reified through interactions, is socially and relationally contingent and reproduces white hegemonic social practices within the institution. And while whiteness can be enacted at the individual level, it is also important to recognize that these individual encounters are embedded in a larger institutional and social context. Therefore, references were made by many of the participants in the focus groups that alluded to the greater structures and practices within and outside the University that created conditions for enactments of whiteness. The intent of this section is to discursively trace the mechanisms of whiteness in order to then reveal the ways racialized subjects are constituted and regulated through discourses that re-center whiteness.

Individual. At the individual level, whiteness was enacted through: (1) limited racial awareness in the forms of ignorance, obliviousness, and racial neutral discourses, (2) stereotypical expectations, and (3) use of the "n" word.

limited racial awareness (ignorance, obliviousness, racial neutrality). Within the university setting, whiteness, according to Martin et al (1996) was described as the norm "with which other racial groups are compared," especially when most white people do not think of themselves in racial terms and believe that racial or ethnic identity is something that only people of color have. This unmarkedness or invisibility of whiteness was enacted in instances when one was classified, marked, or named as a racialized other. In this instance, whiteness is not named or made known by white people but becomes "a marker for location of social privilege, as well as individual identity" (Maher and Tetreault, 1997, pg. 324). Being oblivious or having limited racial awareness is one-way whiteness is enacted and is reflected in the following examples from Victoria.

> Victoria: well let's see, uh I don't know, lets see, I'm a freshman so I live on a hall style hall, and I'm, for example, the only black person on my floor and I only see like one, I basically don't have any people that are black that are my friends pretty much, so, I feel like as the only one…you kind of are the black friend that's like set as an example and stuff and so it's like little things like…like my RA had a cultural event I guess that's supposed to be inclusive or whatever, and so she went around and she was like oh, everybody say what your ethnicity is, or basically and since like a majority of the people you know they said white, and white and white, and then when my roommate, she's interracial and then like I said "me, I'm, I'm black" and she's like "oh, oh really? I didn't know"…and then everybody was laughing and I'm like…I didn't laugh at you guys for saying you were white, so I don't really understand that…you know?

Victoria had a hard time deciphering how to evaluate this experience. She further deemed

this interaction "a little negative" and then justified it by saying that though her RA and

the people in her hall were both "friendly" and "nice," she felt as if they just didn't

"realize." This comment about the lack of realization speaks to statements of oblivion to

white advantage/privilege and further constructions of whiteness that re-center whiteness

as normal (Jackson, 2008). The RA explicitly acknowledged the obviousness of

Victoria's "blackness" even though the whiteness of the RA and the other residents

remained "invisible." Kelly, another participant within the study, had a similar experience

where she felt as though her race was something she could not escape. Kelly explains:

> Kelly: […] I also had that thing with my RA, where they asked what do you guys
>
> identify as and I'm like oh I'm black and they kind of chuckle…

From these two excerpts, it was clear that these students felt mocked or a little

uncomfortable to the fact that their race was made visible and further laughed at. This

situation, coupled with the laughter experienced by both Victoria and Kelly proved

meaningful for them since this instance was identified when the participants were asked

to speak about a time when they felt that their race mattered. It was this sort of naming -

explicit and audible - that created and emphasized Victoria and Kelly's "blackness" as

compared to the other "white" participants at the event. And while the racialized naming

and marking process was inevitably ubiquitous since the nature of the situation asked

them to racially identify, it was in "the two-sided or dialectical nature of the process

wherein difference [was] defined," that constructed the situation as more meaningful for

the participants (Rothenberg, 1999).

The obliviousness or limited racial awareness can be further explained through

Paul experience of attempts made to address race within the classroom. For Paul, the

normative presence of whiteness was very prevalent in the classroom, as it was described

to be inherently white. Paul states:

> Paul: I'll even extend that further and say [white people are] not negatively
>
> impacted by not addressing race in the classroom…and if you're a part of the
>
> majority… everything is kind of normed to your preferences anyways, to your
>
> experience kind of like Band-Aids are nude and by nude I mean like white
>
> complexion so, the same thing goes in the classroom.

In this instance, Paul alluded to a discourse of whiteness or white privilege, where, as

mentioned within the literature review, is employed through the use of an assumed racial

neutral approach. This racial neutral approach sustains whiteness as normative or natural.

Whiteness, in this situation, functions as a structural location that privileges the

"majority." The reference to the traditional color of Band-Aids highlights how whiteness

is socially constructed as "racially" neutral or normal – as centered, even in ways that

permeate the classroom setting.

Whiteness operates to regulate what black individuals can or cannot say about the

incidents of race or racism within the classroom. Students of color, in these examples, are

not in a privileged position to control the conversation about race. This can be seen in

Paul's account of his frustration with the lack of racial discussion within the classroom.

> Paul: […] in our group counseling class, I brought up race three to four times and
>
> my white classmates refused to really go into it, they'd be very silent, they'd be
>
> really quiet, I have 2 out of the seven of us in the cohort, only two people would

like even entertain a conversation about race besides the professor who was

leading the group session and so that was really disheartening because I pretty

much, you know was crying out to address the elephant in the room, like you

know I'm the only black guy in the school cohort but I'm also the only black guy

in the clinical and the counseling program and that class of people that came

through and so, they were just silent.

Paul's attempt to raise awareness and consciousness around the issue of race apparently

wasn't taken well within his classroom. This specific situation had the effect of rejecting,

dismissing or invalidating Paul's racial reality. Whiteness, in the instance, manifest itself

in a more covert and subtle manner – through silence, withdrawal, and lack of

engagement in a discussion of race (DiAngelo, 2011). Based on the responses of the two

participants, race was either not or rarely addressed. Whiteness, as a discursive practice

inherently positioned the white subjects, in this case the instructors, as organizational

authority. The [white] teachers' in both the instances of Kelly and Paul, reserved the

power, agency, and choice to decide when it was and when it was not convenient to

address race and other racial issues in the classroom further highlighting the role of the

teacher as potentially powerful (DiAngelo, 2011; Jackson, 2008). The privileged position

of the teachers and other students in the classroom made it difficult for them to recognize

the existence, benefits, or consequences of their own racial privilege. Further highlighting

the constraints that whiteness places on dialogues of racial issues within the classroom.

    stereotypical expectations. A second enactment of whiteness described by many

participants were the stereotypical expectations, generalizations and essentialist

comments made about what "black" is, should be, and isn't." These generalizations tend

to be abstracted from the broader social, economic, and political issues influencing how some of the students were viewed on campus. These expectations discursively created superficial distinctions that eliminated appreciation of diversity and minimized the individuality and multifaceted identities of the black students. This production of whiteness worked to constitute understandings of blackness, "blackness" as monolithic and narrowly focused. This proved particularly problematic when these understandings of blackness substituted for or superseded understandings of participants as individuals. I asked the question about how white peers perceive black students to address the localized perceptions on campus but also to better recognize the possible underlying stereotypes or general views of black people within society. Kelly responded with descriptions of the broader stereotypes of black people within society. Kelly noted:

> Kelly: athletic I feel…cause most of the people that I know in my hall and stuff think that if you're a black male, you're automatically on some football/basketball team or something, and then for girls (cause I've asked this question before), I feel like they, most of them kind of just said…they come off unfriendly.

For Dean, on the other hand, the stereotype that Kelly spoke of was more of a personal experience for him, where people just automatically assumed that his scholarship at the university was athletic and not academic.

> Dean: […] when I would mention like yeah I'm here on a full ride, I have a scholarship, they be like…"oh is it for football?" and I'm like "no…it's for academics, I actually have a pretty good GPA, I'm sorry you may think that I'm only here just to play football…but that's not the case, I'm actually here to study

and actually here to pursue a career." And so like just those natural assumptions,

you know and it plays a big role in who you make friends with.

Here we can see that Dean's desire to dispel the stereotypes that were placed upon him

were also factors that influenced patterns of self-segregation and friend choice. Earlier, he

stated that he was "mostly close with …more minorities than …with white people"

because of shared "similar experiences." It was clear that he felt representations of

blackness in the white imagination played a role in his choice of being friends with "more

minorities." This further highlights how the practice of whiteness, when enacted, can

sustain certain assumptions, beliefs or stereotypical expectations about individuals

deemed as raced that may limit or constrain their agency in defining their own identity

(Drummond and Orbe, 2009; Jackson and Simpson, 2003; Martin, Krizek, Nakayama, &

Bradford, 1996), because rather than create a humanized portrait of Dean, the white

subjects frame Dean in such a way that re-inscribe simplistic notions of black identity.

Jill also mentioned being subject to supposed "natural assumptions."

> Jill: I mean, I would say based on my like hall mates, 'cause its me and two other
>
> black people in our hall and it's sort of kind of funny but at the same time, I don't
>
> really know how to take it, they'll come in and they'll like say…ooooh, we're
>
> going to a party…can you teach us how to twerk, and I'm just like oh okay...or
>
> like they'll ask questions related to that stereotype, I guess you could say… they
>
> seem like I don't know, admiring but at the same time, why? You know? So it's
>
> not necessarily a negative but it's not necessarily a positive either…and of course
>
> we take it light-heartedly when we make fun of everyone and it's a good time at

the end of the day, but you know for me…that's something where I'm

like…really? Do you have to? Like does it have to be a thing?

For Jill, it was clear the energy she put into making sense of this encounter, of her

subjugation, as her constitution as black became synonymous with knowing how to

"twerk." Due to the apparent negotiation with whiteness, multiple subject positions were

in tension - Jill was constituted as black, as racial Other, etc. First, Jill noted feelings of

admiration but then she wrestled with her understanding of how to process her

markedness or naming (Yancy, 2008). Her body, in this encounter, because of her skin

color, became a site for voyeuristic admiration, as object, as fetish, still subject to the

patriarchal, hegemonic structures enacted by and within the white gaze (Fanon, 1967,

hooks, 1997). These stereotypical discourses shaped how the fundamentally tension

ridden subject positions were produced and dictated how they were to be performed.

Similar to Jill, Kelly was subjected to a situation where she also was expected to know

how to dance because of her physical racial identification, something she claimed she's

reminded of in specific encounters.

> Kelly: I'm reminded that I'm black in the way so…like an experience I've had is
>
> you are just hanging out with people and then like there's music so you're
>
> dancing but then uh, and I'm dancing and they're like, yeah! And nothing about
>
> race pops up, but then someone said "we have the one black person here to keep
>
> us on beat." And I'm just like…yeah, okay.

As Kelly noted, she was discursively constituted or marked as raced when it was

mentioned "we have one black person here to keep us on beat." This shows how

blackness was constituted and constructed through the discourse of whiteness. Her race

was objectified through this discourse, a dominant discourse that pushed her to the margins as her perspective was subverted and her image defined by others' accounts. Kelly was viewed as a hyper-visible object and invisible subject within the discourse of whiteness (Phillips, 2015). Her experience was objectified as "black person" rather than seen as a subject of her own construction (Fanon, 1967; Jackson, 2008). Kenny experienced something slightly similar, where he also was stereotyped because of his race. He stated:

> Kenny: this was actually a few weeks ago…and all my roommates, they're white…and they're from higher income families…where as I'm not from a high income family...and so like they don't understand that I'm constantly like struggling with money since I'm putting myself through college. And so a few weeks ago…I had issues getting the rent in, and so like they thought I was asleep or something…and I was in my room because I wanted to get away from all of the drama. And I heard one of my roommates go....*"black people"*…and its been kind of like, I've actually kind of secluded myself from them… since that night.

Kenny's roommates conflated race with financial issues and essentialized his experience with an overgeneralization of his racial identity. This stereotypical or essentialized explanation alienated Kenny from his roommates and grouped him in ways that ignored his individuality and diversity in experience. While the juxtaposition of Kenny as both alienated and grouped by his roommates might seem like a contradiction, it can also be seen as a function of the encounter. In this instance, whiteness constructed Kenny as a racialized other, object, pushing him and his race to the margins, when his roommates

grouped him with "black people." This can highlight how whiteness functions as a center in these encounters to which everything is measured up against.

For Victoria, on the other hand, her encounter with stereotypical expectations took form in a challenging interaction related to the perspective of what constitutes blackness. Victoria stated that over the course of her life she's had to challenge, resist and negotiate her racial identity against accusations of "acting white" (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). In these instances, she felt compelled to "support and stand up" for her self and race as experienced by her and not a general view of blackness as constructed by whiteness. She claimed that just because she doesn't "fit into [the] stereotype [of what black is] doesn't mean that [she's] not black." This further highlights representations of what black should be as constructed and framed by dominant discourses of whiteness.

These instances faced by the participants clearly indicate an awareness of the impact that these individuals' racial identity has on themselves and others. The stereotypes as faced by each of the individual's became controlling images that perpetuated stereotypical black identities within the white imagination (hooks, 1997, Fanon, 1967, Jackson, 2008). The stereotypes or essentialist groupings became a form of representation of what was deemed as acceptable constructions of black identity as associated through enactments of whiteness (hooks, 1997). These examples all speak to how essentialist thinking creates and disperses notions of a "true" or "authentic" black identity based on the white imagination, one that compartmentalizes and generalizes the black experience without actually considering the experience of black individuals. Evidence in the way identity is negotiated through the encounters, essentialism functions to deny the subjectivity of individual Blacks and as stated by hooks (1997), "narrowly

focused black identity politics do a disservice […] because they seek to render invisible the complex and multiple subjectivity of black folks" (pg. 247).

use of the "n- word." Many of the participants detailed accounts and specific instances where they found themselves subjected by the use of the "n" word. The use of the term, by both black people and white, has become more frequent in millennial vocabulary, mainly because of the use of the word "nigga" in hip hop, rap, and other popular culture songs. This can be seen in the following examples from Kelly, Kenny and Paul. Kelly describes a situation during her first week at the university where [white] people felt comfortable, even around her, saying the 'n' word.

> Kelly: uhm FROG week and stuff you just have people just like throwing out the N word and I'm just like, I'm like...okay, why are you saying that…they're like, don't be like that! It's not that serious, and I'm just like…yeah...it's in a lot of the songs and stuff but that does not like make it right, like because of what it holds, and I don't know, its just …I'm in a weird place.

Kelly found herself wrestling with how to respond to the n word being used in her presence. She evaluated the usage of the "n" word as wrong because, for her, it became a present construction of slavery and black oppression. Though she acknowledges the usage of the word in songs, she still doesn't think it's acceptable for every day use, the epithet, to her, is still considered an abusive slur. The white people in Kelly's situation may not have seen the harm in its usage or that it was potentially offensive. This can be seen as an encounter with whiteness, because while white people and whiteness are certainly related they are not the same. The whiteness of the individual white subjects in this specific situation protected them from understanding their role in contributing to

racism even in the absence of racist intention. As the one of the only black people around white people using the term, it was apparent that Kelly felt singled out, but even still she felt compelled to address it. When Kelly tried to get her peers to understand the loaded meaning and value of the word, it was the unmarked whiteness of the students that blinded them from seeing and understanding.

Kenny also described an experience of his with the 'n' word, where he noted a more personal interaction in one of his classes. In this instance the nature of the word was not in the context of a song, but a more direct social interaction.

> Kenny: […] I was talking to one of my group mates and we were just laughing and joking around and stuff and then I hear him talking to the other two group mates and they're like talking to him about how he needs to be more accepting or something and then out of nowhere I hear him say… "I'm very accepting…I love niggers" and then--I was laughing--and then my face just completely stoned out

This experience is slightly different than Kelly's, where the word, in Kenny's situation was directed at him, and it seemed to be more blatantly racist and demeaning. Regardless of what was intended, his reaction clearly denotes his discomfort. Similarly, Paul addressed and verbalized his discomfort regardless what form the word took – "nigga" or "nigger."

> Paul: […] uh, prejudice you know what have you slurs, like first weekend. That was that first weekend, so that kind of began my like affiliation with the grad student association and then we had a happy hour at union station and one of the first guys from the counseling program that I met he kind of…we were getting acquainted and getting to know each other and everybody was mad cool but he

said something like …he either used I don't know, I forget the context of the

conversation at the point that but he says…he calls me the n word or like refers to

me as the n word like in an endearing way sort of like…"my nigga" or something

like that, like normally people would phrase it, people I guess use it in like a

friendly way and they try to use it as a term of endearment for people they would

consider their friends or part of their group as their nigger or something like that,

like normally people would phrase it…in a friendly way and they try to use it as a

term of endearment for people they would consider their friends.

While Paul cannot deduce the intent of the other person, whether he meant for his usage

to be blatantly racist or "endearing" or "friendly"– regardless of intent, the response of

the encounter was still the same. The use of the word became a construction of a

racialized space because the participants found themselves questioning the intentions of

the other individual involved. In the past and today, the "N-word" is used as a pejorative

and racial slur for black people as a word to oppress and assert power over. No matter the

context of how the word used, whether it was "nigga" (as a term of attempted

endearment) or "nigger," the word was a reminder of the past histories of enslavement

and oppression in the context of Black American history, and thus makes histories of race

present in contemporary interactions.

Institutional. At the institutional level, whiteness permeated the classroom and

campus climate through narratives of being "the only one," through mediated discourse

of Yik Yak and through the discourses surrounding diversity on campus.

"i look around and i'm the only one." Another discourse that emerged in the

focus group discussions was the discourse of being the "only one." This referenced being

one of few black people in a predominantly white space whether it was in the social or classroom context. These individuals noted feelings of hyperawareness of their raced body or "blackness" against the backdrop of perceived whiteness in their surrounding environments. For Dean, being one of the "only ones" made it easier for others to notice or remember them.

> Dean: it's a lot harder for us to like, to basically merge in and try to blend in cause like that was my first intention cause like I'm an introvert so like you know I always try to be as non…not as noticeable as possible, I try to blend in as much as possible but like when you're the only black person in the room, you stick out like a sore thumb…whether you like it or not, and even like with most of my Chem classes… I look around and I'm just like I'm the only black person in a 200 person classroom…there we go…and it's weird, like the teachers noticing you…if I don't show up to class…teachers know…like he's not here.

Dean described the classroom as a space as one that isn't extremely diverse, which to him, makes it harder to "blend in," and a challenge was because of his race. It was in this space that Dean learned what constituted being non-white within this structure. For Kenny, he experienced the same but off campus.

> Kenny: I've definitely experienced like similar like being the only black person and it kind of makes me feel awkward cause like I go to a lot of parties and I guess since I'm like either the only, or one of the few, black guys there…a lot of people remember my name, but I don't remember them and so like I'll see them at like different weekends, and they're like "hey [Kenny]…what's up," and I'm like…I don't know you…and I'm not sure if they like remember me because of

like the [celebrity] thing or if I was just like the only black person there to make it

easier for them to remember…but it's just…it gets really awkward.

Kenny acknowledged that people's remembrance of his name might have also been due

to his race. This demonstrates that, while the general affect is positive from the white

people, it still caused the same "encounter" as implicitly marking and naming blackness.

Critical theorists have taught us the importance of understanding the ways black people

internalize the "white gaze," learning how to see themselves as objects of others'

viewpoints rather than subjects of their own construction (Fanon, 1967; hooks, 1997;

Yancy, 2008). We have learned previously from Jill's stereotypical experience marking

blackness the extent to which physical racial identification confers instant ascribed

identity. In another encounter, this one intrinsically negative, Jill describes a racialized

instance, where she readily identified race by stating her presence at a "white frat" and

"white sorority" party. Further describing the encounter, she noted:

> Jill: but when I walked in, I felt like everyone was staring at me…like why are
>
> you here. Like, that sort of thing. And I remember one time after a party, me and a
>
> group of my friends who are also black, uh she had knew one of the frat brothers,
>
> so we go to his party, and it was the same stares, I tried to talk to somebody they
>
> were like well, I had said something, I was like oh why is nobody dancing…. and
>
> they were like well we don't do that at *these kinds* of parties…. and I was like OH
>
> okay…. [laughter]…so I just go to my friends and they felt awkward as well, they
>
> felt uncomfortable, like the mean glares, the stares, it just wasn't a good
>
> environment, and so we just left, but there's definitely social tension in
>
> environments like that.

When asked to explain the environment, Jill described it as feeling "tense," "not relaxed," unwelcoming, not accepting and it just "didn't feel good." It was clear that Jill found herself in a racialized space, where she was marked as a "racialized other." In another encounter with Dean, we see how being one of the few black males in his major really impacted how supported he felt by faculty and professors. He stated that he felt as though teachers treated, looked, and interacted with him differently. That also translated in how he felt he could connect with other students in his major as well. In detailing his frustration he stated that:

> Dean: If I didn't understand a certain topic, I shouldn't be, you know it shouldn't be expected that I'm going to be treated like crap verses like they're actually going to get the help that they want. And uhm yeah that really played a big role in why I changed my major, just cause I felt like, I was getting a lot of social support at home […] but when you get here…you don't feel that way…I just felt like I was retarded, like I was stupid, like I wasn't getting the social support needed to progress well within the major…even like with this, with health sciences, its hard in certain situations as far as, trying to memorize every bacteria in the world, you know you having this social support like you can do it…or like oh I've taken this class…or like here's what you should do...I never really got that in chemistry really. It was never really like I had like those relationships with people where I could stay in the major because like I was like oh I have this person or I have these group of people who are there to support me to like help me get through it…I was kind of like…I was on my own, and I felt kind of lonely and I mean it sucked.

Dean's experience speaks to the reproduction of whiteness within systems of higher

education (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000) and how when he got to the university he felt

inadequate or inferior and it wasn't necessarily because his professors did anything

wrong, but Dean just felt as if he wasn't supported socially within his major. This kind of

thing might go unnoticed by the White professors and students (encounter with

whiteness), but the racialized message was still there for Dean and was painfully obvious.

For Christopher, the whiteness manifest in the demographic representation of the

university.

> E: and why do you think that is?
>
> Christopher: probably due to the fact that I grew up in a very privileged
>
> neighborhood, I mean the high school I went to, while it was majority white, it
>
> was 16% black, twenty percent Asian so I could literally go and hang out with
>
> whoever I wanted and not and if I didn't want to see white people for the day I
>
> could do that…but like coming here it was like "oh…you're everywhere"…but
>
> like because there was no emphasis on race growing up it was kind of like, you
>
> know, we're all students.

For Chris the whiteness just came from the apparent numerical ratio of white students to

other students. He noted that at the university, "[they're] everywhere." This can be noted

as type of structural whiteness still encompassed throughout the university – a form of

institutionalized whiteness. These encounters all speak to enactments of whiteness as a

set of institutionalized practices and ideas regardless of the intention of individuals.

    yik yak: trust the herd? One thing that was noted by many participants was the

issue of racist comments circulating on Yik Yak, a mobile application that allows

anonymous postings based on geographic location. These comments called for questioning about how individuals perceived the black students and their experience on campus and within society. From the responses it was clear that Yik Yak became a site for racist discourse that the individuals then had to negotiate and reconcile with. In the following example, Jill describes an encounter she had on Yik Yak, where she notes:

> Jill: I deleted that app because I couldn't stand it anymore...but I just remember the most absurd comment, someone had said something about like "wow I'm really upset that the person next to me could be racist" or something like that like "I'm really upset that I go to an institution where you know the person standing next to me could've said something really vile about somebody's race or color...like the night before" and someone was like... "Well you should expect that going to a primarily white college"…whooo? Whaat? who what when where why how.. like what in the hell...like that was the most ignorant thing I've ever seen…like I just…I never...like the thing is like Yik Yak … this is a location thing…this is strictly [Middle State University] like these are [JMU] students, and that's the thing that bothers me that like there are people here that really think like "oh you should not go to a primarily white school or a southern school because you should expect racism there. You should expect to be put down because of who you are"…and it's just… it is just so frustrating.

Jill pointed out how this instance with Yik Yak might reflects the existence of these beliefs within other individuals on campus and the possibility of racism on the university. Dean noted another situation on Yik Yak, where the comment made was more blatantly racist.

       Dean: yeah like I agree, like so another thing...with my friend who's black …she

       just put on Yik Yak, she just randomly put Petersburg, VA that was it, nothing

       else and people were just writing…"Niggaville Virginia" ohhh uhm…"the hood

       Virginia" and I was just like what? And People were just coming off, and so like

       you know the fact that like oh people are able to say this because they're

       anonymous, but even though even though like (Jill: right, like this is real, this is

       what's going on in people's heads daily).

Dean, much like Jill further asserted that this is not just individual instances, but a

location, an institution and for him, he started to question if that was how people saw him

also. Paul also found the application problematic in which he stated that the racism

occurred when he first got to the university. Drawing on Foucault (1987), the discourse of

Yik Yak enables certain individuals/groups of people to create and formulate ideas about

the world, constitute the nature of the body and what is to be taken true or normal. It is

through these experiences that might aid Paul in formulating perceptions, beliefs and

understandings of the nature of the university. Thus making him suspicious of other

individuals because of this encounter.

       Paul: I also when I first got here, I had a Yik Yak account and I would see a

       whole bunch of racist stuff on Yik Yak, and I swiftly deleted that because I was

       like okay, people would say a whole bunch of really disgusting things about black

       people uhm on that anonymous forum but then I kind of expect that because I'm

       like, I feel that a lot of people wouldn't say a lot of the things that they say behind

       closed doors straight up to black students or black people. And so I felt like there

       are a lot of, there's a lot of nice racism or silent racists who kind of tip toe around

black people and try to present their best façade uhm, without like offending, and

a lot of that does manifest as silence, because if you don't have anything nice to

say, don't say anything at all, and I feel like a lot of white people kind of walk in

that when it comes to black students and black people and its really hard for me to

like uhm I feel like [JMU] is a microcosm of what society might be like and so I,

as I answer your question, how do white students perceive their black peers, I also

feel like it kind of relates to black people's experience in this country and the

world per say.

For Paul, he also alluded to the remarks of Yik Yak not just individual random acts but

speaks to societal issues concerning the experience of being black in America. He viewed

the university as a microcosm of society, explaining that though these racist remarks were

anonymous, the Yik Yak comments could be a revelation of a dark societal undercurrent.

The other participants noted feelings of suspicion in terms of how they could be viewed

in the eyes of the Yik Yak users and further other individuals at the university. These

racist discourses, which emerged through Yik Yak, structured the context in how the

black participants made sense of and how they navigated the university. Based on a

couple of the responses, it seemed as though the participants found themselves

questioning or making sense of their own racial identity against the mediated discourse of

Yik Yak. Yik Yak, thus, became an institutional manifestation of whiteness because of

the potential, the possibility of people at the university to be racist, speaking to racism as

a naturalized, normalized discursive event. Consequently these examples illustrate the

ways that the black students experience the institution and to the constrained subjective

location in a racialized context.

discourse of diversity*.* Another enactment of whiteness emerged from how the

way the university defined diversity. The choice of whether to take note of, acknowledge

or act upon issues of diversity within the institution sent a message to students about how

they were valued on campus. The discourse surrounding diversity became a point of

conflict and negotiation for students of color when they entered the institution. When

asked about how the university defines diversity Jill, Kenny, Paul and Victoria all

provided similar definitions. Jill stated that the university prefaces diversity as various

"perspectives and religions" and different ways of talking and thinking. The denial of

racial difference is supplanted with an emphasis on other differences and issues. Jill best

described this when she noted the issue of diversity not solely being about skin color but

placing emphasis on other aspects of diversity rather than just racial differences. Kenny

while stating a similar viewpoint as Jill, acknowledged a lack of diversity initiatives from

the school, where he said:

> Kenny: I don't think there is really a diversity initiative here because like the only
>
> thing that I've even heard about JMU promoting diversity was this one event we
>
> went to FROG week my freshmen year and it was some kind of diversity talk and
>
> they just said like everyone from like different cultures, different diversity…stand
>
> up, and we just clapped for them...and that was the last I've heard of it since.

When asked about how the university's definition of diversity impacted these

individuals' value on campus, Victoria and Jill had similar feelings regarding the

discourses of diversity circulating campus. Victoria stated that though the university

acknowledges the lack of diversity, she felt as though the emphasis placed on "different

backgrounds [and] experiences" made it seem as though that was enough. She then

further asserted that it makes it feel as though "your culture" and "different cultures are insignificant" or that racial experience was irrelevant. The discourses of diversity at the institution functioned in a way to sustain whiteness. While the university discourse of diversity does not explicitly deny the presence of racial issues, it may be taken that the university might deny the importance in addressing them, further highlighting the re-centering of white knowledge. Jill, on the other hand, seemed to believe that the university spent a lot of time touching on issues of diversity.

> Jill: It makes me feel like the university is a bunch of bullshit, honestly…they speak about diversity all the time but I can't really say a moment where everyone's been integrated like with the exception of like one party on forest […] we have these organizations for diversity...well okay you do, but it's primarily black people and it's not diverse...you know they're not acting on it, there's nothing there to show…to show that and it just sounds like bullshit to me just to make them sound better.

And even while the university spent a lot of time implementing diversity initiatives, they seemed to have emerged as black spaces according to Jill's previous comment and the one following, Dean stated:

> Dean: CMSS (Center Multi Student Services) plays a big role in [advocating diversity] and saying you know they try their best to advocate diversity and CMSS is for anybody but like most white people throughout campus they mostly be like …oh I thought that was only for black people.

Jill further stated that the sheer lack of diversity on campus made her feel as though there were not enough people to understand her position, or "standpoint" and that discussions surrounding diversity promoted by the President were inadequate.

> Jill: [...] I feel bad for calling him out, but like President [A], he had spoken and someone had mentioned like why aren't there classes that promote diversity and why aren't there classes that you know make that awareness to the students…you know we have the SCOM class as a requirement…why isn't there anything with diversity, you know? And he sort of …I don't even think he really answered the question…he's like, "well…we're trying"…well trying's not enough for me…I feel like as a minority…if we feel like it's not bringing promoted, I feel like that should say something.

It was clear from Jill's last statements that she felt as though her voice and other minority voices were silenced and absent within the discourses of diversity that circulated the university. When asked about if the way the university defines diversity had any impact on his racial identity Paul stated:

> Paul: when I was talking to my small group the other day, they were like…the university defines diversity by talking about "we have a lot of majors representative on our campus, or by state, like we have a lot of people from different states that go to James Madison University, or we have a lot of…" yeah that's, that's kind of what we were discussing as far as like how the university defines diversity and I'm like okay….so when we talk about socioeconomic status, how diverse is your student body, like are you saying we have a lot of students who have financial needs growing up, a good middle class base and we

have you know upper class base of students…mmm I don't know, I think it's

pretty homogenous for the most part, like when you look at it, like at my pocket,

the people I'm exposed to in my program, through the centennial scholars

program, I feel like they are the people who represent those coming from a low

SES and also the minority populations which if you're looking at the thousands of

students that this university has, that's a little under 200, so that's a very small

that's a very small amount uhm and yeah so it doesn't, does that definition impact

my racial identity…no because I'm secure, but if I wasn't secure in it might, it

might make me feel like, oh I'm not represented well here, I add to the diversity

here but since there's not much how much do I count.

Despite intentions of the university to create a more inclusive campus, it was clear

through the responses of these participants that these supposed policies inadvertently

secured patterns of exclusion and inequality. The discourse of diversity circulating the

campus became another way whiteness was enacted and sustained, by normalizing and

enacting whiteness as a barrier that maintained whiteness as the status quo. More

specifically, this is a version of diversity that emerged historically to include white people

(Mease, 2015). This specific enactment of whiteness failed to address the concerns or

difficulties that marginalized people encountered because of the dominant practices that

privileged whiteness. This could be seen in the responses of the individuals that explained

how even though the institution made claims to support diversity, it was also apparent

through the responses that the institution failed to examine and interrogate the ways the

policies, practices and culture of the institution reinforced and sustained white hegemony

and whiteness.

Regardless of intent, these examples illustrate the ways in which Whiteness is enacted and sustained at the university. As previously noted, whiteness is enacted and sustained at the individual and institutional level. At the individual level, whiteness is enacted and sustained through limited racial awareness, stereotypical expectations, and use of the "n" word. Institutionally, whiteness functioned as a set of practices and ideas through narratives of being "the only one," through the mediated discourse of Yik Yak and through the discourses on diversity on campus. These enactments of whiteness all functioned to create and constitute the participants within this study as racialized subjects. In the next section, I turn to the second step in the politics of the encounter, the ways in which the racial subject is constituted through an encounter with whiteness.

Constitution of the Racial Subject

The racial subject, as noted by many of the participants is constituted through social and relational encounters with enactments of whiteness at the university through individual and institutional conditions. Racial identity is formed through what Ehlers (2006) describes as a "dual operation" (p. 154). First the racial subject is called into being – as raced – "through a discursive name or assignment, that is as black or white," when encountered with whiteness (Ehlers, 2006, p. 154). The second part of Ehler's dual operation is consistent with Allen's description of the conflictual encounter stating how racial identity is also formed through negotiating, questioning and interrogating interactions where the individuals find themselves "second-guessing the other person's intentions" (Allen, 1998, p. 578). Commenting on how the materialization of a racialized identity takes place, Ehler (2006) notes that:

the subject responds to the name through which she is called into being…she then

negotiates with the normalized acts and behaviors that are seen to be associated

with the name and that mark the subject's 'belonging' – to the category black or

white. This production of identity, always in reference to regulatory procedures

and injunctions, takes place in, through and under the potentially ever-present

'eye of power' for various techniques, institutional sites of power and inter-

subjective exchanges seek to mould the conduct of the individual (p. 154).

What this means is that the assigned identity of racial status as black operates and is

framed through the discursive conditions through which whiteness is enacted. In stating

this, I suggest that constitution of identity, or blackness for the individuals involved in

this study, is socially and relationally defined by encounters with whiteness. What

happens in response to their encounter and constitution as a racial subject is two-fold: (1)

the individuals find themselves dispelling energy in negotiating the encounter and (2)

suspicious of others'. Thus, I suggest that black identity is better understood through the

ubiquity of these navigational processes, rather than any essential cultural characteristics

that make one "authentically" black.

Energy spent navigating "conflictual encounter." When asked to speak to

experiences as [Middle University] students where they felt as though their raced

mattered, many of the participants mentioned situations that weren't explicitly racist but

spent "valuable mental and emotional energy trying to process them (Allen, 1998, p.

579). Regardless of what the other individuals in the encounter intended, many of the

participants attributed the nature of the encounter to race. They found themselves

questioning the encounter contemplating if the situation was in fact racist, and if it was,

how should they proceed in their response from that point forward. Kenny describes his

negotiation while explaining an encounter faced at work.

> Kenny: like well, this was last year when I was working at [Chix Sandwich Shop],
>
> and it was like during one of the choices weekends so there were like a lot of
>
> parents in town and I was working at the cash register and this one lady like I saw
>
> her in line, like she was really friendly to like everyone or I guess it was like a
>
> pretty positive environment because I guess like her daughter had just gotten into
>
> JMU or something and then she gets to my register and she starts throwing out
>
> this huge order, and so like with an order like that I kind of want to go through
>
> everything to make sure it's all right and then I missed something and she not like
>
> berates me but definitely puts me down in a way… so I feel like I'm not sure if it
>
> was because of my race or what it was but there was definitely a moment I was
>
> really tempted to go to the back and just let someone else handle it and I ended up
>
> sticking it out then called my mom about it that night when I got off work, she
>
> told me I was in the right for staying professional.

Kenny here found himself wondering if the conflict with the woman at [Chix Sandwich

Shop] was racist, but even still, he found himself wrestling with how he was going to

react to her. His response was due in part to this conflictual encounter with whiteness that

constituted him as a racial subject implicitly. Note, that the encounter with whiteness is

does not depend on another's racist intentions, but can result from both individual and

institutional whiteness. A very common theme amongst the participants was the desire to

not perpetuate stereotypes and with that, they found themselves policing their responses

and actions to particular encounters that they may have felt were racist, or possibly racist.

Their concerns highlight, not only their fear in perpetuating stereotypes, but also a profound dilemma in navigating the encounter.

Dean elaborated more on the process of negotiation that occurs from his encounters with whiteness in which he stated:

> Dean: you have to sit there and actually think…think like 'how am I going to respond to this" you know "how do I say this without making people think that I'm just an angry black man...and that's how I'm always going to be, I'm just loud and ratchet and uneducated"…and I'm not just going to speak out of spite just to say like you know I disagree and come up with all these bogus facts but actually present them with factual information, show them statistics and, show them what's actually true instead of just their ignorant assumption

Dean indicated the emotional labor that emerged in response to the encounter with whiteness and being constituted as a racialized subject. Paul on the other hand details his response with being subjected by the use of the 'n' word.

> Paul: And so that was like the first time of a series of times where I'm always in this conflict of like okay, when people use this, do I want to have an educational moment and be like okay…let's go on and unpack why the n word is not appropriate even if you're not using it in an insulting way, but just the fact that its tied to a history of hatred of degradation, of oppression of our people since slavery since Jim Crow, but hey, and so I kind of have this guilt if I don't say anything but then I have this conflict in uhm and yet I always feel like the token because I'm the only one out of my grad program and I'm the only black person

in the clinical and the school, so if I go off and get angry, you know…how are

they are going to take that…they're not going to invite me to the next function or

whatever what have you, so I have to deal with this turmoil like do I educate this

person, or call it out and confront or do I like let it rock or handle it in a more

nonverbal way or something like that. so that happened

Paul's conflict stemmed from an individual enactment of whiteness, as previously

mentioned from the usage of the "n" word. This is illustrative of how this specific

encounter with whiteness led Paul to questioning how he should react in this specific

situation. The discourses led him to strategically respond and regulate/police his

behavior. In another discussion, Paul further asserted that how his encounters with

whiteness caused him to question himself and the different kinds of "black" or further

racial subject-positions he could take up or represent, which "self" he wanted to be at that

time.

> Paul: I had an identity crisis in a lot of different ways that first year because I was
>
> like what kind of black person do I want to be, do I want to be the extra well
>
> dressed well spoken docile black person in the classroom or do I want to be the
>
> one that's really like outspoken and always addresses race and always corrects and
>
> always is the ambassador for my race and that sort of thing and so I struggled with
>
> that for a while and I felt like I wasn't being heard regardless of which way I
>
> came at it.

Here Paul states that by enrolling in the university, it caused him to question himself and

how he was represented, specifically selecting from different kinds of "black people" to

be. This was a specific style of encounter with whiteness that functioned to silence him

and constrain discussions and conversations about race. What Dean shared is consistent

with other participants' understanding that negotiation of these encounters meant

knowing how to handle these particular situations. Specifically this meant spending time

evaluating and assessing the situation before responding because the response is

contingent on what identity will be ascribed, regardless of what identity is avowed. This

signifies how race became a factor within these encounters with whiteness for Kenny and

Dean and how the encounter leads to this contemplation. As previously stated, the racial

subject is constituted through a discursive name or assignment. This naming/assigning –

whether explicit or implicit – is described through the process of the encounter and the

constitution of a racial subject.

       Discourse of Suspicion. Some of the participants in the focus groups pulled on a

discourse of suspicion when describing their experiences constituted as a racial subject in

a white space. For some of the black men that participated in this study, they pulled on

tropes of fear and suspicion when making sense of their own subject position. These

examples also illustrate how these past encounters of race are materialized as local and

situational encounters. This can be detailed in the following examples of Kenny, Dean,

and Paul.

       Kenny: yeah I was going to say that like racism is definitely changed but now its

       like now a lot more subtle so that everyone's thinking that its not an issue

       anymore and I think that's actually more dangerous because he was saying since

       we're not acknowledging that it is an issue, we're not discussing it we're not

       trying to find solutions for it, and ole with the hoodie thing actually I relate to that

       a lot and I live on south main and is not a far walk from campus and at night if its

like cold or something I'm even terrified of just wearing my hoodie but I don't

want that perception, like the whole Trayvon Martin thing and a couple weeks ago

I was walking to campus at night and it was like really cold so I put on my hoodie

like the actual hood part and I saw flashing lights behind me and my first thought

was…holy crap what did I do that I'm like…I don't want that to be my first initial

thought just because I'm wearing a hoodie like I feel like that that shouldn't

happen but because of like because of racism today, the thought is there.

In specific to Kenny, this example also illustrates how a past encounter of race was

materialized as local and situational encounter. Dean explained something similar:

Dean: mike brown was perceived as a thug and a criminal, [Dean] is also

perceived as a thug and a criminal and its just like is that really…do you really see

me as a thug, criminal, part of a gang?

Much like Kenny and Dean, Paul questioned how he was valued against the enactments

of whiteness within the university.

Paul: Like… cause they can't see, its not like I walk around with my diploma, or I

walk around with my degree, you know say don't shoot me officer, I'm an

educated black man, if you don't walk around with that, I wonder if we're still

valued and someone will always have the question like what do you…I question

where the value comes from.

Within these moments, these three men all constructed their identity against the historical

discourse of black men in America, within a space of social control and bodily policing, a

kind that truncates their being as suspicious, their body a site of violence. Within these

instances, these three males interpreted their positions as devalued and inferior. These constructions were all assumed positions of blackness in the white psyche. They found themselves questioning how white people might be viewing them, perceiving or valuing them, and further questioned how they were recognized in an assumed "racially neutral" society.

"Post-black" Response (Desire to be individual, not object)

Many acknowledged and recognized the desire to feel to be seen as individuals, as humans, as persons, and rather not simply objectified or stereotyped their race. This desire stems from the individuals being constituted as a racial subject in response to the encounter with whiteness. Dean emphasized this when speaking about an instance where he felt his race mattered as a student at the university. He explained that he experienced a racist encounter with a bus driver not thinking he was a student at the university. After this specific situation, he attended a diversity talk where he conferred with other students similar to him about it and their situations on campus. He stated:

> Dean**:** I mean they weren't shocked, I guess it allowed them to also share their
> personal experiences and how it has affected them and how it also became a racial
> issue and it just allowed us to come to a consensus, a group consensus that you
> know, we all do have our own rights and we all see each other currently as
> individuals, but not everybody feels that same way, and so that it is our job to
> make sure that you know we advocate for diversity but also that like you know
> people actually see us as individuals first before we just try to advocate diversity
> in general, but just also like seeing me as a human being and not like as property.

Dean further asserted how he is sometimes portrayed and is seen to be problematic of

how black people are traditionally portrayed by these mass media channels. As a member

of the university's speech team he used that as a form of advocacy, but still questions if

the way he is (or his race) is portrayed in the media affects how people judge or see him.

He constantly emphasizes the fact that when individuals are stereotyped how they should

be viewed as "people," as subject, rather than objectified by their race and grouped.

> Dean: I think like these are people too, like they may not have had the same
>
> opportunities as you…but like they're still people they may be different and they
>
> may have come from a different neighborhood, because there are some black
>
> people here, who I guess have come from high income neighborhoods, but at the
>
> same time, you shouldn't just assume like oh he's poor...he doesn't have
>
> this…and like in a lot of the cases that may be true, but it shouldn't always be
>
> assumed that like every stereotype in the media is always applied to me.

Christopher rarely had to deal with being subjugated by his race until he entered

university. Upon stepping foot on campus, race wasn't a factor for Christopher, but rather

when it did become one, he decided to be prideful of it, and to have a positive

representation, since that was how everyone else saw him. He stated:

> Christopher: one thing I find interesting that was like before coming to James
>
> Madison University, I was the kid that was like oh race doesn't matter, you know
>
> everyone's equal and then my third of fourth day, I was like everyone keeps
>
> telling me I'm a black student…you know I've had it, I'm a black student and I'm
>
> proud! I had been three days in, I was like okay…you're going to make me a

> black student…I'm going to be a black student…I had never seen myself that way
>
> before coming to JMU.

Christopher's statement reveals a couple things. First it points to the socially-constructed nature of race; Christopher did not think of himself as black until he was assigned this label by others (the others in this case being the white students at the university). Second, it highlights how his constitution as a racial subject led him to fully embracing it as a defining element of his identity. He noted that he started to view his blackness with a sense of pride. He wrangled with his need to express his blackness in his own viewpoint rather than others - a voice of difference. His insistence on being prideful when ascribed a black identity allows him a more positive self-representation. When asked about how he manages his racial identity against a backdrop of whiteness he noted:

> Christopher: it makes me emphasize it if one thing, I hate being the spokesperson
>
> but then when I hear micro-aggressions like walking across campus, I'll end up
>
> like well I'm black and I'm proud and saying things to people as I hear them.

On the other hand, Paul felt that his blackness, especially within the university was viewed as a representation of "diversity" or simply, a commodity.

> Paul: uhm I feel like you might see a group and like to me, when I see a black
>
> person in a group, I don't know if they're valued for their, for really who they are
>
> as a person or as much as like kind of like, that whole like "I have a black friend"
>
> complex, one of my best friends is black, what do you mean? We hang out. I feel
>
> like its kind of like this badge of…I'm not racist, like that's one way I think, I
>
> think it's also a commodity.

For Christopher, his "only" status created conditions for him to be subjugated and positioned as the "token" black person, as representative or as spokesperson for his race even in spaces that dealt with discussions of racial oppression. These situations worked to illustrate Chris as more like a symbol and representative than individual (Allen, 1998).

> Christopher: for me, because I study social movements and oppression and things like that race is constantly brought up but uhm I absolutely positively hate when we're talking about racial oppression and I'm the only black person in the class so then it feels like oh…now let me guess…you're going to look at me and you're going to ask me like... "do you feel oppressed [Christopher]...like are you okay?" like I absolutely hate that moment, but in my senior year, its gotten to the point now where like I can expect it and now when I like see it coming I'm like [shakes head]…uhhh, its better when there's another person of color in the class with me, uhm, but more often than not, I'm usually the only one, and so when there is a person of color with me like then from across the room like you know the look from across the class is like…do you want to take this question? I mean so…it's gotten better but still.

These racialized situations became almost second nature for Christopher, where he claims it gets better when there are other black people present, however, he still feels subjugated as the "token" black person or spokesperson in the classroom setting, further showing how whiteness is upheld within the educational system. It can be seen in Christopher's case that his race placed him in a position of perceived authority in the racial conversation. And even still, Christopher desired to not be placed within that position, but it was something he had to reconcile with being one of the only black individuals in the

classroom. And while Chris negotiates his "only status" against the backdrop of

perceived whiteness at the university, Paul experienced the same. I asked Paul how he

negotiated his racial identity as a student at a predominantly white institution, his

response detailed the emergence of his racial identity within a constant struggle.

> Paul: I felt like the black experience in this country will push through an internal
>
> struggle in constant with yourself, like you said juxtaposed you know with a
>
> predominantly white institution I think my reawakening was negotiated through
>
> that…its like rediscovering how important it was to be authentically me.

This speaks a lot to the continuous negotiation of racial identity and blackness as a point

of negotiation against a backdrop of whiteness. In his description of this struggle, he also

pulled from a discourse of authenticity in terms of describing the self, one that described

him wanting to be "authentically me". Though I would argue that all versions of Paul are

authentic, it seemed that Paul had a hard time negotiating some of the tension-ridden

subject positions discursively available. But even against them, he constantly struggled

and negotiated assertion of an "authentic" "self." These discourses all spoke to the

participants desiring a space to reassert and affirm their own black identities, to be seen

as, subjects, individuals, as persons, rather than objectified by the impositions that

whiteness creates.

Discussion

The discourses discussed in this chapter regarding individual/institutional

enactments of whiteness, constitution of racialized subject and postmodern blackness –

show the complex ways that black students negotiated their identities within a

predominantly white institution. While they understood and acknowledged the

similarities within their experiences as students at the university, they also recognized the

degree of diversity in their individual experiences. Unlike traditional discourses that treat

black racial identity as fixed, rigid and static, I found that students' multiple meanings

and understandings of their racial identity were contingent on the local context and

encounter, hinting at the social construction of these encounters and discourses. What

seemed the most prevalent from their responses was how the individuals illuminated the

ways they developed and still were developing their sense of "self" within encounters.

The challenge for a couple of the participants was confronting old representations of their

race, representations that were still haunting the present. The identities of the individual

participants were also being constructed within the focus groups, where they found ways

consciously, strategically and at times subconsciously to think about who they were as

black subjects. As the focus groups were ending (and even during), some participants

noted that the very opportunity to speak to their experience as a black student at a

predominantly white institution, though rare, was important and meaningful. The

perceived whiteness of the university, enacted both individually and institutionally,

constituted the students within a context of racial politic. Within these racialized

discourses, however, the students found subjective spaces to process and make sense of

their own experience and claim and assert agency to define who they were against the

structures and enactments of whiteness.

This inquiry sheds light on the multifaceted constructions of black subjectivity

while simultaneously challenging the homogenizing discourse of racial identity politics

that describe blackness as monolithic object and place blackness within a rigid, fixed,

essential container. Their narratives demonstrated the mechanics of whiteness in

constructing blackness, but even how these identities are constantly in flux and socially and relationally contingent. Blackness is a constant process of negotiation within certain discursive conditions and formations. Even within the context of the encounter, the identities of the black participants were enacted on their bodies, negotiated, and at times claimed with pride.

This section provided an interpretive analysis of the focus group texts to highlight the ways in which whiteness is enacted at individual and institutional level. It also provided an overview of the mechanisms of the encounter and how black individuals are constituted through enactments of whiteness. The next section will situate the project more theoretically per the lens of Holstein and Gubrium (2000) while weaving in my personal experience as a Black student at a predominantly white university.

Chapter 3

Conclusion

Conclusion

As explained in the previous chapters, this inquiry stemmed from my very own personal experience dealing with and trying to make sense of the experience of Black students in a predominantly white space. From this inquiry I found useful the argument of blackness of encounter, extending Nakayama and Krizek's conceptualizations of whiteness as having no true essence to conceptualizations of blackness, further highlighting blackness as a point of negotiation with an encounter with whiteness. After conducting two focus groups with seven self-identified Black individuals, what emerged were accounts that described what I would consider to be politics of the encounter. The mechanisms of the encounter is described as three-fold, first whiteness is enacted (socially, discursively, relationally etc.), second is the constitution of the racial subject, and third the desire for these individuals to be seen as subject, as individuals rather than objectified by their physical skin tone. Enactments of whiteness, at the individual and institutional level functioned to establish whiteness as invisible, the dominant norm, and a structural location of advantage and racial privilege. These enactments of whiteness constituted "blackness" by further "constraining the social power of blackness by colonizing the definition of what is normal" (Trifonas, 2000, p. 146). In so doing, the emergent structures of whiteness constrained and limited the ways black individuals could construct their identities and exemplify meaning. These encounters with whiteness emerged from discursive conditions, socially, locally, and relationally. For example, many of the participants were frustrated with the ways that racism (both covert and overt) and stereotypes and generalizations limited the ways they could be black, but also were quite frustrated with how white people and others just did not get it, and inquire the possible reasons as to why

there was such an apparent disconnect within the respective world-views. The encounters worked to name and assign them as raced and further regulated how they could navigate their bodies and experiences. Put differently, blackness and black identity (due in part to the encounter) is often informed by the limitations set in the act of naming blacks in the first place. This highlights the limits and constraints put on blackness by discourses and structures of whiteness. But even within these imposed identities that often times objectified their experiences and race, some of the participants found liberation in accepting them and redefining them according to their own perspectives, experiences, and values – reaffirming their "self" and assertion of agency. Owning their identities (subjectivities) also was an act of liberation to counter the racism they experienced and some of the ways they had been reduced as silenced, invisible, and de-centered. To be clear, the instances recounted here are not meant to only suggest a definitive relationship between blackness and whiteness. Rather, they serve the purpose of demonstrating the factors at play in the enactments of whiteness and the multiple subject positions black individuals take on as they engage with the discourses that have shaped their racialized experiences as black students immersed in a white space. These enactments worked to constitute the racial subject. In my case, not only is whiteness structured around me, it affects the way I see, navigate and make sense of my world. In short, these discourses structure my everyday consciousness and ways of being in the world. While it is crucial to recognize that discourses shape the ways in which we can recognize and understand our respective realities, it's just as important to situate this discourse in the lived, historical, political, institutional and material situations in which they circulate. To extend on this further, it is important that I creatively imagine ways to build on these

understandings of the world and how these discourses operate to reshape the ways I

perceive and interact within it, which is the purpose of this next section. The function of

the reflective analysis is twofold (1) to situate the project in my own lived experience and

(2) address the shortcomings of the previous analysis to incorporate a post-structural

framework from which this project is grounded within.

Reflection

In my office on campus I sift through literature for some inspiration or example

on how I can focus this chapter in such a way that connects my experience and the

experience of the other subjects in this inquiry- how I can voice my "self" in relation to

the "others." My thoughts are jumbled. I stare blankly at my computer screen, thinking

about how I can make this chapter and my writing more evocative. In so doing, I think

about a past conversation I had with a professor on my thesis committee. His advice -

"write fearlessly." Ironically I missed that classroom lecture, but it still resonates

nonetheless. Like Lorde (1984) I find myself questioning, what it is that I am truly afraid

of. And pondering my response, I wonder if afraid is an appropriate word choice. Am I

afraid or fearful? And if either...why? Why am I hesitant? Could it be that I'm not ready?

And I chuckle as I ask myself, "How could that be?" I start to think that maybe the

question is not if I'm ready, but rather if "they" are. A deep breath, then a fraught sigh

denotes the hefty task of writing and speaking. So as I begin to ask myself where or how

do I start…I open the drawer to the right of my desk and I take out my focus group

transcripts, protocol, field notes and analysis, and I pause. I look, first at the focus group

texts and then my analysis and I start to see the words on the page(s). I reread them over

and over again. And while I read, I am realizing…these words embody their voice(s),

their individual voice(s). I hear the voices of the Black participants and I make a connection. These Black words, even constructed in a White space, are centered. And for the first time, in a long time, someone is listening…I am listening and they are being heard.

As I sit with my data, the literature, my analysis, the theoretical framework and underpinnings of my research method, I'm seeing (and perhaps not seeing, but hearing) that there is significantly more to this beyond the self-evident. Amidst the frustration, pain, and angst that many of these participants evoked, I knew, in some capacity that felt sense. This project emerged from my own lived experience. And though, I approach this work ripe with my own experiences with history, culture, identity and race, this project is deeply entwined with the experiences and voices of them – my participants. As Friesinger (1994) states, "we find our voice…among the voice of others," and this chapter and the former is as much about mine as it is about theirs (pg. 271). On one hand, it should be noted that I do not intend to speak on behalf of, or for, a Black collective, I do not wish to carry that burden. But on the other hand, I tell my story upon reflection of theirs. And just as their stories evoke and inspire me to investigate my feelings, the stories that I tell not only, "relate to material situations and objects, but are also inflected through systems of discourse and imbued with the feelings of real people" (Song, 2009, pg. 12). These discourses are how we think. These discourses are how we perceive. These discourses are how we communicate our reality. This very reality is one that I seek to understand – understanding the reality and the experience of being a black student in a predominantly white context. I think in this moment, I recognize, that the catalyst of my fear- this feeling that I sense is the possibility that my reality is incomprehensible.

In my attempts to understand the situated identities of the black participants (and myself) and the experience of being raced in a white context, I found utility in the idea of blackness as "encounter." The significance of this encounter comes into view when the lens of Holstein and Gubrium's (2000) *Analytics of Interpretive Practice* is applied. Holstein and Gubrium's (2000) *The Analytics of Interpretive Practice* lies at the juncture of a Foucauldian and ethnomethodologic perspective, and proffers a framework to examine "how is it that individual experiences come to be understood in particular terms such as these" (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000, p. 491). This suggests that attempts to understand the Black experience would be partial without consideration of the larger factors, and even more critical, the possible historical and structural factors at play (discourses-in-practice). The Foucauldian perspective offers a view into the complex histories from which knowledge, power, and discourse interact. The ethnomethodologic perspective allows for an understanding in which experience is locally situated and constituted and (re)constituted through everyday talk and interaction (discursive practice). Thus, a Foucauldian analysis (per the lens of Holstein and Gubrium) is helpful in uncovering discursive practices around black (and white) individuals and bringing awareness of the discourses that dominate understandings within the university setting. More specifically, it provides a glimpse into the very different ways of understanding and explaining what is distinctive about the experience of Black students at a predominantly white institution. This method resonates with my own understandings of the way in which "we" as subjects construct our everyday realities in relation to our race and the various contexts and situations in which "we" are involved. This supplementary analysis provides insight into how participants (and myself) actively construct our personal

accounts, but also how these accounts, experiences, and self-understandings are

constrained by certain ways of knowing or "conceptual limits" (Holstein & Gubrium,

1998), for example those set by institutional settings such as the university.

Consequently, we must attend to each encounter's possible and potential meaning in the

present context, recognizing how active black subjects make use of the past for particular

purposes. A key to understanding these racial encounters when using the perspective of

Holstein and Gubrium (2000) is an appreciation that the encounter must be understood in

terms of things that happen outside of the local context. It is helpful to understand

cultural discourses and recognizing how these historic discourses of slavery, oppression,

repressive structures of racism are prophetic and constitute how black subjects negotiate

their identity. As Erica Still (2014) writes, "Black identity is inextricably bound up with

memories of slavery, colonization, segregation, and apartheid". And while, my Black

identity is not constructed solely by and contingent upon these memories, this history

exists in the past and present "threatening spaces within which I move and have my

being" (Yancy, 2008, p. 25).

Still in my office, I'm examining my interview protocol and thinking about how I

would answer these questions as a researcher turned research subject. My first question

asks to describe a time where you felt as though your race had mattered as a student at the

university. Reading this question, I ask myself one in response. Do I think about race as a

scholar or student? As an individual in higher education? My answer is simple – yes, all

the time. I then proceed to look down at my skin and notice the striking contrast in shades

between the building walls and my exterior and still, I'm consciously thinking about race,

because to me, it's meaningful, a defining element of my identity. The recognition of my

blackness as always playing a key factor in the way I approach the world is crucial to the development of such an identity. There is never a moment in time that I'm not – racially conscious. I cannot close my eyes to the reality of my own racialized identity – something I experience on a daily basis, particularly when it comes to encounters, such as those with whiteness and often those with white people.

I put down my interview protocol and I pick up my analysis and as I'm looking at this section, the title, seven words bolded. **Limited Racial Awareness. Ignorance. Obliviousness. Racial Neutrality.** I stop…perplexed, again questioning, how in the world are people not aware that race, skin color …it exists. I stand corrected. Maybe the thought is not that skin color or race does not exist, but that it does not matter for the white subjects because it never had to matter. I then juxtapose, "limited racial awareness" with the responses of the self-identified Black participants and again I read. In the previous interpretive analysis, the participants noted instances where whiteness was centered as the norm. These situations where whiteness was characterized as the norm were described when Kelly and Victoria were asked to self identify racially and their RA had the audacity to chuckle when they responded as Black. Another situation is with Paul, when he attempted to address race and racial relations in the classroom and the silence of the other's -their whiteness- silenced him. As Shannon Sullivan (2006) writes:

> Ignorance of it [whiteness] is actively, dynamically and even deliberately produced – albeit not consciously so- and it stubbornly maintains its existence as an allegedly mere lack through that uncanny type of production. Here the seemingly trivial claim about the existence of white privilege becomes much more momentous. As unconscious habit, white privilege exists as nonexistent, and

the lack of knowledge about it helps structure all knowledge about one's self and the world. Human beings' experience of white privilege profoundly shape who they are, what they do, and what kind of world they live in, and those experiences often do this without one's awareness of them (p. 189).

To break this down a little further, Sullivan (2006) here is attempting to explain the inattentiveness to one's whiteness and how it operates as unseen, invisible, an unquestioned norm, and as an "asset of which you are meant to be oblivious/unaware" (Yancy, 2007). Whiteness is a determining factor in the way people see and interact with the world and often times this is a deluded reality. Per the lens of Holstein and Gubrium (2000) the discursive construction of white people as having "limited racial awareness" is set against a backdrop of race consciousness – a necessity of Black survival. For the white subjects, the subconscious discursive practice of whiteness is set against the backdrop of the discourse-in-practice of race neutrality – a necessity for white supremacy to continue its reign. These opposing discursive practices and discourses-in-practice described by the participants created points of tension, a negotiation, an encounter that racialized the subjects. Elena Featherston and Jean Ishibashi describe it in the following terms:

> Whiteness must be recognized and acknowledged as more than color. Whiteness is an interlocking pattern of beliefs, values, feelings and assumptions; policies, procedures, and laws, behaviors and unwritten rules used to define and underpin a world-view (p. 90).

Among the black participants, the discursive practice that constructed white people as

having limited racial awareness is embedded in discourses of "historic systems of

oppression that sustain wealth, power, and privilege" (Featherson and Ishibashi, 2004).

This is something white people seem to have no knowledge of – the reality of a racialized

subject. The embodied whiteness of white subjects, a whiteness implicated as a

discourse-in-practice, deeply embedded in the consciousness of these individuals, affects

how they walk, talk, and see themselves in the world, and their race, frequently invisible.

Drawing from the theoretical framework of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, as cited by Alcoff

(2001), and working from the premise of race as socially constructed concept, she argues

that "race is constitutive of bodily experience, subjectivity, judgment, and epistemic

relationships," and that "one's designated race is a constitutive element of fundamental,

everyday embodied existence and social interaction" (p. 271). These invisible interpretive

practices influence how white subjects see the world, under the guise of racial neutrality

or a racial awareness that is limited -through their eyes and others - and since they often

do not experience their "world" as raced, it would be difficult to understand the "other"

and their raced experiences. So how does this apply to me? It was Joy Simmons (2007)

who noted how "perceptual practices are shaped by racial consciousness" (p. 2) and

keeping that in mind, it's no wonder that some white people just don't get it. Truthfully,

if they can't understand their own experiences as raced, how could it even be possible for

them to understand mine?

Ironically though some people can be characterized as having a "limited racial

awareness," there are others that still think that there is an "authentic" blackness. And

often times the way individuals constitute blackness is through representations of

blackness in the white imaginary. While these perceptions, often times are implicated

through a discourse-in-practice of white power and privilege and historic systems of

oppression and hegemony (whiteness), the discursive practice of these stereotypical

expectations limit the ways in which we can discursively define ourselves, the ways in

which we can discursively "be Black." What is seen from these encounters is a

stereotypical "object" lacking distinction or diversity, devoid of nuance and collectively

identified. From my membership of being a Black student at a primarily white

university, I have to navigate the attributions, stereotypes and frequent deep-seated biases

and ignorance of my classmates and instructors (who sometimes just don't get it), the

media portrayals, societal discourses, and myself at all times. My father (because society

taught him, while not in these exact words, they taught him nonetheless) at an early age

that in order to be successful in this white world that meant to not be "Black." "Black" in

the white imagination brought with it associations of lack of education, inferiority, and

inadequacy. I was condemned in my own skin. I was taught that being "black" in white

spaces was unprofessional and unbecoming and that I needed to "talk and act white" to

be perceived as "educated." I was told that in order to have more respect for myself that

meant to not "be Black." Black bodies are discursively constructed by a discourse of

whiteness that over-privileges white subjects and devalues the black body. This whiteness

discourse re-inscribes and perpetuates white as the norm and oppressively operates to

subvert blackness and objectively represent how one can be black in this "world."

I move to the next section in my analysis and I close my eyes and I still can see it,

"the use of the n word" and I find myself choking at the thought of white people deeming

the use as acceptable. It would be remiss to not use this time as a moment to discuss, not

just this analysis, but also the implications this word has. The word "nigger" in the past

was used a pejorative, a racial slur for black people in the context of slavery and historical oppression. The word, a six-letter word, brings with it chains, a loaded history of pain and historical trauma. For white subjects that use it, their discursive practice is set against the backdrop of whiteness. One might argue that to be white under the guise of whiteness involves an epistemology of ignorance and a lack of understanding. To carry this further, this lack of understanding may translate into good intentions. And while the intention might be all good and well, the result is still racist. For this Yancy (2008) is worth quoting in full:

> To reduce whiteness to a set of false beliefs overlooks the fact that many whites, those who have very honorable intentions, those who might be described as "good-will" whites, who deny holding racist beliefs, benefit from acting whitely-in-the-world in ways that they themselves may not consciously intend. On this score, benefitting from acting whitely-in-the-world can have negative implications for nonwhites, even if whites are unaware of the consequence of their actions. (Yancy, 2008, p. 24)

If we take word from Yancy and apply it to the situation of white people and the use of the 'n' word, this is one of the (many) situations where white people benefit more than "nonwhites." Though it might be hard to believe that some white people are unaware of what they are doing when they take part in the usage of the 'n' word, the possible whiteness discourse-in-practice distorts reality. The whiteness discourse-in-practice fails to acknowledge the meaningful history behind the word, assuming that the history is somehow irrelevant and outdated. This discourse-in-practice contrasts the discourse-in-

practice that I operate within that recognizes the historical and continuing significance of the word, a history that carries weight. This whiteness conceals itself through norms that tend to miss the complexity of racism and the 'n' word specifically, even despite racist intentions. The discursive practice even with it shortened as "nigga" when used by white people triggers a discourse-in-practice that tells my body, and me you're still a slave, imprisoned then, imprisoned now, imprisoned forever.

At the current moment; I'm reminded that this feeling is not uncommon, for this is a reality that I negotiate daily as a Black student at a predominantly white institution. As a Black student frequently surrounded by a classroom of White students, I find myself in a marginalized position. When I leave the classroom (or even while I am still in it) I remain Black. The perceived whiteness that permeates the institution produces, ascribes and racializes me as the "abject other" (McLaren, 1991). This whiteness not only dominates and subjugates my blackness, but it creates it, and further constrains it (McLaren, 1991). And while my skin confers instant ascribed identity when I am constituted as Black, I feel the presence of whiteness more frequent than not, especially in the realm of academia. The whiteness discourse-in-practice and the discursive practice used within the academy, on many occasions denied my voice and have deemed my experience insignificant. I've had people teach me about my own experience. As I remember, in the times that discussions have often centered on "marginalized" populations or "intersectionality," I ironically felt "marginalized" from the very conversations that were talking bout my "intersections." It's disheartening even, when you use words and can't be heard…when your discursive practice is in tension with the discursive practice of the academy. Like Royster states (1996):

> I have been compelled to listen to speakers, well meaning though they may think
>
> they are, who signal to me rather clearly that subject position is everything. I have
>
> come to recognize, however that when the subject matter is me and the voice is
>
> not mine, my sense of order and rightness is disrupted. In metaphoric fashion,
>
> these "authorities" let me know, once again, that Columbus has discovered
>
> America and claims it now, claims it still for a European crown (p. 32).

And I too have spent countless moments in class being spoken for and on behalf of,

pulling from discourses of the oppressed. The whiteness operating here was in order to be

normal, good, right (on top of the food chain), you must speak "academic." And in these

moments I felt like I had nothing to contribute to the conversation. I could not discuss the

assigned material, but I had first-hand knowledge and experiences to bring to this table

but I was the only one. The stories they spoke, wreaked havoc on my body. My

imagination…riddled with the stories racism built. My body…a site of historical trauma.

Their theory was my lived experience. Yet the words they used, I can admit, I had no idea

what they meant at the time but I knew how it felt. But I could not articulate it because

my words seemed to not be good enough. My words meant nothing. My words were not

their words and thus, they could not hear me. I was invalidated. The discursive practice of

the academic suggested that I was only worthy of being heard if I used their discourse, if

I spoke in agreement with the dominant culture. They could only hear me if I said things

privy to "the discursive construction of my marginalized subject position is operating

within a discourse-in-practice of whiteness" or "the discursive practice of white subjects

having the authority to theorize my lived experience is set against a back drop of

oppression and hegemony" or the "theoretical discursive practice is implicated within a

discourse-in-practice of academic whiteness." This discourse constructed my being. I was

imprisoned by silence and this was not strategic, this was forced. The silence was not

brought on by choice. There was no power in this silence. And yet again, I knew the felt

sense of oppression through the shutting down of my self-awareness, my personhood, and

my voice.

Lurking in the shadows of these growing concerns is the ever-present discourse of

racism, blanketed with a covering of whiteness. As mentioned by the participants in this

inquiry the anonymity of the social media application Yik Yak made them wary of the

possibility of people thinking of them in such a way that the locally situated discursive

practice of Yik Yak was seen as a reminder of the discourse-in-practice as racist, as

oppressive, as a reminder of a legacy of historical and political discourses that materialize

race and what it means to be "Black."

Specifically for some of the black males in this inquiry, the discursive

construction of the black body triggered a discourse-in-practice of police brutality, fear,

and suspicion. In these encounters, they embodied Trayvon Martin, a 17 year old fatally

shot walking through his neighborhood with his hood up. They became Eric Garner, a

black male put in a fatal chokehold in New York City. They were Freddie Gray, a 25-

year-old African American male, arrested and taken into police custody in Baltimore,

only to die seven days later from "spinal injuries." The symbolic lynching of the Black

male body was a discourse-in-practice embedded within their psyche every time they

found themselves encountering whiteness. On this score, as Yancy (2008) notes, the

"black body [is] defined by historically embedded racist practices" and the white body

"privileged by normative structures and institutional structures that protect them, deem

them "honorable" and "safe" bodies" (p. 26). From these past encounters, these

individuals started to find themselves negotiating threat and discomfort within these

white spaces, beginning to question their value to others and the intention of other's

valuing them.

Like many of the other Black individuals within this study, I too have been

subject to encounters where I question the intention of the other parties involved. And in

these encounters I find myself in conflict, deliberating internally how I should respond.

On one hand, I have to choose not to express myself in ways that perpetuate stereotypes

or "represent the race." Processing how I could, should, or would react in the presence of

racism. "I don't want to be seen as an angry black woman," I tell myself, or constrained

between "what black should be." These stereotypes fail to take into any account diversity

of people or experience. And then on the other hand, I wonder, if there is any other way I

could respond, will that still make me the "exception"…does that make me less "Black?"

In light, I shouldn't have to perpetuate or fit into stereotypes in order to be authentically

Black. And while, we spend time trying to not fit stereotypes, pulling our hair out if we

do, we find ourselves policing our responses, suspicious and distrustful, because of these

past encounters pulling from historical discourses-in-practice that victimize, oppress,

colonize and subjugate the black body.

So, as I sit and reflect on these challenging moments and encounters, I am

reminded that this project emerged as a space to reassert my self, my voice, and

blackness as I define it. It is a quest and journey for voice and black subjectivity. Yancy

(2009) notes, "it is through the capacity of language to accommodate difference that

Blacks will be able to fashion notions of selfhood outside the jurisdiction of white

supremacy and essentialism" (p. 149). This critique of essentialism will allow for a re-definition of blackness as encounter that not only takes into account the social, historical, and political significance of whiteness but also addresses the role of whiteness in constituting black subjects. It will allow the space to conceptualize black subjectivity even within a discourse of whiteness. A critique of essentialism will provide the opportunity to re-center and re-position black subjects in their own right, rather than displaced by these enactments of whiteness. And while we repudiate the idea that "there is a black 'essence,' this will allows us to recognize and acknowledge the ways that black identity has been specifically constituted in the experience of exile and struggle" (hooks, 1990, p. 29). And within these encounters, I'm reminded from my father, that I'm conditioned, I'm armored, I'm prepared to struggle.

My dad and I stayed up one night to watch the CNN special on a black man interviewing the Ku Klux Klan. I was editing my thesis at the time; enjoying it with my father when a commercial break came on. During it, I asked my dad about his most recent racist encounter, he replied, "I suspect the guy who pulled up outside of the house asking me if I lived here." My dad got up, moved to the kitchen and then said, "to give you more context, I was cutting the grass, a guy pulled up, asked for directions, and after I gave it to him, he asked me if this was my house." I said nothing in response, laughed, and just continued to write. After a couple of silent moments, my dad interjects and asked very nonchalantly, "So why was this racist? Do you think he would've asked me that if I was white?"

Now, there is certainly no easy answer to the question posed above because one could only understand completely with the knowledge of where the individual and both

my dad were operating under, but a start is to understand the potential discourses at play.

For that I pose a question, which also has no easy answer but, "what do we do with this

now?" Orbe and Allen (2008) encourage us to consider the "constitutive role of

communication in both perpetuating racial problems and effecting social change" (pg.

202). Since language "works in relation to what is taken to be real, evident, and

significant," (p. 94) how people make sense of the world and themselves can be discerned

from the discourses they engage (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). All the stories included

here, I believe are vital to the transformative process. These stories are vital for social

change. To philosophize social change and these stories as a form and tool for advocacy

is a start to challenging the dominant frameworks and discourses that oppress and

marginalize individuals.

Katz (2003) speaks on the lack of understanding that sometimes exists between

white people and black. She states that, "this attitude infects all interactions with people

of color and influences our immediate reactions to their competence, talents, and

achievements. It poses a great barrier for Whites by preventing [them] from engaging

fully with people of Color and by supporting a deluded view of the world and our place

in it" (p.11). Additionally, The President's Initiative on Race (1998) reports that:

> [T]he absence of both knowledge and understanding about the role race has
>
> played in our collective history continues to make it difficult to find solutions that
>
> will improve race relations, eliminate disparities, and create equal opportunities in
>
> all areas of American life. The absence also contributes to conflicting views on
>
> race and racial progress help by Americans of color and white Americans (p. 3).

The phenomenon that both Katz (2003) and this report confirm is the possibility of white people and black people pulling from different discourses of knowledge construction. By utilizing a postmodern and post-structural framework to investigate this and understand the tension-ridden negotiations, such inquiry can potentially illuminate the structuring or institutionalizing process of a racialized social order and redress the apparent disconnect in the lived experiences of black and white students within white dominated spaces. Moreover, I argue that more emphasis should be given to the voice of the marginalized and centering the voice of difference (in this case black students) because as indicated from this project, their bodies were a site of struggle and negotiation. Barbara Christian (1998) states that:

> [P]eople of color have always theorized – but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. And I am inclined to say that our theorizing (and I intentionally use the verb rather than the noun) is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, because dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking. How else have we managed to survive with such spiritedness the assault on our bodies, social institutions, countries, our very humanity? (Christian, 1988, p. 68).

It is not a novel idea, but rather a concept Black people have been forced to contend for centuries and the first and initial step in enacting social change should for white people to "engage with them in dialogue with the goal of understanding" (Dutta, 2008, p. 45).

Appendix A

Implications

It might be beneficial if researchers consider utilizing postmodern perspectives to illuminate the multiple ways individuals negotiate, engage, and resist such collective identifications to reject essentialist notions of identity from the variety of subject positions that constitute a given racial community (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000).

A critique of essentialism encouraged by postmodernist thought is useful for black constructions of identity. Furthermore, these critiques challenge notions of universality and naturally imposed notions of a universal identity or constructions of blackness and allow for new constructions of self and assertion of agency (hooks, 2012). Black individuals and other persons of color are then able to acknowledge their own subjective experiences, diversity in opinion and present variety in the black experience rather than culturally inflicted and traditional views of the situated identity of blackness (hooks, 2012; Hall, 2000). This inquiry highlights that through the use of focus groups that center the student's experiences and perspective, we can better understand how black subjectivities are constructed, navigated and negotiated. This inquiry highlights the constructed nature of blackness, whiteness, and racial identities. And by challenging dominant discourses, interrogating and potentially understanding how they work, it can provide the space to make new and different discourses of ourselves as racial subjects – something I found to be a constant but simultaneous process located at the core of racial identity construction.

The students' narratives also suggested the ways that the university in particular perpetuates racist and prejudice practices, as well as the interventions and disruptions that

they found within their institutions, both personally and programmatically.

This inquiry has various policy implications for the university. One of which is the

incorporation of a required diversity course that incorporates diversity of experiences and

worldviews of not just Black students (but other races, ethnicities, and cultures) and to

incorporate them into their classrooms, events, and programs. It should be taken upon the

university to work diligently to dismantle assumptions and the prevalence of racial

stereotypes of Black students (and others) as homogenous and to resist institutional

enactments of whiteness to foster an inclusive climate that embraces and promotes

difference (racially) not just intellectually. It should be taken upon faculty and staff as

well to be more culturally-centered, competent and sensitive and allow more

opportunities within the classroom for marginalized groups to voice their experience

across ethnic and cultural boundaries. Participants carried an awareness of the structural,

systemic, and social oppression, which impacted their daily interactions, academic

courses, and co-curricular activities. From this I argue that students need better support

(institutionally) to combat and address hostile climates and institutionalized racism.

Moreover (as shown from the students' narratives), institutional policies and practices

must apply interventions to disrupt the racial paradigms that normalize Whiteness (white

students' experience and practices), and to create a more inclusive community that re-

centers academic experiences around students' multiple identities.

Limitations

Several oversights are apparent from this analysis. A limitation of the research

was that I was only able to reach seven black participants. This may limit the findings in

making generalizations (even though that was not the intent of this project) on how we

conceptualize Blackness. Among those seven black participants, I had only one graduate student. Future research should look at the differences between undergraduate experiences and graduate student experiences and examine the commonalities and differences between them. Since blackness doesn't exist without whiteness, future research also should look at whiteness encounters with whiteness to examine the tensions that may emerge within that encounter. Intersectionality and other marginalized intersections should be examined to see how that might problematize Blackness further. Lastly, this inquiry focused a lot on the mechanics of whiteness and the encounter itself and not enough on the post-black response or solutions, but by utilizing a postmodern framework to conceptualize blackness the response can be examined.

Appendix B

Consent to Participate in Research

Identification of Investigators & Purpose of Study

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Elisa Davidson from James Madison University. The purpose of this study is to examine the situated experiences of those who identify as black and attend predominantly white institutions. It will be an attempt to discover how people of color who attend predominantly white institutions engage in racially neutral discursive practices and navigate a black racial identity, while simultaneously reinforcing white supremacist thoughts/actions.

Research Procedures

Should you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to sign this consent form once all your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. This study consists of a focus group that will be administered to individual participants in Harrison Hall. You will be asked to provide answers to a series of questions related to race, communication, and identity. The focus group will be audio recorded.

Time Required

Participation in this study will require 60 to 90 minutes/hours of your time.

Risks

The investigator does not perceive more than minimal risks from your involvement in this study (that is, no risks beyond the risks associated with everyday life).

Benefits

There are potential benefits for educators and those involved in higher education who wish to develop a deeper understanding of the racialized experiences of African americans at a predominantly white university and how this research can contribute to larger discussions on race within society.

Confidentiality

The results of this research will be presented in a master's thesis. The results of this project will be coded in such a way that the respondent's identity will not be attached to the final form of this study. The researcher retains the right to use and publish non-identifiable data. While individual responses are confidential, aggregate data will be presented representing averages or generalizations about the responses as a whole. All data will be stored in a secure location accessible only to the researcher. Upon completion of the study, all information that matches up individual respondents with their answers including audiotapes will be destroyed.

Participation & Withdrawal

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You are free to choose not to participate. Should you choose to participate, you can withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind.

Questions about the Study

If you have questions or concerns during the time of your participation in this study, or after its completion or you would like to receive a copy of the final aggregate results of this study, please contact:

Questions about the Study

If you have questions or concerns during the time of your participation in this study, or after its completion or you would like to receive a copy of the final aggregate results of this study, please contact:

Elisa Davidson	Jennifer Mease
School of Communication	School of Communication
James Madison University	James Madison University
davidsem@jmu.edu	measejj@jmu.edu

Questions about Your Rights as a Research Subject

Dr. David Cockley
Chair, Institutional Review Board
James Madison University
(540) 568-2834
cocklede@jmu.edu

Giving of Consent

I have read this consent form and I understand what is being requested of me as a participant in this study. I freely consent to participate. I have been given satisfactory answers to my questions. The investigator provided me with a copy of this form. I certify that I am at least 18 years of age.

☐ I give consent to be audio-taped during my interview. _____ (initials)

_____
Name of Participant (Printed)

_____ _____
Name of Participant (Signed)   Date

_____ _____
Name of Researcher (Signed)   Date

Appendix C

1. Talk to me about any experiences you have had that made you feel your race mattered as a JMU student (Be as specific with the details as possible)

    a. When did it happen? (i.e. freshmen year, last month)

    b. Where did it happen? (i.e. in class, residence hall)

    c. Without naming any names, who made you feel like that? (i.e. students, faculty members, staff)

    d. What role do you feel your identity as a black individual played into the occurrence of your experience?

    e. Describe the environment (ex: weather, how were you feeling?)

    f. What were you doing before the occurrence?

    g. What did you do after the occurrence?

        i. What was your first reaction?

        ii. What ran through your mind?

        iii. Who did you talk to about the occurrence?

        iv. What advice did they give you?

        v. Were others around, how did they respond?

        vi. How did their response/involvement make you feel?

2. In your experience how do white peers perceive black people on campus?

    a. In your experience how does this affect how white peers and white faculty treat black individuals on campus?

    b. How does this affect how you are valued on campus by students?

    c. How does this affect how you are valued on campus by

       faculty/administrators?

    d. Where do you think they get these ideas from?

3. **Diversity/inclusion** (how do you think the university's diversity initiatives impact

   how you are valued on campus?)

    a. how does the way the university prefaces diversity (i.e. conversations,

       policies, practices) affect you and your experience at the university?

    b. What are the problems or challenges of 'diversity practices' at this

       university?

    c. What are the benefits of diversity at this university?

    d. Does the way the university defines diversity have any impact on how you

       think of your racial identity?

4. Often times, as a society, we try to say that we are "post-racial" or rather race just

"does not matter" because "we" chose to elect a "black" president and because of all the

"progress" we have made since the civil rights era, what are your thoughts on this?

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