

The Black-White Dichotomy of Race: Influence of a Predominantly White Environment on Multiracial Identity

Veronica Jones, PhD

University of Texas at Austin

The racialized norms of a predominantly white institution can affect multiracial students' agency to self-identify. A university in the Southern region was chosen to explore sociohistorical inclinations to place individuals within a black-white dichotomy which implies either-or identification. Utilizing the theoretical white racial frame and individual identification patterns, in-depth interviews revealed barriers to acceptance and campus organizational culture. Findings indicate multiracial participants' cognizance of imposed racial stigmas and organizational structures which ascribed a monoracial lens to students, regardless of how they chose to identify. This study gives insight into the need to deconstruct institutional practices which exclude multiracial perspectives.

Jones, V. A. (2015). The black-white dichotomy of race: Influence of a predominantly white environment on multiracial identity. *Higher Education in Review*, 12, 1-22.

The Black-White Dichotomy of Racial Identity

Identity development for multiracial individuals who hold ties with more than one socially constructed racial category has been a primary topic of study in the social sciences (Chaudhari & Pizzolato, 2008; Renn, 2004; Root, 2005). Encompassed in this inquiry is the current debate that the study of race further delineates the false concept of race as a biological and fixed variable (Graves, 2004; James, 2008). However, race as a social construction has been accepted by many scholars who suggest approaching race as a fluid concept to be deconstructed within a sociohistorical context (Kellogg & Liddell, 2012; Renn, 2004). With United States demographics reflecting an increasingly diverse population, identity development is all the more pertinent within the context of higher education and the inclusion of all students. As advocacy groups such as the MAVIN Foundation fight for greater movement beyond racial categories to give individuals more ownership over their identification, there must be a constant push for social justice to disrupt spaces where resistance to a fluidity of identity exists.

Because scholars increasingly view racial identity as in constant flux based on situational factors and the salience of race within a particular context (Renn, 2004; Renn, 2008; Shelton & Sellers, 2000), the study of multiracial identity progressively has been based on an epistemological lens that acknowledges individuals' reality and gives voice to their lived experiences. More specifically, Renn (2004) suggests methodological tools such as utilizing a constructivist lens, contextualizing terms, and disrupting the texts through writing conventions. Therefore for the purpose of this study, terms such as black and white will not be capitalized to refer to the social construction of such classifications. While this study recognizes the problematic nature of racial categories, these categories must first be acknowledged to challenge how they are embedded into United States institutional culture through structures of power and privilege (Gusa, 2010). Scholars who deconstruct the meaning of race must also incorporate a critical look at the institutional binds that reaffirm the dominance of monocultural viewpoints.

Just as Feagin (2013) explores the "myth of racism" to deconstruct the dominant white viewpoint that racism is on the decline, current research can analyze the pervasiveness of institutional racism. American education has been shaped through a racialized history. Particularly in the South, whites sought to maintain educational inequalities to keep the idealized white race superior (Walters, 2001). Social distancing was generated in order to protect the white race (Root, 1996); this continues to impact biracial individuals seeking to move past defined racial categories. The historical black-white dichotomy of racial classifications created an either-or lens (Jackson, 2013; Root, 1996) which some individuals refuse to eradicate. As Roberts states, "biracial individuals are both

black and white in a society that sees almost everything as either black or white” (2003, p. 8). In challenging the myth of race as a biological construct, we also must challenge the myth of racism by exploring racialized institutional contexts. Institutions since the radical student movements of the 1960s and 1970s have become “racial battlefields” (Literte, 2010), even more evident in the lack of diversity at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) post-segregation. This phenomenological study examined how a Southern PWI affected multiracial students’ agency to move beyond socially fixed categories.

Literature Review

Various theories that consider socially constructed core identities such as race, gender, class, and sexuality are often applied to multiracial students (Renn, 2008; Root, 1996; Root, 2005); however, many criticisms of these epistemological stances exist. First, traditionally theories have overtly referred to a linear progression through stages, suggesting that development has a beginning and end. Second, many theories fail to consider the impact of race on identity, and although racial identity development theories address this issue, most imply a homogeneous nature within racial groups (Literte, 2010). Recent scholarship related to the multiracial experience reflects a critical approach to several interconnected issues.

Marginality and Identity Development

In order to accurately explore the complexity of identity, consideration must be given to the historicity of marginalization that multiracial individuals have experienced over time that affects their identity development. Models for multiracial development have evolved particularly since the mid-1990s to place emphasis on the sociopolitical terrain that influences the ownership afforded to individuals over their lived experiences outside of socially fixed categories (Kellogg & Liddell, 2012; Jones & McEwen, 2000; Renn, 2004). Due to the propagated mixed messages of acceptance that have historically shaped biracial individuals’ realities, models of biracial identity generally focused on marginalization. Multiracial identity development models have been postulated on the notion of “otherness” that biracial individuals experience on the margins of sociopolitical power struggles between dominant and subordinate racial groups (Root, 2005).

In acknowledging realities that reflect fluidity in the nature of development, Poston and Root are recognized as the first theorists to develop models which accounted for healthy biracial identities. Poston’s model (1990) sought to step away from popular models of racial identity development that underscored societal racism. The model’s five outcomes included personal identity, choice of group categorization, enmeshment/denial, appreciation, and integration. While

these alternative resolutions highlight one's agency in moving past a sense of marginality and oppression, scholars continue to examine the inherent racial hierarchy ever present in this country. To expound on the turmoil multiracial adolescents of white heritage might feel in not being able to completely reject the dominant culture and immerse among people of color, Root (2005) suggested four outcomes of positive biracial identity: acceptance of the identity assigned by society, identification with both racial groups, identification with a single racial group, or identification as a new racial group (multiracial or biracial). Although the first and third outcomes appear to be similar, the latter indicates an active rather than passive identity. The decision to identify with a group regardless of societal constructs symbolizes self-empowerment in overcoming social stigmas. However, caution must be taken in oversimplifying self-identification and minimizing the impact of environment and contextual influences.

Racial Oppression and the Dominant Culture

Exploration of multiracial identity must account for the ontological perspective of a dominant group that white Americans created to maintain social, political, and economic power. Helms and Cook (2005) state that effective use of systemic oppressive strategies by the dominant group "requires that mutually exclusive racial categories be created, regardless of whether these categories have any biogenetic basis in fact" (p. 235). The ideal of this dominant white culture as referred to throughout the paper calls for a multifaceted account of the strategies that multiracial individuals evoke in order to live in the margins of these categories.

Theories of epistemological development often stress one's agency in asserting a multiracial identity; however, the larger systemic factors of racism and sociopolitical oppression necessitate an understanding of their effects on multiracial identity. An assumption is made that biracial individuals who hold membership with the dominant white culture place emphasis on that identity above others to escape the oppression of people of color (Root, 2005). Cooper (1997) cites the work of Stonequist dating back to 1935 which explored the natural desire of biracial or "mixed blood" individuals to move towards the race which was identified with higher social status. Conceptualizing biracial individuals' assertion of privilege is complicated by the historical ways in which the dominant group sought to maintain structures of power. In the absence of slavery which created a caste system and maintained the black-white power relationship, terms such as mulatto and quadroon gradually emerged to describe biracial individuals of various levels of black ancestry (Davis, 1991). These terms held a double connotation of establishing the ideal of a biracial, maladjusted inferiority in comparison to whites while also positing biracial superiority above single race blacks to encourage a racial hierarchy (Brown, 2001, Root, 1996). In order to reaffirm their superiority and to deny multiracial

individuals the benefits of privilege, whites developed the “one-drop-rule” to categorize individuals who held any black ancestry as black (Graves, 2004; Renn, 2004; Root, 1996).

Monoracial Influences and the Collegiate Landscape

The ideal of a racial hierarchy with biracial individuals below whites and above monoracial communities of color worked to maintain the idea of a pure white race and created opposition in the acceptance of multiracial individuals within marginalized subgroups. Elitism was shaped by white’s preference of biracial heritage over monoracial people of color; preferences such as lighter skin color continue to divide subcommunities that exist within fabricated racial boundary lines (Davis, 1991; Graves, 2004). Monoracial people of color often view biracial individuals as embodying both the “us” versus “them” of identity. During the Civil Rights movement as biracial individuals embraced their black identity, some in the black community postulated that individuals of partially white heritage would identify with white culture to escape oppression (Jackson, 2013; Root, 2005). Multiracial individuals often have to legitimize membership in oppressed communities. Ultimately the battle for ownership in one’s ability to self-identity with their perspective heritages became a fixture of debate in the political landscape of marginalized communities. Civil rights groups have argued that increased reporting through a multiracial perspective results in declining numbers in single-identity minority groups (Literate, 2010). This argument that multiraciality will weaken minority organizational efforts and eradicate the support of race in policies highlights the need for recognition of the larger sociopolitical system that affects individual choice in racial identity.

Socially constructed prejudice among the marginalized group with which one seeks to identify problematizes a simplistic concept of self-identification. Root (1996) speaks of the internalization of racism which forces multiracial individuals to fit into socially defined spaces. Research on the multiracial college experience has focused on the physical, psychological, and social space needed for sense of belonging (Renn, 2004). While ethnic organizations serve as venues of support, they are often based on a monoracial perspective. Most ethnically based organizations are based on four minority groups: Chicano/Latino/Hispanic, African-American/black, Native American/American Indian, and Asian American/Pacific Islander (Ozaki & Johnston, 2008). Multiracial students who fit into more than one of those categories frequently are left in the margins. In a study of race-oriented student services (ROSS), Literate (2010) found that the majority of biracial students who had experienced previous discrimination did not participate in ROSS at their campus. Many stated that even the group naming of ROSS implied that multiracial students had to choose one specific racial heritage in order to participate. With the changing dynamics of our country’s

institutions, students increasingly face political, social, and psychological challenges. Furthermore, multiracial students often find themselves marginalized and are increasingly compelled to assert their distinctive voice to address the issues pertinent to a multiracial worldview (Ozaki & Johnston, 2008). Within racialized spaces based on a monoracial perspective, how then is multiracial students' self-identification influenced by this black-white dichotomy?

Conceptual Framework

Two theoretical perspectives guide the study of multiracial identity: a focus on constructing one's own identity and focus on the larger dominant racial hierarchy and systemic racism (Literte, 2010). The current study will bridge these two perspectives through the use of Renn's (2004) patterns of multiracial identity and Feagin's (2013) white racial frame. Renn recognized little work had been done on the sociological effects of college on multiracial identity and utilized an ecology of student development to show how various systems influence self-identification. Her study revealed five discrete patterns of multiracial identity: monoracial (choice of one heritage), multiple monoracial (shifting between heritages), multiracial (embrace all heritages), situational (different identities based on context), and extraracial (opt out of racial categories) (Renn, 2004). Sixty-one percent of students in the study asserted situational identity, consciously shifting in and out of identities based on the institutional context (Renn, 2008). However, her study was conducted at six institutions in the Northeast and Midwest region of the country. Situational identity acknowledges one's ability to navigate within and adjust to various environments, which calls into question the effect that a racialized university culture has on situational identity. Geographic location is essential to perceptions of one's ability to self-identify, as Renn (2004) emphasized the interaction of various micro and macro systems in which multiracial individuals exist. Therefore, the current study seeks to deconstruct how the racialized context of a PWI in the Southern region influences patterns of identity.

In exploring patterns of identity, Renn acknowledges the sociohistorical influences on identity. This perspective relates to the ideal of a black-white dichotomy rooted in our nation's history (Brown, 2001; Davis, 1991) that creates resistance for multiracial individuals in the confines of certain spaces. Particularly in the context of the South, the presence of biracial student communities or the lack thereof affects individuals' self-identification choices. These decisions are based on the informal rules of group membership that have been established (Renn, 2004), a socially constructed influence on identity also explicated by Roberts (2003):

Regardless of whether biracial individuals choose to claim a black, biracial, or other racial identity, they navigate a politicized racial terrain by

constructing, negotiating, and enacting their self-concept of racial identity even as others may assume and impose different identities upon them. (p. 8)

Monoracial groups often monitor those seeking membership to establish their legitimacy (Renn, 2004). This brings into question how a dichotomous racial context influences patterns of identity.

The second theoretical approach relates to the white racial frame, a social frame that illuminates how the systemic oppression of people of color complicates the ideal of agency in self-identification. Feagin (2013) defines the white racial frame as a worldview created over centuries by the dominant white group that has normalized the rationale of ingroup superiority and outgroup inferiority of people of color. In outlining how racial oppression is legitimized, Feagin emphasizes how the frame is utilized by the dominant white group to structure society:

The white racial frame includes a broad and persisting set of racial stereotypes, prejudices, ideologies, interlinked interpretations and narratives, and visual images. It also includes racialized emotions and racialized reactions to language accents and imbeds inclinations to discriminate. (p. xi)

In order to maintain superiority, the dominant group created patterns of racism to separate the white race; a racial hierarchy was established to place African Americans at the lowest level and also to shun multiracial individuals and other people of color. People of color over time have created anti-racist counter-frames to survive as well as fight against normalized white norms (Feagin, 2013). This resistance impacts multiracial individuals, for instance for those with partial white heritage, who might seek to address internalized racial stereotypes and membership within oppressed monoracial communities of color. Counter-framing can be complicated within predominantly white institutional spaces where the white racial frame is affirmed.

In outlining the ways that institutions function under a predominantly white frame, Gusa (2010) emphasizes the standardization of rules created by the dominant white group under which other groups must operate. The white racial frame illuminates the ways in which whites as well as people of color are socialized in conscious and unconscious ways to function under a system of racist thinking and fixed stereotypes. This study therefore places emphasis on the white racial frame and its effect in creating a racialized black-white dichotomy of inferiority-superiority in the PWI environment. Dominant worldviews and institutional practices all have an impact on self-identification for multiracial students. An intersection of the theoretical perspectives of individual patterns of identity and the white racial frame guides this study's methodology; consideration of the forces that work against individual agency necessitates

critical discourse on the racialized spaces of PWIs that influence how multiracial students negotiate their identities.

Methodology

This study was influenced by the phenomenological perspective, the study of the lived experiences of individuals as they experience and make sense of a particular phenomenon (Miller & Crabtree, 1999; Patton, 2002). With the phenomenon being biracial identity, a constructivist paradigm was utilized as it allows for the study of multiple realities and emphasizes the reciprocal reflections of the researcher and participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The selection of a public, research PWI in the south, referred to as Province University, as a single-site study was informed by institutional materials such as archival data, organizational websites, institutional newspapers, and nationally publicized records of recent racially charged campus events. As with many institutions in the South, this particular PWI at the time of study was nearing the commemoration of fifty years of integration, and the lack of diversity in student demographics made Province an ideal location to explore negotiated racial spaces. University demographics for fall of 2012 reflect a student population that reported over 60 percent white and only five percent self-identified as representing two or more racial categories. Inclusion in the study was contingent on holding heritage in two or more socially defined racial categories.

The white racial frame (Feagin, 2013) acknowledges how various people of color navigate through a racist terrain based on the ideal of a superior white race. Therefore, the specific heritage of potential participants was kept undefined in order to explore how the white racial frame affects multiracial students of various heritages. Purposeful and snowball sampling techniques (Patton, 2002) were employed to secure five participants who agreed to share their experience as biracial or multiracial students at Province. All students but one had a background encompassing a white and black heritage, with one student having a white and Hispanic background. It is important to note that the process of securing participants for the study became a significant finding in and of itself. During the process of securing participants, it was made evident that race was a taboo subject within the campus community. Additionally, student organizations were structured in a fashion that facilitated an emphasis on a monoracial perspective, i.e., black or Hispanic student organizations, with no emphasis on a multiracial viewpoint. Multiple attempts were made through student affairs personnel to secure additional participants with little to no response; those who did respond emphasized the complexity of accessing students who identified as and who were willing to discuss their multiracial identity. Participants themselves expressed that they did not know of additional multiracial students

for inclusion in the study, shedding light on the monolithically racialized culture of the institution.

Data collection was conducted during the fall of 2012 and included semi-structured interviews that lasted for a maximum of 90 minutes, with each student also participating in a follow-up interview to clarify perceptions of campus organizational culture. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to use a basic set of questions but provide flexibility for new topics of discussion (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). Interview questions were framed in order to reveal participants' patterns of self-identification and influences of the white racial frame on the PWI environment, including of the structural makeup of campus organizations and institutional policies based on dominant group norms. The institutional review board process also necessitated that consent to discuss the specific racial makeup of each participant was obtained. In order to ensure trustworthiness, which entails research quality through the use of certain criteria to build confidence in the "truth" of one's findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), several methodological approaches were used during the duration of the study. These methods included peer debriefing, member checking, and research memos. Discussions were held with colleagues, including individuals of biracial heritage, to receive input on the conceptual development of the study. Full individual transcripts were sent to each participant for review to ensure that their authentic voices were captured. Finally, research memos in between interviews aided in synthesizing emerging patterns and to inform subsequent discourse.

Each interview was audiotaped and transcribed by hand to ensure engagement with the data and then unitized with content analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the process of reducing data into single units in order to consider representations at the most basic level of analysis. Units were then grouped utilizing the constant comparative method (Miles & Huberman, 1994), which entails the process of creating and restructuring categories until emergent themes have been saturated. During data analysis, the conceptual framework was invoked to consider how participants revealed patterns of identity as well as the influence of the white racial framing of the PWI environment. The merging of these theoretical viewpoints allowed for a comprehensive summation of the ways in which a racialized institutional space influenced the experiences of multiracial students.

Limitations

Due to the particular context of a PWI in the Southern region, it is recognized that monolithic and racialized social norms might influence individuals' perception of their inclusion in the study. Students who solely saw themselves along fixed monoracial lines such as black or Hispanic therefore might assume exclusion. Despite the low response rate that might be linked to this possibility, this potential barrier contributed to the significance of the study as a single-site

case to explore the influence of the white racial frame that supports an either-or racial dichotomy. As a researcher of African American descent, my positionality situated me as an outsider in that I do not hold a multiracial background situated between various heritages. However, I shared an insider status with participants in that we all grew up in the South. This was a critical component of the research that allowed a shared understanding of regional norms as related to the influences of segregation and the ways in which the socialization of racial categories occurs. Additionally, for participants who identified monolithically as black, it was possible that they might assume I held an oppressed lens related to my black identity and therefore held an expectation of that worldview in their responses. It was therefore necessary to make clear the intention of the study to highlight their voice as a multiracial individual while simultaneously allowing for connections to be made in the similarities of our experiences.

Findings

Renn's (2004) patterns of identity explore the ways in which participants chose to self-identify (see Table 1). Participant names have been changed to ensure anonymity.

Table 1

Participant backgrounds and identity patterns

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Family background/heritage</u>	<u>Identity pattern/self-identification</u>
Devin	mother: white; father: black	multiracial
Jay	mother: white; father: (full-blooded) Mexican	monoracial/Mexican
Lydia	mother: Maltese, Trinidadian; father: black	monoracial/black
Daniel	mother: black, white, Italian; father: black	monoracial/black
Tyra	mother: German, Egyptian; father: black	multiracial

Two out of five participants self-identified as multiracial, with the majority holding a monoracial identity. Their experiences made the impact of a campus based on dominant white norms categorizing individuals as black, white, or other evident. Due to the PWI environment and a Southern upbringing, students did not speak of the ability to shift between identities or to opt out of racial categories; membership within an oppressed racial category was a constant awareness. It is important to note that Jay used the term “full-blooded” when describing his family heritage. This concept of blood line related to community norms was essential to framing the ways in which students navigated through a racialized context that for the majority caused them to make a solidified choice in claiming one heritage. Four themes emerged based on the influence of the PWI context:

societal inclinations to categorize, socialization into the white frame, racial stigmas attached to ascribed identity, and community spaces through a monolithic lens.

Societal Inclinations to Categorize

Threaded throughout our discourse was the influence of the socially constructed idea of race. Physical attributes such as skin color and hair inclined classmates to constantly categorize participants as other. Even though Daniel was raised by his white grandmother and a mother who holds black, white, and Italian heritage, he identified as black and never recognized color until he reached middle school age. Daniel only brought up his Italian heritage if someone noted his light skin and rendered the question “What are you mixed with?” and naturally embraced a black identity. In contrast, Devin who grew up in a white family and in a neighborhood where he was normally the only black individual among his peers chose to embrace a multiracial identity. Even in attending the high school at which his mother taught that was majority students of color, he spoke of his constant awareness that he was “too white to be black.” Throughout his reflection he deconstructed the influence of the idea of black-white, inferiority-superiority in society’s maintenance of a monolithic racial frame. Devin metaphorically framed the inclination to categorize as a box that others sought to place him in, allowing him to move from passive to active self-identification as multiracial:

As hard as I may try, I’ll never be considered white. A lot of people are like ‘if society is gonna write me off as black then I’m gonna be black.’ I don’t feel I should have to. Okay you say I’m black, well what does that mean? If you’re going to force me in the box, what’s in the box? I’m going to be thrown in and all of these stereotypes placed on top.

The ascribed stereotypes associated with a monoracial black identity influenced Devin as well as Tyra in claiming a multiracial identity. Tyra, who grew up in a military town which she described as a melting pot, never emphasized race as part of her identity until she came to Province University. She then found herself in what she considered an extreme and constantly racialized space. In acknowledging that she was neither fully accepted by the black nor white student community, she noted the racialized stereotypes that marginally removed her from the tendency to typecast. Tyra explained this middle existence by stating, “My coworkers don’t consider me full black. They are like ‘oh you’re only half. You’re a halfie, you’re fine.’” Tyra’s statement places emphasis on whites’ desire to utilize a racial hierarchy to affirm superiority. She distinguished that the oversimplification of individual agency does not speak to multiracial challenges of being viewed as privileged but also dealing with constant marginalization.

Lydia's parents adamantly told her that they did not want her to grow up not being able to fit in a box. Incidents such as her father being called a "nigger" after accepting a high-ranking position allowed her to understand racism firsthand and prompted her to identify solely as African American. A noteworthy contrast lies in this monoracial pattern of self-identification. Lydia and Daniel felt full acceptance in their desired community by identifying solely as black; however, Jay described a constant battle during his upbringing to be fully embraced by the Hispanic community. He emphasized the influences of ethnicity and language:

Mexicans don't consider me Mexican fully because my parents are not from Mexico. And I can speak Spanish but not fluently, so that's another strike. So you're like in this weird limbo. There is a girl in my class...first she thought I was pure Mexican. I told her my mom was half white. Now she'll say stuff like 'oh well you're white then.'

This reflection speaks to the expectations of behavior within various subgroups. Previous studies have highlighted differences between the oppression of African Americans and other subgroups in United States culture (Coon & Kemmelmeier, 2001). Jay's struggle for legitimization underscores how the resistance of communities of color to separate themselves from white racial frame oppression affects multiracial individuals.

Socialization into the White Frame

Participants' adjustment to the social structure at Province shed light on the pervasiveness of the white racial frame. Microaggressions, known as unconscious and subtle exchanges of prejudice by whites based on notions of superiority (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000) were a constant presence in their daily interactions. Although Devin dealt with daily microaggressions from white friends as jokes and stereotypical comments growing up, he had always felt comfortable in white spaces. However he noted the stark emphasis on race as his primary identity as a freshman, indicating, "Province will give you your black card. They will force that card upon you. I'm like 'I'm cool with white people whatever.' And I get here and I've had some experiences." Tyra, who always considered herself as other, recalled her family insisting that she would experience an 'ah-ha' moment that would center her identity on a newly found racial lens. She experienced that in coming to campus and revealed, "I realized I didn't see any mixed people here and that's my element. I was just so shocked; I never thought that would come to me." Tyra's most resounding comment, "coming here I found out I was black," speaks to how the white racial frame of discrimination is normalized and embedded into PWI experiences.

An interesting dynamic in the influence of the PWI was the traditions of the institution which highlighted the white racial frame and the socialization of students into accepting that frame. When speaking of their decision to attend the university, Devin and Lydia spoke of their high regard of university traditions that drew them to the school. Devin referred to “buying in” to the campus culture and distinctive traditions embedded into campus life, but as his freshman year progressed he was exposed to the racialized history of the school. A significant piece of the socialization process was freshman orientation, the social component of which was not required but highly supported by the dominant group to learn institutional customs. Tyra first noticed there were no black people at orientation; in fact, she “freaked out” and immediately called her mom and asked to transfer. Jay attended freshman orientation and illuminated the prominence of race due to the lack of students of color. He described a group activity consisting of only 3 students of Mexican descent out of 70 students, explaining, “Me and my buddy kind of drew to each other I guess. Some other girls from other camps would come. So I guess we clustered together.” Jay revealed how the contrast of whiteness and the need to find a social space of acceptance filtered the experience through a monolithic either-or racialized frame.

Another area of contention was the physical spaces that endorsed racialized and often racist frames of thinking. Province featured numerous statues of prominent state and institutional figures. Several of the revered statues are in fact of individuals with a racist past, having ties to Southern roots such as the Ku Klux Klan or the Confederate Army. Students of color became knowledgeable of these truths through informal discourse at Province. Lydia described a class discussion which illustrated her frustration in the institutional practices that embraced such a figure and also revealed the attitudes held by many in the dominant white group:

Another girl who is white said ‘everybody does bad things so who are we to say what you do is so bad to where we have to take your statue down.’ If we’re trying to promote tolerance and diversity, but we have this statue on campus- why don’t we take it down? It bothers people- what he did was wrong! And even if you don’t think it’s wrong what we know is that it bothers people who we are trying to accept.

Students of color experienced a general marginalization due to the prevalence of racist traditions. Even individuals who self-identify as multiracial still experienced persistent reminders that filtered their experience through a monoracial lens of oppression as students of color.

Stigmas Attached to Ascribed Identity

As students described their experiences with blatant and covert racism, they exposed the constant awareness of race forced upon them in a white institutional space. There existed unspoken social rules on campus regarding social settings in which students of color did not belong. Devin described this concept by outlining his experiences at a local bar area:

Going there is like a Province tradition. It's the kind of place you walk into, and you immediately feel uncomfortable, if you're not white. I remember going in and feeling like this doesn't feel like a place I should be, like I could get dragged out of here, and something bad's gonna happen.

Devin upon leaving a restaurant with black friends was yelled at by white individuals in a truck who used the term "nigger;" Jay while walking experienced six whites in a pickup truck who yelled the racial epithet "wetback." The incidents of racism that happened to and around participants exposed them to a constant stimulus that attached them to an oppressed identity.

As students of color, racialized stereotypes were imposed upon participants through a community based on white norms. Daniel as a residential assistant discussed the constant presence of jokes which he mainly shrugged off. However, he insisted that the pervasiveness of microaggressions in some instances required him to respond in defense, in which case he was viewed as the "angry black guy." The racial stigma of black males as a threat was in constant play, noted by Devin as he relayed an incident with white peers surrounding Juneteenth, a Southern holiday celebrating the announcement of the abolishment of slavery:

One of them was like 'yea we should have a Juneteenth celebration; we can have chicken and watermelon. And kool-aid.' I just went off. That's racist. And the entire idea and proposition of your dinner is counter to what Juneteenth really stands for. Then I calmed down and he was like 'sorry I didn't mean to offend.' And that's how you lose friends real quick...I guarantee you after second semester I was angry black man for a year.

Individuals' attempts to absolve themselves of responsibility for their racist behavior by labeling the receiver with a racialized stereotype revealed how multiracial students had to navigate through a black-white dichotomous racial lens, regardless of the way they chose to self-identify.

Racialized stigmas were perpetuated in interactions with the dominant group who displayed a deep attachment to a white racial frame that endorsed stereotypes of people of color. Jay maintained his right to dress a certain way regardless of Hispanic stereotypes placed upon him; he spoke of a particular incident during which he wore a coat and hoodie in cold weather and interacted with a white student. During the weekend when Jay saw the same student at a

party, he was greeted with “Are you that little gangster kid?” Although Tyra recognized the privilege of being partially removed from stigmas due to her multiracial status, she was still marginalized and influenced by them. She detailed the prejudices of her white coworkers:

They had a black greeter before. I think it’s their experience with black people honestly, because she was very ghetto and loud. And now you have me who’s not very loud... There’s this one girl who says they don’t dislike me, they’re just afraid of me. They feel like at any moment my black side can come out.

Evidenced here is the influence of the white racial frame of emotions entrenched in whites. Even in Tyra’s description of her black co-worker, she utilized reinforced stigmas of blacks as “ghetto” and “loud” embedded in the frame to maintain the image of black inferiority.

Participants’ experiences with dating provide another example of the lack of spaces at Province which facilitated a multiracial lens. Tyra and Devin both expressed that interracial dating was a very stigmatized and rare occurrence on campus. Devin conveyed that because black women considered him “too white” he had only dated white girls, but yet in this PWI space every dating attempt failed because of the presence of “country” and “white power” types of individuals. During one incident the dog of a girl Devin dated barked at him, and the girl exclaimed, “Sorry I don’t know if she’s ever seen a Negro.” Tyra shared her rationale related to the concept of skin color and stigma in communicating her dating preferences:

My mom only dates black men, or light skinned men. My dad is not dark, but I don’t get along with him...I’ve dated everything but Asian. I guess the one who treated me the worst was the dark man. He cheated on me, and [I never dated a dark man] never again.

Her statement reveals how the white racial frame endorses racial stigmas, such as dark men as immoral and light skinned men as “pretty boys” or bourgeoisie. Daniel confirmed that he had to deal with those very stigmas as a black male with lighter skin. The white racial frame affirms inferiority of some individuals over others, creating dissonance within affected subgroups.

Community Spaces through a Monoracial Lens

Discourse on the black student community revealed that participants’ acceptance was contingent on them having either a monoracial or multiracial identity. The PWI environment made the black student community a unique subculture in which the students of multiracial heritage had to navigate entry.

Devin and Tyra in identifying as multiracial felt limited acceptance due to their ability to exist as a bridge between cultures. Tyra described an occasion during which she and a multiracial friend felt shunned at an African American event on campus:

Everyone turned and looked at us, and gave us the meanest look. It was unwelcoming so we just turned around and left. You can't really call our black community a community; because we have cliques...you have two different types of mixed people. Ones who are like me when I was growing up and just didn't see it. And then there are the other ones.

The terms African American and black in and of themselves centered the black student community on exclusivity due to campus reminders of the larger structure of racism against blacks in America. As Devin stated, "I get along with white people. Our black community is very closed here. They're all people who kind of turn their back on the rest of the school and only hang out with black people." In this sense, the black community was created as a safe space to shelter individuals from daily racism, and multiracial students who were perceived as not choosing a side were in a sense seen as violating the sanctity of that space.

Lydia and Daniel in identifying monoracially as black felt acceptance in the black student community. Lydia was cognizant of the magnitude of her choice, discerning that because she identified as black and did not see herself as in between, she received greater acceptance. Daniel relayed, "If you're a black student you know you're going to be welcomed and not shunned off... because we're all black and here for the same purpose." However, Daniel recognized further separation among black students due to a multiracial background:

Needless to say when you're inside, there still is that box and that separation of dark and light. Two of my best friends who I'd call my brothers now, they are light skinned as well. I guess that kind of helped out as well 'cause I had my own box.

Daniel countered possible marginalization by creating an additional space of acceptance; yet his acceptance first came through his monoracial lens. This is an important distinction to deconstruct the concept of agency in self-identification for multiracial students.

The culture of student organizations exposed a separate campus environment. Lydia and Tyra were actively involved in dominantly white organizations but experienced significant discomfort. Lydia felt an awkward and constant need to defend herself, and Tyra articulated that at meetings often no one ever sat next to her. Because a contrast existed between racially-based and dominantly white organizations, organizations were gateways into students' desired communities.

Tyra specified, “Because of my experiences and my big culture shock I joined a lot of black organizations...and I’m actually learning a lot more about what it means to be black.” For multiracial individuals, belonging was created through racially-based venues but only through a monoracial frame constructed to safeguard against an oppressive white racial frame. Jay noted his struggle to find entry into the Hispanic community. He reflected on a resistance to community heterogeneity: “I think it’s a ‘this is our group- you can’t be in it’ kind of thing. We’re not going to let you mess it up; we want to keep it like pure.” Jay created avenues of acceptance through a predominantly Latino fraternity that he expanded with friends:

These dudes are literally my brothers. And it’s such a good combo ‘cause one’s not even Hispanic- can’t speak a lick of Spanish. I’m mixed and then one’s like pure full blood. So it’s really nice diversity. We have brothers that are from Vietnam and stuff. It has nothing to do with what you are; it’s like what are your values.

This newly created space that deviated from a monolithic organizational structure gives evidence of the need for greater avenues to counter the monoracial frame of the PWI environment.

Discussion and Implications

The multiracial experience within this predominantly white institutional space confirms previous research on situational identity. Chaudhari and Pizzolato (2008) found that students with a mix of white heritage and one of color are more likely to classify as monoracial and less likely to experience situational behavior. Even participants who identified as multiracial expressed that their identity was imposed upon by a racialized environment. Devin referred to himself as a bridge between cultures as he had always been embraced by his white heritage, but black and white cultures in this particular campus space were separate and resistant towards each other. The effect of ecosystems discussed by Renn (2004) was evident in the study. At Province students’ microsystems were structured by white, conservative stimuli and the overall macrosystem of sociocultural, regional norms had an overarching effect on the ways students made meaning of their experiences with racism. The current research supports and adds to previous literature that highlights the effect of context on multiracial identity by directly emphasizing the influence of regional stimuli. Within the sociohistorical structure of the South, a culture of slavery, lynching, and the founding of PWIs based on white exclusivity affected students’ self-authorship. Participants who never held a racial lens growing up now existed in a vacuum of an either-or, black-white dichotomy within a PWI. They were cognizant of automatic placement in an oppressed heritage, regardless of their choice in self-identification.

The ideal of social justice centers on the empowerment of individuals to find their own voice and have agency in developing their identity, yet participants had very little space to create counternarratives against the PWI white racial frame. Their experiences confirm previous research on the assumptions made by whites as well as monoracial people of color that multiracial individuals seek association with the privilege of their white heritage (Jackson, 2013; Root, 2005). However, whites only referred to this privilege to affirm the inferiority of blacks, such as in the case of Tyra's coworkers who deemed her tolerable as a "halfie" but held onto reservations that at any time her "black side" would show itself. Students who identified as multiracial were therefore doubly marginalized in that whites were comfortable in sharing racist narratives but as multiracial individuals they could not share these experiences with monoracial students of color. Participants expressed gratitude in being provided an outlet to discuss their experiences with lived racism, underlining the lack of multiracial perspectives within PWI spaces and how their resistance to marginalization was filtered through a monoracial lens. The white racial frame acknowledges that people of color resist racist white norms on a continuum of aggressive resistance to survival (Feagin, 2013), but there is little understanding of how multiracial individuals utilize counter-frames while embracing blended heritages.

Several implications emerged from the findings of this study. While ethnic and racially-based organizations can provide systems of support for students of color, their focus is often based on a monoracial perspective which fails to address the interracial struggles of biracial students, forcing biracial students to choose one heritage to participate (Literte, 2010; Ozaki & Johnston, 2008). Monoracial organizations at Province added another layer of marginalization through which participants had to navigate, and student affairs practitioners should assist in cultivating a climate of collaboration. Tyra and Jay mentioned that little co-programming was done between racially-based monolithic organizations, acknowledging that the advisor of a particular black organization also advised the Hispanic and Asian student associations—yet the advisor did not encourage collaboration between groups. Institutional practices which endorse an either-or perspective reaffirm a black-white dichotomy under the white racial frame, and university professionals must be willing to facilitate a multiracial perspective that challenges the ideal that socially constructed racial groups must be separated.

Renn (2000) found peer culture to include resistance from white students as well as monoracial students of color. The current study confirms this resistance, as there existed the need for dialogue not only between dominant and racially-based groups, but also within racially-based groups to create counter-frames to white norms that endorse separation. As outlined in previous literature (Ozaki & Johnston, 2008), student affairs professionals in their advising efforts can not only advocate for the establishment of multiracial organizations, they can also

encourage difficult dialogues among monolithic groups to break down assumptions about multiracial privilege. Institutions that have been founded on dominant white norms need to reconsider the rhetoric around the development of a diverse student body. Campus diversity should not be solely defined by increases along static racial categories, and administrators can be front line advocates by assessing the ways in which campus spaces send the message of exclusion for multiracial students. Socially constructed ideals of racial separation are realized in the daily experiences of multiracial collegiates, particularly in the context of a PWI. These experiences cannot be silenced or treated as taboo, and the current study necessitates new ways to look at counter-framing beyond monolithic borders in order to think outside of a dominantly normed box.

Conclusion

The current study explored the multiracial experience within the PWI environment in order to deconstruct the effect of a black-white dichotomy that constricts individuals' self-identification. By utilizing Renn's patterns of identity along with a critical look at the influence of the white racial frame, this study directly revealed the constraints of particular sociological environments on individuals' ability to move across racial boundaries. Many universities in the South are recognizing 50 years since the era of integration during the Civil Rights Movement, and this study shed light on understanding how PWIs continue to function as racialized spaces. The Southern PWI in the study based on separate and monolithic practices required multiracial students to maneuver through racism by the dominant group as well as the subgroups with which they sought to identify. Participants exerted significant effort in creating avenues of acceptance and spoke to the challenges of being ascribed to a marginalized identity regardless of their desire to define identity for themselves. While research continues to support individual agency in the ability to self-identify, further work must be done to acknowledge and eradicate institutional barriers that continue to affirm separate and stagnant racial lines.

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