Understanding Perceptions of Race: Exploring White Racial Consciousness among White Students at a Predominately White Institution in the Southeast

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“Although systemic change takes many decades, there are pressing questions for me and I imagine for some others like me if we raise our daily consciousness on the perquisites of being light-skinned. What will we do with such knowledge? As we know from watching men, it is an open question whether we will choose to use unearned advantage to weaken hidden systems of advantage, and whether we will use any of our arbitrarily awarded power to try to reconstruct power systems on a broader base.”- Peggy McIntosh (McIntosh, n.d.)
I could not have completed this study without the help of some very important people. No amount of words could truly articulate how thankful I am to you all.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ......................................................................................................................... iv

LIST OF TABLES ................................................................................................................................. vii

FIGURE ................................................................................................................................................. viii

ABSTRACT .............................................................................................................................................. ix

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................ 1
  Statement of the Problem .................................................................................................................. 2
  Purpose of the Study ....................................................................................................................... 2
  Research Questions and Design ....................................................................................................... 3
  Significance ...................................................................................................................................... 4
  Definition of Key Terms ................................................................................................................ 5
  Theoretical Framework ................................................................................................................... 6
  Delimitations and Limitations ......................................................................................................... 8
  Subjectivity Statement ................................................................................................................... 9
  Concluding Thoughts .................................................................................................................... 11

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW ............................................................................................. 12
  History of Whiteness ..................................................................................................................... 12
  Theory of Meritocracy .................................................................................................................. 17
  White Fragility among Students ................................................................................................... 17
  White Privilege ............................................................................................................................. 19
  White Racial Identity Models ....................................................................................................... 20
  Cultural Competency ................................................................................................................... 23
  Conclusion ...................................................................................................................................... 24

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY ................................................................................................... 25
  Research Design ............................................................................................................................ 26
  Data Collection ............................................................................................................................ 26
  Initial Email Correspondence ........................................................................................................ 28
  Individual Interviews ..................................................................................................................... 28
  Follow Up Email Correspondence ................................................................................................ 29
  Data Analysis ................................................................................................................................ 30
  Researcher Bias ............................................................................................................................. 30
  Limitations .................................................................................................................................... 30
  Conclusion ...................................................................................................................................... 31

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS .................................................................................................................. 32
  Participants ...................................................................................................................................... 32
  Individual Interviews ..................................................................................................................... 34
  Overview of Themes ...................................................................................................................... 46
  Noteworthy Interview Questions .................................................................................................. 52
  Conclusion ...................................................................................................................................... 54
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS .......... 56
  Discussion ........................................................................................................ 56
  Implications for Practice .................................................................................. 58
  Recommendations for Future Research ............................................................ 60
  Conclusion .......................................................................................................... 61

REFERENCES ....................................................................................................... 63

KEY TERM REFERENCES ...................................................................................... 66

APPENDIX A: INSTIUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPLICATION .............................. 68
APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT EMAIL .................................................................. 69
APPENDIX C: FOLLOW UP EMAIL ..................................................................... 70
APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM ......................................................................... 71
APPENDIX E: DEMOGRAPHIC SHEET ................................................................. 72
APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL ................................................................. 73
APPENDIX G: RESEARCHER NOTE .................................................................... 74
VITA .................................................................................................................... 75
LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1: Participant Demographics .................................................................................. 33
Table 4.2: Participant Curriculum and Student Involvement .............................................. 34
Table 4.3: Visual Representation of Themes ...................................................................... 47
FIGURE

Figure 1.1: Rowe, Bennett, Atkinson’s White Racial Consciousness Model.................................. 7
ABSTRACT

Higher education is continuing to diversify and there is a need for student affairs to be intersectional in their approach (Renn & Reason, 2013). Having an understanding of how the dominate group, White/Caucasians, identify their racial identity or understand their identity in relation to other races is essential to creating dialogue and programming that targets the inequalities that exist in higher education. In this study, White student’s White racial consciousness is explored using a phenomenological approach. At the time of the study, the students participating were all enrolled undergraduates at Louisiana State University. The White Racial Consciousness Model is designed to explore the concept of Whiteness and its implications on other racial groups (Exploring college student development theory A, 2010). For the purpose of this study, I used the White Racial Consciousness Model to examine how White students at a Predominately White Institution in the Southeast came to understand their own racial identity and how they view the racial identities of people of color.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

White racial consciousness is an important area in higher education and student affairs, and continues to be important as higher education continues to diversify in terms of racial makeup of student populations (Renn & Reason, 2013). White racial consciousness is defined as, “One’s own awareness of being White and what that implies in relation to those who do not share White group membership” (Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994, p. 133). White students’ understanding of their race impacts not only them, but also students of color, the institutions they attend and society as a whole. The historical influence of Whiteness on the education system dates back to the creation of the education system in the United States (Thelin, 2011). Education was originally created for upper-class, White, men and as time progressed slowly other groups were allowed access to the education system, but not in an equitable manner (Thelin, 2011). Much of this is influenced by the social construction of Whiteness, but not all White people/students understand or are even aware of the advantages they have in society due to their race and are not conscious that their race carries meaning.

As the landscape of higher education today continues to expand and diversify, there is a need for active engagement from all involved to work towards a more accepting environment for multiple identities and the intersection of them and to be an overall inclusive environment. Part of this begins with being self-reflective as individuals and understanding how our identities are perceived by us and by others and their various influences on society and our environment. Understanding how White racial consciousness impacts the higher education environment is necessary in order to make it more accommodating and equitable for students, staff, administrators, and community members.
Statement of the Problem

As the racial make-up of the student populations in higher education continue to expand (Renn & Reason, 2013), there needs to be an understanding among higher education professionals about the impact of Whiteness on themselves, their students, and the educational system as a whole. In order to provide a welcoming environment for students of color, professionals must understand the culture of the institution but also how the social construction of Whiteness is presenting different environments to these students and how these various environments are sending non-welcoming messages before they even arrive to the institution. Currently there is not enough research existing on the White racial consciousness of White students and its implications on the institutions they attend, and the students themselves. Although the field of counseling does have research on Whiteness, White privilege, and racial identity, this is an area of growth for higher education and student affairs. Student affairs practioners need to be cognizant of this topic in order to best serve their diverse student population and create an opportunity to develop culturally competent students (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to describe White racial consciousness attitudes amongst White students at Louisiana State University, a PWI, located in the Southeast region. Understanding White consciousness among students at a PWI can be informative into what experiences or moments help them to identify White privilege and/or Whiteness, how they view their environment depending on their White consciousness, and how student affairs practioners can use this information to develop cultural competency in their students.
Research Questions and Design

Although there could have been various ways to conduct this study, I have chosen to utilize Rowe, Bennett, and Atkinson’s White Racial Consciousness Model to analyze the experiences of White students at a PWI in the Southeast region and its impact on their racial identity.

Four research questions guided this study:

1.) How do experiences of White college students in the southeast at a PWI influence their awareness of White racial identity?

2.) How do White college students understand Whiteness?

3.) Where do White college students at a PWI in the Southeast fall on the White Racial Consciousness Model?

4.) For White students who are in the Achieved White Racial Consciousness category, what factors contribute to their awareness of White privilege?

In order to answer these four questions, I posited that a qualitative design was necessary in order to reflect the experiences of the participants in the study. I utilized semi-structured interviews to explore White racial consciousness among each participant and provide a platform to compare and contrast their experiences to each other’s in order to identify the variables that are present. I chose the White Racial Consciousness Model because it represented a nonlinear representation of White racial identities and did not do so with a comparison of just Black and White race framework. This theory focuses on how this racial identity and being aware or not aware of it can impact other racial groups. This framework presented itself to be the most useful for this study due to its ability to categorize different attitudes of White racial consciousness and provide an ability to assess the findings.
Significance

The study of White racial consciousness among white students is significant because it provides insight to White students’ perception of their race and other racial identities; considering the historical influence Whiteness has had on education from dictating who is allowed to access education and how students of color navigate historically White environments, this study is important in order to make the higher education setting more inclusive as it continues to diversify.

This research is directly significant to higher education, but also to society as a whole. Understanding the ways in which Whiteness is continuing to dictate the education system in terms of access, opportunity, and resources is important in order to understand what opportunities exist to change that, particularly at PWIs. I also believe that this study is significant because it is conducted in a particular region that historically is known for denying access to people of color in education and employment and not acknowledging White privilege and how it advantages those who identify as White or as White passing (those who have physical features associated with the White/Caucasian race). White racial identity is not considered complex or holds any meaning to a large population of White people; this is problematic because it camouflages how Whiteness impacts society on systematic levels.

Student affairs professionals need to have an understanding of their racial identity and its influence on society in order to create opportunities for students of all different races and ethnicities to do the same. These professionals have direct access to students while they are navigating their own beliefs, opinions, and identities. By not only building literature on Whiteness in higher education and student affairs and by aiming to fill a gap in the research that currently exists, this study is important in moving to creating a dialogue that is intersectional and
leads to active engagement with higher education and student affairs professionals in order to initiate positive change on university and college campuses.

**Definition of Key Terms**

In this study there are terms from the fields of psychology, sociology, and other academic disciplines that are used repeatedly that should be addressed for the readers to understand the context of each. It is not only helpful, but necessary to define each in order for consistency among meaning throughout this study.

**Affirmative Action** - (US) a policy or programme designed to counter discrimination against minority groups and women in areas such as employment and education (Affirmative Action, n.d.).

**Avoidance** - The action of keeping away from or not doing something (Avoidance, n.d.).

**Caucasian** - White-skinned; of European origin (Caucasian, n.d.).

**Colorblind Racism** - also known as aversive racism, is racism that acts as if skin colour does not matter – even when it does (Abagond, 2008).

**Discrimination** - The unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of race, age, or sex (Discrimination, n.d.).

**Intersectionality** - The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage (Intersectionality, n.d.).

**Micro-aggression** - a comment or action that subtly and often unconsciously or unintentionally expresses a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalized group (such as a racial minority) (Micro-aggression, n.d.).

**Oppression** - Prolonged cruel or unjust treatment or exercise of authority (Oppression, n.d.).
Person of Color—a person who is not white or of European parentage (Person of color, n.d.).

Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs)—institutions of higher learning in which Whites account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment (Brown, Dancy, 2010).

Race—refers to a category of people who share certain inherited physical characteristics, such as skin color, facial features, and stature (Race, n.d.).

Social Justice—Justice in terms of the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society (Social justice, n.d.).

White Fragility—Discomfort and defensiveness on the part of a white person when confronted by information about racial inequality and injustice (White fragility, n.d.).

White Privilege—Inherent advantages possessed by a white person on the basis of their race in a society characterized by racial inequality and injustice (White privilege, n.d.).

White Racial Consciousness—One’s own awareness of being White and what that implies in relation to those who do not share White group membership (Rowe, Bennett, Atkinson, 1994, p. 133).

**Theoretical Framework**

When selecting a theoretical framework I was drawn to Rowe, Bennett and Atkinson’s White Racial Conscious Model (WRCM) because unlike other White racial identity development models that framed White identity development as a linear process and parallel to people of color’s identity development, the WRCM had a different approach. (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Rowe, Bennett and Atkinson created the White Racial Consciousness Model to explain “the role of White attitudes toward their own and other racial groups…and can consequently describe the phenomena more accurately, predict relationships better, and provide a more stable base for assessment” (Evans et. al, 2010, p. 261). Overall the model provides an
understanding of one’s own awareness of what being White is and how it effects those who do not identify as White and/or are not recognized as White (Evans et. al, 2010). The model (Figure 1.1) consists of two categories, Achieved White Racial Consciousness and Unachieved White Racial Consciousness, which are made up of types of various attitudes that a White person may possess. This model is not linear and White individuals move to different types throughout their lifetime based on the different experiences they may have. In order to move from the Unachieved White racial Consciousness category to the achieved White Racial Consciousness category, a type of dissonance is needed to transition (Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994). I felt that this model best identified White students in their racial identity development in a way that could be applied to higher education and student affairs.

Figure 1.1: Rowe, Bennett, Atkinson White Racial Consciousness Model (Exploring college student development theory A, 2010)
Delimitations and Limitations

In the initial stages of creating the study, I made a few deliberate decisions in order to create some boundaries for the direction of the study. The first decision or choice was to conduct the study at a PWI and to only interview White students. I had a greater understanding of this institution type and also felt that the history associated with this institution type would be essential to gaining perspective from the participants who have grown up in predominately White environments. I also wanted to gauge if the participants could identify when they were or were not in White environments and specifically selecting participants from a White environment allowed me to inquire on how the students thought of the environment they were currently in to create a baseline of what was and was not a White environment for them. It also was imperative to have an understanding of what the broad understanding was of White racial consciousness from self-identified White students. The decision was made to not interview students of color for this particular study because it was not focused at comparing and contrasting the perception of White racial consciousness between different races.

Another intentional choice was to ask for the participants religious and political affiliation before the interview occurred. Although I did not review their answers until after the interview, I believed that it would add more context to how their religious beliefs and/or political beliefs influenced their understanding of their own race and others. Louisiana State University is located in what is known as the “Bible Belt” which has a rooted history in Christianity and Conservative values (Thelin, 2011). Inquiring about these affiliations was to see how they influenced or did not influence the participants’ perception of their race.

In person interviews were conducted on in order to allow myself to pick up on any nonverbal cues that were being given off during the interview. From past experience I found that discussing
topics around race or social justice orientated conversations could make others feel uncomfortable and therefore wanted to capture the emotions of the participants around this topic that could not be interpreted just through their words. The in person one on one interviews also allowed me to gain an understanding of the experiences each participant had.

Due to the nature of this study and its limited sample, the findings are not generalizable to all White students and institutions. This study provides insight to the topic of White racial consciousness that can be continued to be researched in other contexts. The need for more research of this subject is evident and different samples can prove to help to create a more holistic picture.

**Subjectivity Statement**

It is essential to have a basic understanding of my story as the researcher and what led me to this type of research in order to understand the driving factor underlying this study. I grew up in a conservative, Christian, suburban town where the political leadership was passed down through the family tree. The rule of thumb was to never stick out in order to succeed and to always respect those in authority without question. The authority figures were always White. From a young age I questioned anything and everything and was known by family and friends as the child who knew what questions to ask to make people feel uncomfortable.

In middle school I went to a local fair with my best friend, who identified as an African American. She, my mom, and I spent the day riding rides, looking at art displays and having a fun break from school. Towards the end of our day we decided to get some traditional fair food (funnel cakes) and eat before heading back home. My friend and I sat on one side of a picnic table and my mom sat across from us. My friend sat in-between myself and a White family that was already at the table. Shortly after we had sat down the mother of the White family next to my friend screamed at her child, who was right next to my friend, to move because they should
not sit by that (referring to my friend) because they are dirty. I can remember the child being pulled away by the mother and how I felt a stir of emotions from anger to confusion to feeling sick because I had realized they were upset because they were physically next to a Black person. The family quickly got up and left and I remember asking my friend if she was okay. She was much calmer than I was and said she was fine. From a young age her parents had explained to her that there would be people in the world who did not like her just because of her skin color. I remember listening to her words and feeling so hurt and lost because that was never a conversation I had to have. It was in that moment that I realized that my skin color had advantages that other races did not have. I did not understand exactly what that meant, but it was a catalyst for me wanting to learn more about race, social constructions, privilege and much more.

Coming into college I pursued a degree in Women and Gender Studies while minoring in sociology and social work. In this environment I learned more about my own intersectionality and the many privileges I held for being a White, cis-gender, heterosexual, woman. I also reflected on my actions growing up and realized that I had been a perpetrator of micro aggressions, colorblind racism, and other oppressive actions subconsciously. I found my classes to be empowering and enlightening and began to realize that I had an obligation to use my privileges as a tool to give a platform for marginalized groups to have their voices heard. I struggled with how to go about this during my undergraduate career and found different avenues that I thought were great opportunities for me to create social change. One of those areas is through research and was a driving factor for why I chose to do this study.
Concluding Thoughts

As detailed in the sections above, this study involves interviewing white students at a PWI in the Southeast region. Utilizing Rowe, Bennett and Atkinson’s White Racial Consciousness Model, this research is analyzing the experiences of White students and how their development of their racial identity impacts them and other non-White groups. Implications for higher education and student affairs practitioners will be presented and discussed.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This study explores White racial consciousness development of White students at a Louisiana State University. The study aims to understand student’s perception of the concept of Whiteness, White privilege, and how their previous experiences and postsecondary experiences have influenced their perception of race and how they identify in today’s society. Although a large portion of Whiteness research in relation to education is centered around the field of counseling, this study seeks to connect the experiences of these participants to understanding how to craft educational experiences to aid students in becoming culturally competent individuals.

This literature review specifically explores current and past literature on the history of how the concept of Whiteness came to be, as well as the influence Whiteness has on various institutions in society as well perceptions on race. Through these historical literature concepts such as the Theory of Manifest Destiny, Theory of Moral Superiority, and the normalization of Whiteness, they appear to create a timeline of how Whiteness and white consciousness has evolved. Next, the Theory of Meritocracy is explored along with concepts such as White fragility among students and White privilege. The review concludes with an explanation of the White Racial Consciousness Model and the importance of cultivating an educational environment to produce culturally competent students for the workforce.

History of Whiteness

In order to understand White consciousness and its implications on higher education, society, and individuals, one must have a general understanding of how the idea of “Whiteness” came to be and is reinforced in today’s society. Whiteness is more than the color of one’s skin tone; it is a social construction that has evolved throughout centuries and it functions to keep a hierarchy in
today’s society, a hierarchy that advantages the Caucasian race and disadvantages other races (Hays & Chang, 2003). Although Whiteness can be traced back to before the creation of the United States, for an understanding of how it influences the educational system and how it has influenced different regions of the country, this section will focus on early examples of the creation of Whiteness in the United States.

From the beginning of the United States, those who have been identified as White have held power and created systems that reinforce their superiority through law, education, health care, property, and social capital. It is important to note that those who are considered “White” have changed during the history of the United States, so being aware of when certain ethnicities were and were not recognized as “White” is important. From manifest destiny, to the writing of the U.S. Constitution, which categorized Black people as a form of property and less than human, to laws separating races to keep Whites and “non-Whites” in their “proper” places, Whiteness has always been a part of the United States history (Kendell, 2002).

The theory of manifest destiny is that, “White people were intended by God to take the lands of indigenous people and others in order to possess the whole of what is now the continental United States” (Grant, Zwier, & Banks, 2016, p. 5). This theory implies that their right to land was guided by a higher power and that also meant a right to power without fear of consequence. This idea has carried over throughout centuries in the way that Whites created a nation that gave them power, allowed them to dictate who had access to that power, and created different institutions that allowed a hierarchy that befits them to thrive. This theory connects to the theory of moral superiority, which articulates that Whites are the more superior race and therefore deserve what they have. This ignores any notion that they are privileged and have any type of advantages that other races do not have, rather they are deserving of their the success they attain.
because they are morally and intellectually more competent (Grant et al., 2016). These theories allowed Whiteness to be created and begin to insert itself in every fabric of American society. From beauty ideals, to representation in political offices, as well as religion, health care, administrative roles, to representation in literature and law, Whiteness functioned to advantage a section of the population, while doing so in a less visible way. Its ability to remain “neutral” on the surface, allows it to continue with such strength even today (Kendell, 2002).

**Influence on Educational System**

The educational system in the United States was created for a particular group of people: White, upper-class, males. Although people view education as an opportunity to advance for all people and also a fundamental right for children, initially it was designed to advance only the upper-class and was not accessible to minorities (Thelin, 2011). In the mid-1700s, Thomas Jefferson proposed the idea for an education system that would have different educational paths available, but that would only allow a slim margin of the laboring class to advance. It focused mostly on the advancement of those in upper-class statuses, which denied access to any people of color who during that time in America did not hold such status. In the late 1800s laws were passed to make it illegal for Native Americans to be taught in their native language, which was an example of the Whitewashing of certain cultures. It was clear from the creation of the educational system that non-White curriculum did not have a place (Historical Timeline of Public Education in the U.S, 2015). When reflecting on the education system in the “separate but equal” time period, it is ironic because the conditions of a White institution versus an institution with students of color was not equal in terms of resources. People of color created educational institutions such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) because PWI or Historically White Institutions denied access to students of color strictly based on their racial
identity during segregation. The resiliency of people of color creating their own educational places of learning when denied from the “standard” educational institutions is remarkable, but these institutions did not have the social capital, monetary wealth, and resource allocation that the Predominately White Institutions had from donors, alumni, and the government (Freemark, 2015). A PWI is defined as, “institutions of higher learning in which Whites account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment” (Brown & Dancy, 2010, p. 2. Many institutions that are classified as PWIs also may be classified as “historically White Institution which recognize the exclusion of people of color in the United States before the 1960s (Brown & Dancy, 2010).

**Location.** Whiteness’ influence on the educational system can be seen today in how resources and money are allocated to schools and how curriculum and programs are designed for “traditional” students (Renn & Reason, 2013). Before students start their educational journey, school districts are divided by geographic areas. Each district receives different allocations of money and resources based on that areas’ property taxes and revenue, which determines the quality of education a student will receive (Owens, 2018). For the most part, the school districts with the largest amount of money and resources are areas that are predominately White. This disadvantages lower socio-economic communities that typically have more people of color because their students are receiving fewer resources to maintain educational facilities, to purchase classroom resources (computers, textbooks, etc), recruit well qualified teachers and administration, as well as provide opportunities for learning outside of the classroom for their students (Owens, 2018). This puts the students in the schools that receive less funding at a disadvantage when it comes to the job market and their opportunities to continue their education at a postsecondary institution. The educational system therefore promotes a hierarchy that
privileges White students to remain more educated and thus more successful in society because their foundation allows them to excel in areas that society deems as worthy.

**Curriculum.** Curriculum also influences Whiteness because history is taught from a “victor” perspective that shows how the United States became the nation it is today by abusing people of color without any repercussion. The victor perspective is also synonymous with the White perspective, since the people with authority and power in the United States have typically been White (Boatright-Horowitz, Marraccini, & Harps-Logan, 2012). White students, “construe themselves as free from the start of United States history (Grant et al., 2016), while students who do not identify as White often find their ancestors represented as victims and treated as non-humans. This is problematic because it often ignores historical figures and events that were influential, but were led by people of color or for causes that challenged societal norms at the time. This lack of representation and favoring of White history as victors and saviors creates an image for students that “Whiteness” is connected to more favorable qualities and that their history is deemed important to be the “only” narrative that is taught in the public education sector (Grant et al., 2016).

In many instances literature around deconstructing Whiteness articulates the need to fix the broken education system, but if you understand the creation of the education system in the United States then it is clear that the system is not in fact broken, but is functioning the way it was created to (Grant et al., 2016). In order to deconstruct the authority and influence Whiteness has on the United States education system, it is necessary to deconstruct the education system as a whole to make a more equitable and inclusive environment that does offer opportunity to everyone.
Theory of Meritocracy

A component that allows Whiteness to thrive in society is the Theory of Meritocracy. This theory articulates that individuals are in control of their future, rather than society; therefore where an individual ends up in life (rich, poor, educated, uneducated, etc.) is because that is what they “earned” (Grant et al., 2016). Those with privilege often distance themselves from the idea that their different forms of wealth (ex. capital, social) are due to systems in society that favor certain groups of people over others. They believe that their success is due to hard work that they put in individually (Liu, 2017). This theory is often a source of student’s resistance to expanding their understanding on White privilege and how race can significantly influence a person’s path in life (Hassain, 2015). The concept of “pull yourself up by the boot straps” is a common American ideology that is taught to students from an early age. It expresses the idea that America is a land of opportunity and that if you want to be successful it is fully possible no matter who you are, as long as you put in the effort. Although this concept is ideal, it is not realistic and it ignores how intersectionality impacts how different people experience different barriers that prevent them from advancing. The idea of “pull yourself up by your boot straps” normalizes the concept of meritocracy for students, so that when they are introduced to the idea that race can impact someone’s mobility in society, resistance and avoidance are common reactions amongst them (Boatright-Horowitz & Soeung, 2009; Case, 2007).

White Fragility among Students

White “guilt” or “shame” or even “fear” are common emotions that students express when introduced with the concept of White privilege and Whiteness. These emotions often come about because students are having to question their previous understanding of race and what being White meant to them with a new understanding of race and how they perpetuate a system
of inequality and discrimination while not even being fully conscious of doing so (Pinterits, Poteat, & Spanierman, 2009). Often White students have never had to confront their own race and, rather, have connected being White to being “American” (Liu, 2017). When asked to identify what is means to be White, many White individuals can only define what it means to be American. This ignores how their race effects them on an individual and societal level, as well as connects American ideals to that of being White (Jackson II, 1999). This connects with the concept of being “race-less”, that White people do not recognize their own race and are just “normal” (Grant et al., 2016; Buck, 2001). Equating the White race to “normal” automatically distinguishes nonwhite populations as “not normal” and as outsiders in society. Ideas such as being “colorblind” to races were held by students who believed that by not seeing color they were believing in a just and equal world, when in reality ignoring one’s race ignores that racism and discrimination occur to support a hierarchy in society that ultimately benefits them (Schulz & Fane, 2015). When White students are forced to consider the negative implications from these ideologies, guilt/shame/fear and other emotions occur and create a type of dissonance that makes them rather uncomfortable.

Students find this dissonance hard to navigate, but in this dissonance comes an opportunity for students to expand their understanding of race, inequality in America, and how they have an active and passive role in society due to race (Sanders, 1999). Privilege itself is a fairly easy concept for students to understand, but when the idea of White privilege is introduced, confusion and resistance occurs. In some part, the connotation that exists around the concept of privilege is negative or is linked to having more monetary wealth. Understanding that privilege can mean other types of wealth is something that students may struggle with, especially if it is in relation to their race.
White Privilege

White privilege is defined as, “Inherent advantages possessed by a White person on the basis of their race in a society characterized by racial inequality and injustice (White privilege, n.d.).” White privilege is not something that is necessarily done consciously or purposefully, it often is something that White people are unaware of. It provides advantages for those who are White or White passing and ultimately shapes society in their favor. “Those who benefit most from a privilege system are usually unaware that the privilege system exists (Grant et al., 2016, p. 2)”

Peggy McIntosh’s Invisible Knapsack is a list of advantages that she is aware of that her racial identity allows her to have, that other racial groups do not. McIntosh is typically linked to research on White privilege and has helped to popularize the topic. Some examples of this list are,

1.) I can if I wish arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
2.) If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live.
3.) I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.
4.) I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.
5.) I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented. (McIntosh, n.d)

This list has been used in a number of practitioner based research studies focusing on classroom instruction on Whiteness. Typically White students who are first introduced to this list dispute its validity because they do not consider themselves to have advantages due to their racial identity. Research shows that the dissonance created with these students from having their current belief system conflict with this information can lead to more awareness of their White

19
consciousness. Essentially research regarding White consciousness is typically always related to White privilege and vice versa.

**White Racial Identity Models**

Much of the literature revolving around White identity has used Helm’s White Identity Model, or has critiqued the applicability of this model to modern times. Other models have been created in response to the critiques of Helm’s Model, such as the White Racial Consciousness Model. It is important to understand how both of these models function and why the White Racial Consciousness Model was selected to be the framework for this study.

**Helm’s White Identity Model**

Helm’s White Identity Development Model (WIDM) is recognized as the most used model when it comes to White identity development (Evans, et al, 2010). In this model White identity development occurs in two sequential phases, *abandonment of racism* and *evolution of a nonracist society*. In the first phase, *abandonment of racism*, Helms describes it as moving away from a lack of consciousness of being White and privileged. It consists three stages: *contact*, *disintegration*, and *reintegration*. In the second phase, *evolution of a nonracist society*, White people have become aware of their White racial identity and are reflecting on its meaning and attempting to interact with people of color. This phase consists of three stages as well: *pseudo independence*, *immersion/emersion* and *autonomy* (Helms, 1995). This model is linear in the sense that in order to be in phase two, the White person must have progressed through phase one and once you have progressed to a stage in a particular phase, then you cannot revert back to a previous stage. Although this model is heavily used in past research regarding White identity, White privilege, and power dynamics in social systems, it has been revised and still is critiqued as being outdated. Other critiques include that the model only emphasizes the White-Black
relationship and the linear fashion of the model (Exploring college student development B, 2010).

**White Racial Consciousness Model**

As mentioned in Chapter one, the theoretical framework used in this study is Rowe, Bennett, and Atkinson’s White Racial Consciousness Model (WRCM) which was created in response to Helm’s White Identity Model. This model addressed concerns with Helm’s Model such as (a) identity development is not parallel with other racial groups but that it develops differently for all groups; (b) a linear progression for identity development was an outdated notion; (c) that focusing on just a White-Black framework was limiting; (d) and that Helm’s model focused more on awareness rather than identity development. The WRCM examines Whiteness and its implication on other racial groups. It uses attitudes, rather than phases, not only to articulate a nonlinear progression, but also to create assessment efforts on understanding development among racial identities (Exploring college student development theory A, 2010).

“The role of White attitudes toward their own and other racial groups…and can consequently describe the phenomena more accurately, predict relationships better, and provide a more stable base for assessment” (Evans, et. al, 2010, p. 261).

This model was created in response to Helm’s model, but was also created from Phinney’s ethnic identity stage model. This theoretical framework is used to address awareness of being White and its effects on other racial groups, which approaches research from a more phenomenological approach which this study followed (Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994).

**Achieved White Racial Consciousness.** The Achieved White Racial Consciousness category is composed of the dominative, conflictive, integrative and reactive types of attitudes (Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994). Although the Achieved category consist of more types of
attitudes that indicate a White individual is aware of race in some capacity, each type varies significantly in how much they are aware and responsive.

**Dominative Attitude.** The dominative type attitude recognizes race and that being White is a different experience than being another race, but believe that “they are superior to people of color” (Evans et. al, 2010, p. 262). Individuals in this attitude rely on negative stereotypes of other races, and this attitude is expressed in either a passive mode or an active mode. Passive modes avoid interacting with people of color, while active modes overtly express their feelings and often use violence or slurs as a way to do that (Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994).

**Conflictive Attitude.** White people who fall into the conflictive type of attitudes believe in equality, but are not supportive of measures to diminish or end discrimination. They believe that people of color are provided more opportunities now, so that it is their responsibility to fix the problems that they encounter (Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994).

**Reactive Attitude.** White individuals who fall into the reactive type of attitudes are aware that being White gives them different advantages in society than that of people of color and that people of color face more inequality due to this. This attitude type works to address discrimination and support and connect with people of color (Evans et. al, 2010). This type of attitude can be passive or active, with passive being White people who intellectual think about the issues non-White people face.

**Integrative Attitude.** The integrative attitude type understand that they have privilege and advantages as being a White individual, but that they also understand what being White means and represents. These individuals interact with people of color more often and are typically active in social change (Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994). Although this attitude is
more reflective and self-aware than the others, it is not an end point. When a White individual enters into this type of attitude, it does not mean that they will always remain.

**Unachieved White Racial Consciousness.** The Unachieved White Racial Consciousness category is made up of three attitudes types that include avoidant, dependent, dissonant.

**Avoidant Attitude.** The avoidant attitude describes White individuals who ignore race and the experiences of non-White populations. This attitude type avoid recognizing race and its implications until they are forced to (Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994).

**Dependent Attitude.** The dependent type of attitude do not recognize that being White comes with advantages and privileges, but depend on others to decide what views they align with (Evans et. al, 2010). Individuals in this category have not engaged in self-reflection to understand why they believe in what they do.

**Dissonant Attitude.** The final attitude type in the Unachieved White Racial Consciousness category, is the dissonant attitude. Individuals who fall in this attitude are often confused about race and are in the process of expanding their knowledge on the experiences of people of color. A level of dissonance exists from the knowledge about race they previously understood and the new knowledge on race that they are being introduced to (Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994).

**Cultural Competency**

As higher education continues to diversify, so does society. It is important for higher education professionals to foster environments where White students can reflect on their own intersectionality and how they pass through spaces/environments differently than people of color do. These environments and dialogues will often evoke negative emotions and reactions from White students, but this dissonance is needed for them to challenge their previous understanding
of race and be able to define what being “White” means to them and in society (Hassain, 2015). Research shows the need for students to be culturally competent due to the diversification of the educational and employment industries. White students in particular, those who have not had high levels of exposure to people of color growing up, struggle in these diverse settings or are unaware of how they are perceived or perceived others do to racial identity (Schulz & Fane, 2015). The need for higher education professionals to address this is an area of literature that continues to grow, and existing research shows there needs to be an emphasis on White Racial Consciousness among professionals as well (Mueller & Pope, 2003).

**Conclusion**

This chapter was used as a guide for understanding the historical lens of Whiteness and White privilege, as well as how different institutions are impacted by them. It also served to explain how White students come to understand racial identity as being detached from their own race and the emotional responses they have when their previous platform of knowledge on race is criticized. Given the complexities of White racial identity and the varying levels that students may be on with claiming or not claiming their racial identity, the White Racial Consciousness Model gives insight to different attitudes White individuals may hold at various times in their life. The attitudes within the model are not linear, and can change at any time for an individual based on the experiences they have or do not have. Understanding this information is essential in understanding how educators can create an environment for White students to acknowledge their racial identity and the implications that come from that. Educators have a responsibility to open the door to these uncomfortable conversations in hope to fostering environments that support cultural competency.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Much of research on White racial consciousness utilizes Helm’s theoretical framework of White Identity Development and is centered on the field of counseling. Little research exists within the field of higher education and student affairs that utilizes the White Racial Consciousness Model. Particularly, there is not a large quantity of research regarding White racial consciousness for White students in the Southeast, which may or may not have implications on how these students perceive their racial consciousness or how they are perceived by others. Although there are multiple ways to explore this phenomenon, I utilized a qualitative research design to understand what experiences influenced the participants’ perception of their racial identity, as well as identify whether there are any common themes among these students.

Qualitative research is used to study a phenomenon or research topic in more depth or from a different angle (Hays & Singh, 2012). This type of research focuses on the experiences of participants and how they make meaning of a particular phenomenon, rather than objectively confirm a phenomenon exists like quantitative research typically does (Creswell, 2015). Language is an important component of qualitative research because some phenomena are not directly observable or previously explored. This study used a phenomenological approach to answer the following research questions:

1.) How do experiences of White college students in the southeast at a PWI influence their awareness of White racial identity?

2.) How do White college students understand Whiteness?

3.) Where do White college students at a PWI in the Southeast fall on the White Racial Consciousness Model?
4.) For White students who are in the Achieved White Racial Consciousness category, what factors contribute to their awareness of White privilege?

This chapter describes participant selection, data collection, data analysis, and the validity of the chosen methodology.

**Research Design**

This study used a phenomenological approach which explores the lived experiences of multiple individuals in order to find a common meaning of a particular phenomenon. This approach reduces individual understandings and creates a connection among all the individual experiences in order to articulate a more universal understanding of the phenomena (Creswell, 2013). In utilizing this approach, I conducted in-person interviews with participants in order to understand the phenomena of White racial consciousness.

**Data Collection**

While preparing for this study, I considered several factors in order to best attend to the four research questions. Through reviewing research study design literature, as well as through personal reflection, I determined that a sample size of 8-12 students would be appropriate and the time warranted for data analysis. The participants needed to identify as White/Caucasian and be currently enrolled as an undergraduate or graduate student at Louisiana State University during the time of the study. The objective of interviewing these students was to understand how their awareness, or lack of awareness, of White racial consciousness were influenced by their experiences or influenced their experiences. The interviews also focused on allowing participants to define various social constructions such as race in their own words. This section lays out the research design used to ensure that the study was conducted in an intentional manner.
Study Site

The study site was conducted at a large, public, research PWI in the Southeast region. Due to understanding the historical influence of Whiteness in the South, it was important to explore how it still impacts students in this region today. Louisiana State University (LSU) is located in Baton Rouge, Louisiana and reports student enrollment at 29,292 for Spring 2017, of which 24,089 were undergraduates and 4,234 were graduate students. There are approximately 15,482 females and 13,810 males. White undergraduates make up around 18,192 of the total population, and White graduate students made up around 3,058 (LSU Finance and Administration, 2017). The city of Baton Rouge had an overall population of 229,493 at the end of 2016, with 90,348 of those citizens identifying as White (Suburban Stats, 2017). From these statistics it is evident that not only is the institution predominately White, but that the Baton Rouge area has less than half of the number of citizens who self-identify as White/Caucasian. At present, that means that LSU, a PWI, is located in a minority city. The state of Louisiana is also a majority Republican state (Political Maps, 2016) and is known for its conservative values. The combination of the large White/Caucasian population and large Republican population has historically been a prominent theme among the state’s political and educational history.

Sampling and Recruitment

I utilized snowball and purposeful sampling in this study. Snowball sampling involves participants identifying other participants to become a part of the sample, and purposeful sampling involves intentionally selecting participants in order to learn about a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2015). Criteria for participant recruitment included (1.) self-identification as White/Caucasian, and (2.) current undergraduate or graduate students at LSU.
After obtaining IRB approval (see Appendix A), I sent a recruitment email (see Appendix B) to students who met the criteria. These students were indicated as meeting the criteria through staff members, as well as through current graduate assistants in the Division of Student Affairs who worked with White students in various capacities. I had some previous relationship with the staff members and graduate assistants that connected me with potential participants, which allowed me to access participants that I had no direct connection to. During interviews I asked participants if they knew anyone who met the requirements and would be interested in participating as well.

**Initial Email Correspondence**

The initial recruitment email (see Appendix A) was sent to 65 students at LSU. Eleven self-identifying White students responded to the email and completed the attached availability survey. After, I then contacted those eleven students over the course of three months in order to set up individual interviews with each participant. Two of the students stopped responding and were not interviewed for the study.

**Individual Interviews**

I conducted semi-structured interviews which allowed for consistent questions to be asked to each participant, but also allowed me to follow up on any responses I deemed necessary (Creswell, 2015). Each participant was interviewed once for approximately thirty minutes to an hour. All interviews were conducted on LSU’s campus or near the campus at a location selected by the participant. Six of the interviews took place at the institution’s student union, one took place at a residential hall, and two took place at a coffee shop that was adjacent to the campus. Before each interview began I described a brief overview of the study and requested the participants to sign the informed consent form (see Appendix D) agreeing to participate in the
recording of the interview. Participants also filled out a basic demographic sheet (see Appendix E) and were allowed to skip any section they did not feel comfortable disclosing with me. At the conclusion of the interview, participants were allowed to express anything they did not disclose already or felt was important to include after answering the questions. Once the recorder was turned off I asked participants how they felt after answering the interview questions in order to gauge any distressing emotions they may have had. I asked the participants to reflect on the questions asked and their responses, and I informed them that they would be contacted in two weeks to add anything after reflecting on the topics discussed during the interview. I then provided them with their contact information if they had any additional questions or concerns going forward and thanked them for their participation. After each interview ended I transcribed them verbatim and included any notes that were taken during the time of the interview to give context to the participant’s physical movement, visible emotions, or interpretations of their actions during questions.

Follow Up Email Correspondence

I sent a follow up email (see Appendix C) to each participant two weeks after their interview occurred. In this email participants were asked if they would like to add anything to the information they provided me after reflecting on the questions that were asked in the initial interview. Two participants responded saying that they did not have anything to add to their initial responses. One participant requested a name for their pseudonym, but did not provide content to add to their responses. The other participants who did not respond were assumed to not have anything to add.
Data Analysis

I began analyzing the data by reading each transcript multiple times without taking notes to familiarize myself with the content. After becoming aware of the existing content I went through the data and highlighted or noted any content that stood out to them. The notable content was then coded and reviewed. After reviewing the coding, I identified themes to encompass the overlapping of multiple codes. The themes and findings are presented in Chapter Four.

Researcher Bias

Qualitative research is considered to be interpretive research because researchers are forming a meaning from the data which is inevitably influenced in some capacity by their own views and understandings (Creswell, 2015). When interpreting the data there is a chance that researcher bias will exist due to how they interpret the phenomena being presented. Understanding the researcher’s bias gives insight to how the data may have been interpreted.

In this study I self-identified as White/Caucasian and am a current student at LSU. I used my identification as White and as a student to connect with the participants in hopes to make them more comfortable to be honest in their responses. I also had previous education in White racial consciousness, the social construction of Whiteness, White privilege, and social constructs such as race which may have influenced my interpretation of the data. In an effort to combat this potential bias I challenged myself to not place any judgment on the participant’s responses that did not align with their own personal values and look at them from a strictly educational data driven perspective.

Limitations

Limitations of research are defined as, “potential weaknesses or problems with the study identified by the researcher” (Creswell, 2015, p. 197). Within this study a few limitations exist
that I have identified. First, the timeframe to conduct the research was limited. This impacted how long data could be collected, which impacted the sample size of the research. Second, the sample size is relatively small (nine participants) and due to the size is not reflective of a diverse pool of participants in regard to age, sex, school classification, etc. Third, I had no monetary incentives for participation in the study. I believe that this impacted how many people were willing to participate because 65 were contacted and only nine participated. Having any type of incentive would potentially have made participating more desirable to students who met the criteria, in turn increasing the number who would participate. The fourth limitation concerned that the study was limited to one institution in one region. Increasing the site to more than one institution in the Southeast or looking at students in various regions may have impacted the data in a way that is not represented in this study. The fifth and final limitation I identified was lack of previous experience analyzing data.

**Conclusion**

This study used a qualitative, phenomenological approach to explore White racial consciousness in White/Caucasian students at a university in the Southeast region. Snowball and purposeful sampling were both used to gain participation in the study and transcriptions of the interviews were coded by hand. The limitations and bias that exist within this study have been acknowledged by myself, and have been taken into account before analyzing the data in an effort to present the data as organic as possible.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This chapter discusses the findings of this study and specifically places each participant onto the White Racial Consciousness Model, as well as discussed the emerging themes from the data. Each participant was examined individually and their responses analyzed to understand how they perceive their race and what meanings they have attached to being White/Caucasian. This chapter explores how they define being White and the supporting factors that reinforce the attitude in which they are placed within the model.

Participants

Nine self-identified White/Caucasian students were selected through snowball and purposeful sampling over a span of three months. Three of the participants identified as female and six identified as male, with ages ranging from 18-22. Each participant was allowed to choose a pseudonym or elected to have myself choose a pseudonym for them; only three participants selected their own pseudonym. In regard to academic classification all participants were undergraduates at LSU and the sample was composed of two freshmen, two sophomores, two juniors, and three seniors. All of the academic fields of study for the participants were different. See Table 4.1 and Table 4.2 for participant demographics, as well as religious affiliation and political affiliation and student involvement.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Racial Identity</th>
<th>Ethnicity Identity</th>
<th>Gender Identity</th>
<th>Religious Affiliation</th>
<th>Political Affiliation</th>
<th>Classification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barry</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collin</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>White/European</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Moderate to Liberal</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otis</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Christian, non-denominational</td>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christine</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Christian, non-denominational</td>
<td>Libertarian</td>
<td>Junior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>21</td>
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<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Liberal Democrat</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nick</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>Junior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caleb</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Non-denominational</td>
<td>Libertarian</td>
<td>Senior</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.2: Participant Curriculum and Student Involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Field of Study</th>
<th>Student Involvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barry</td>
<td>Kinesiology</td>
<td>LSU Ambassadors, Christ the King (Church)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collin</td>
<td>International Trade &amp; Finance</td>
<td>Tigerband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otis</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Tigerband, Bengal Brass Band, Jazz Lab Group, Tiger Tenors, Alpha Kappa Psi Business Fraternity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>Nutrition &amp; Food Science</td>
<td>Tigerband, was in a sorority but not anymore, former Resident Assistant, Pre-PA Society (Physician Assistants)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christine</td>
<td>English-Creative Writing</td>
<td>Resident Assistant, Volunteer LSU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>Electrical Engineering</td>
<td>Resident Assistant, formerly involved at the Baptist Collegiate Ministry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Animal Science</td>
<td>Resident Assistant, National Residence Hall Honorary, Leadership LSU, Sigma Alpha Agriculture Sorority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick</td>
<td>Natural Resource Ecology &amp; Management</td>
<td>Resident Assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caleb</td>
<td>Agricultural Business</td>
<td>Agribusiness Club, Sigma Chi Fraternity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Individual Interviews**

The interview questions were constructed to be able to place the participants on the White Racial Consciousness Model, as well as dissect what their racial identity means to them. After reviewing the transcripts and completing the coding process, I determined where each participant would fall on the model and uses their responses to provide support to their positioning.

**Barry**

Barry was a more difficult participant to place on the model. He is a freshmen at Louisiana State University and classifies himself as conservative and religious. He had been only
in White environments growing up and articulated that coming to LSU and getting involved has expanded the diversity he is exposed to. Although he vocalized his disdain for racism and discrimination, he was not in favor of practices that would eliminate those such as affirmative action. This information would lean towards the Conflictive attitude among the Achieved category, but Barry seemed to not have any true understanding of his racial identity and relied on what he heard from others to base his opinions. When asked what it meant to be White to him Barry said after a long pause, "That’s hard, I mean I don’t really… I don’t know if it means anything, I was just like born this way. I don’t know if it has any meaning behind it… necessarily. I mean if you look at social issues and stuff like that then there’s a lot of meaning behind it, but if you boil down to like what it is, it’s just skin color."

He could not formulate his own understanding of his racial identity and throughout his interview kept alluding to a more colorblind approach. When asked at the end of the interview if he wanted to add anything else he said, "Nothing other than to just uh to reiterate that people are people. You know? Like we’re all human and I think that when you boil everything down that’s what really matters not how you look or where you come from, just be a good person I guess. Is really the key thing that we should be concerned about."

Barry made other comments about “we’re all human” throughout his interview and kept emphasizing that it is that we are human that matters and not people’s racial identities. Before the interview had begun Barry mentioned that he was heavily involved in a Christian religious group that was close to campus. I noticed that many of his comments seemed to align with the faith in the context of being a good person is what matters. He was also not comfortable with discussions about race and often avoided them. When asked if he tended to shy away from conversations about race or enjoyed them and initiated them he replied, “I think I tend to shy away, just… I’m not really a confrontational person and that topic usually comes with confrontation at some point.” I made a note that when he answered this question he was visibly...
uncomfortable. Due to Barry’s lack of ownership of his racial identity, his emphasis on being human and not race, and his lack of ability to form his own opinions on race with help from others, I placed him in the unachieved category under the dependent attitude. Barry has not experience enough dissonance in his racial identity to be able to take ownership of it and formulate his own understanding of what it means to be White.

Collin

I classified Collin in the Achieved category of the White Racial Conscious Model, but within the Conflictive Attitude. Collin is a freshman at Louisiana State University and came from a predominately White educational background before attending college. Although he disclosed that he never had had any teachers of color before college and during college, he did have mentors of color growing up. When asked what being White meant to him, Collin said “I mean, it’s just how I identify myself. Like my parents tell me you’re European, you’re White and I’m like oh okay sure.” Although Collin has not reflected in depth on what how being White impacts him, he is aware of the history of racism, privilege, and oppression from American and World History courses he has taken. Collin is opposed to discrimination by race and when asked if he believed that one race was better than another he immediately responded with a firm “no”. He also was in favor of inter-racial relationships and sees no issue with people of different races coming together. Although Collin expressed his opposition to discrimination in general, he did not seem interested or supportive of programs that are created to eradicate discriminatory practices.

When asked if he was in favor or opposed to affirmative action, Collin replied, “I think affirmative action was necessary for a while during the Civil Rights Movement, but now I feel that it’s outdated. I feel like people have an equal footing.” Affirmative action was created in
order to help marginalized people have access to areas such as education and employment,
Collin’s dismissal of it due to people of color having an equal footing is an example of why he
would fall into the Conflictive attitude in the model (Evans et. al, 2010). Collin repeated this
sentiment that people of color had “equal footing” now compared to the past when he was asked
if he believed in the concept of White privilege. Collin said,

I believe that… (long pause). I believe that it’s easier for, um, White people to get jobs,
make more money stuff like that. It’s just uh, I believe nowadays African Americans or
other ethnicities have almost an equal footing now.

Collin is aware of how being White has privileges in the economic realm but also that in
today’s world people of color have more equality than before. His statement conflicts with itself,
and articulates that people of color have equal opportunities and are responsible for their own
circumstances. He also was not interested in participating in social justice related events, and
when asked if he would like to in the future he replied, “Um, I’m fine right now thank you.”
From Collin’s interview it is evident that he is against discrimination and oppression on the
surface level, but not interested in and opposed to practices made to stop these from occurring in
society. His responses also indicated that though he understood racism was a prominent feature
of American history, that people of color are equal and therefore should not be treated in any
special way.

Otis

Otis would be classified in the Achieved category and in the Reactive attitude,
specifically the passive Reactive attitude. Otis is a sophomore at Louisiana State University and
is heavily involved on campus, specifically in music-orientated organizations and business
organizations. On his demographic sheet that each participant completed prior to starting the
interview, as well as throughout the interview, Otis kept mentioning that he was raised
conservative but no longer identified with that political spectrum and pushed against that
ideology. He came from a predominately White educational background and his tone could be interpreted as resentful or disappointed when discussing the lack of diversity at his previous educational institutions. The Reactive attitude recognizes,

That inequalities and injustices exist and that people of color bear the brunt of these issues in their life experiences. Leads people to understand that White people are afforded unearned privileges and benefits that perpetuate inequality to work toward recognizing and addressing discrimination while attempting to connect with people of color (Evans et al., 2010, p. 263)

The passive Reactive attitude is focus on these inequalities, privileges, and injustices on a more intellectual level rather than an active one (Evans et al., 2010). Otis fits into this attitude because of his understanding of his racial identity in society, his experiences that allowed the exploration of his identities and social justice related topics, his active seeking to continue to educate himself, and his conscious efforts to not use his racial identity as an oppressive tool.

When asked about what the idea of Whiteness Otis responded,

… Um, but Whiteness in general, um, in the world it probably means um I suppose…I hate to say the word success because that’s not necessarily true. (pause) But I will admit that there is a legacy towards Whiteness in world history to where if you don’t agree with the Whiteness then you better put up or shut up (laughs).

He has an understanding that being White holds meaning and also that it comes with advantages that other racial identities do not have afforded to them in the United States. His response below is to him being asked if he believes White privilege exists and shows his awareness that he receives different treatment and more positive treatment because of his race.

Um, I do because I believe I have experienced it. Several times, almost consistently across 19 years of living. Um, why or why not? I suppose it comes down to the fact that I know that as a White person I have laid out oppression consciously and subconsciously and I have also noticed that I do not have almost never received the same treatment in return. Um, so I guess I’ve just noticed that it’s there… That’s why I think it exists (laughs).

Throughout the interview Otis was extremely reflective in his answers and often took time to pause before each to collect his thoughts. Although he is aware of the privileges he has in society
for being White and articulated his interest on continuing to educate himself and others, he seemed to be more passive in his approach. He was reflective internally and not necessarily active.

Um I’m actually going to go back to what I shared at Geaux Lead. Um which is how I feel about being a White person. I feel in a lot of ways, I can be perceived as an oppressor. I’ve earned that in a lot of ways when I was younger, um, but it’s also very upsetting to hear “oh look this is happening. People are protesting, there’s race riots…” In what was it Charlottesville, Virginia? I believe, um where the Klan as getting together, “Oh look these White people are doing this here, you know, they’re oppressing these people” and things like that. Um so I suppose um the biggest thing I’d like to put out there is I hate seeing where we are disadvantaging other people um for reasons based entirely on race or ethnicity there’s no point to it um and here’s no reason to really act or feel that way. And I know a lot of it is subconscious, um but the biggest way to change your subconscious behavior is to challenge yourself and say, “while I acted this way every day, why do I do that?” you know? Really dig down and think you know where did this come from and am I really thinning about this because I actually feel this way or is it a habit I’ve always done, X, Y, Z. So I’d like to challenge a lot of Caucasian, White people and you know opening their minds, opening their eyes and realizing you know nothing is better about my situation and nothing is worse about their situation as far as their talent or their character. And a lot of people need to open their eyes and realize that uh there is a huge factor of luck in success, you know? You may think you’ve earned everything in a lot of ways, and in a lot of ways you’ve earned a lot you know? You’ve provided for people, you’ve done good things to promote your job and you’ve done a lot of success in your business, you’ve done a lot of success at home, um, whatever that may be, whenever you may find your success- a lot of time you can trace to some aspect of luck. Wither you talked to the right guy or woman at some point and they were able to help you on your path to success or uh the biggest factor that a lot of people don’t realize is that you didn’t receive judgment for it on you path. And you know the lack of judgement can be very… very free I suppose would be the best way to describe it because you don’t have restriction and you don’t have friction. You’re allowed to just do the most you can and uh be given time to do it.

As seen in his quote above, Otis has put in a lot of thought about his racial identity and is aware that is has more implications than just an identifier of skin tone. Otis seems to be on the verge of moving to the Integrative attitude if he became more active to committing to social change, but at present is very internally reflective. I believe as he progresses through college he may move to the Integrative attitude when he has more experiences that motivate him to take his feelings and
understandings of racial consciousness and attempt to apply it in a way that pursues genuine interactions with people of color and is reflected externally and internally.

**Rebecca**

Similar to Otis, I classified Rebecca as a Reactive passive attitude. Rebecca is a senior at Louisiana State University and from her coursework and involvement opportunities has an understanding of her own racial identity and acknowledges that it comes with advantages that not all racial identities have. When asked what it means to be White to her, Rebecca said,

> It means that I have a lot of advantages that other people necessarily haven’t had. Um, even if it doesn’t feel like it sometimes. (Pause) But it’s strange I feel like there’s not, I don’t feel like there’s a specific culture like associated with being White like to me. Throughout her interview she not only acknowledged how people of color face the blunt of injustice, but also that she was in favor of educational opportunities that aimed to inform others on injustice and oppression. She also felt that programs like affirmative action were a positive thing to combat past discrimination. When discussing topics like the “American dream” and concepts that have been woven into the United States history, she disagreed with the narrative that through hard work alone you can change your situation.

> It means to me like, if you can pull yourself up by your bootstraps it’s like no matter how low you’ve gotten or no matter how much disadvantage you have you can still bring yourself up by working hard and by like trying to achieve your dreams. And I feel like that’s not necessarily true, I think especially anymore. Like the whole rags to riches story are really really rare and it’s really hard, um, it’s really hard to pull yourself up from being like really low. Especially if you’re in poverty or if you are um have disadvantages of being a certain race in this country, then it’s hard to get from the bottom to the top.

Rebecca is conscious of her racial identity and its influence on other racial identities. She pushes herself to connect with people of color and enjoys conversations about race to educate herself and others, also that it’s something that needs to be done. Like Otis, Rebecca seems to more internally focused on the issues other races face and is not active externally.
Christine

Christine is a junior at Louisiana State University and is an English major. Her courses gave her an understanding of Whiteness from an historical analysis. When asked what she took away from those courses she replied, “That in history, um, White culture typically just conquers um and tries to erase other cultures.” When asked what being White was to her and how she understood her racial identity she said,

(Laughs) It is a tough question, um. I mean if I were going bases on things around me I would probably say the default race, just cause that’s kind of what our culture is leaning towards or trying not to lean towards. Is like Whiteness is just the default, everything else is “other” or abnormal, um but I guess to me it’s just kind of something that really shouldn’t matter. I don’t know, just like a physical identifier more than a personality thing.

Similar to Otis and Rebecca, Christine shows an understanding of injustice and how people of color face the brunt of those in society and is considered to be in the Reactive attitude. From her interview she was also very reflective on how even if she does not directly see the advantages that she has from being White that does not mean that they are not occurring. She articulated how not seeing them is an indicator that the privilege does exist because she does not have to be aware of it, while people of color do not have that privilege.

Christine is different from Otis and Rebecca because she does not initiate conversations about race or programs designed around social justice topics. She is open to being a part of them, but does not necessarily seek them out. She does not seek out conversations about race because they often turn into a “debate” rather than a discussion, but does enjoy when they are a positive educational opportunity. Due to Christine’s hesitation to initiate opportunities with people of color and their experiences, she would be considered passive, but her understanding of her racial identity and its advantages would be considered overall as the Reactive attitude.
Frank

Frank is a sophomore at Louisiana State University and he is a resident assistant, which he takes a lot of pride in. I would classify him as having a Dissonant attitude in the unachieved racial consciousness category. An interesting factor about Frank is that he identifies as White, but his father is Hispanic and his mother is White. All of the other participants had strictly European heritage, but Frank did not. The Dissonant attitude is defined as,

High levels of uncertainty regarding their White racial consciousness and the experiences of people of color. While open to receiving information and alternative perspectives, they may experience confusion due to the disconnection between their previous understanding of race and their newly found knowledge (Evans et al., 2010, p. 262).

Frank falls into this attitude because he does not have a strong understanding of his racial identity and his response consisted of a lot of questions and his thoughts were scattered and hard to follow and did not answer the question. He would repeat things his friends have said before and mention their names so it was a clear indicator to me that they were not exactly his original thought. An interesting comment he made was in response to if he agreed or disagreed with the concept of White privilege. He said,

Uh (long pause) Imma say yeah but on a very small scale. Like of course uh there’s still people that like do things and it’s harder for me cause just like A.) if it is happening then I don’t experience cause it’s like I don’t know like it may just be so common to me that I just don’t even see it but I would say that if you were to ask any of like my Hispanic friends or like a friend that’s African American then they would probably say of course yes cause it’s like things that they see are things that they’ve been thought, but uh me personally I would say I haven’t like experienced any like favoritism because I’m White or not that I’ve seen or heard of and even if there was it would be something that I would step back and be like hey like you know one that’s not cool and it’s not necessary too. But uh maybe I have and I just haven’t experienced it but uh I would say that I’m sure that it’s still out three but me personally no so yeah.

Frank’s responses are almost an internal battle of if he does or does not agree with the concept of White privilege because he feels like he has not experienced it before, but according to some of his friends of color it does exist. This could be considered an indicator the Dissonant
attitude where high levels of uncertainty exist regarding racial identities, but in this attitude people are open to more knowledge on this topic. Frank spoke about diversity programs he’s participated in as a resident assistant and how he did not enjoy them and would not do them again because he found them uncomfortable and thought they could be done better. Although he is opposed to the diversity training he has received as a resident assistant, he is open to conversations about race even with people with very different opinions than him. He finds them interesting and educational. One thing that stood out throughout Frank’s interview is that he defined Whiteness in relation to how light or dark the skin tone is. He was the only participant to talk about how people who are darker may have a different experience and used more literal color terms for racial identifiers.

**Sarah**

Sarah is a senior at Louisiana State University and prides herself in her experience with diversity training through her various involvement outlets. Sarah is in the Reactive attitude because like Otis, Rebecca, and Christine; she is very much aware that people of color face hardships for their entire lives due to their race. She recognizes that being White affords her certain privileges and advantages and acknowledges that she wants to use them to create more spaces/environments for people of color. An example of this is seen in her response to agreeing that White privilege exists,

I’ve always kind of um you know felt like since historically we were, especially White men, were given like just power for being White and just being the first people here essentially, not really. But um that it was always my job to like use my privilege as a White person to help people who don’t have a voice.

I would classify Sarah as a more active Reactive attitude, than passive like the others. She reiterated a few times in the interview that she not only enjoys conversations about race,
diversity, and oppression but that she also initiates them. She knows that these conversations often make people uncomfortable, but that does not stop her from initiating them.

Yeah, I do. I don’t shy away from it. Um, I think that it’s a good discussion to have with people who have a different opinion than you about what race is. And um, yeah I think it’s just one of those topics that is a hot button issue, and some people want to hear it and some people don’t but it needs to be talked about. So I don’t shy away from it.

Sarah also indicated that she often will stop her residents when they make an insensitive comment and ask them why they said it, do they understand what they are saying and the message it is sending, and how even though it may make them uncomfortable in the moment that she is not going to shy away from “calling them out” or starting the conversation. She goes past just being internally reflective on these issues and finds herself actively addressing them. The reason I did not place her in the Integrative attitude is because although Sarah is conscious of her racial identity, she has not fully come to terms with it and in some of her responses said that it did not matter to her.

Nick

Nick is a junior at Louisiana State University and comes from a fairly White educational background and is involved as a resident assistant as well. I classified Nick in the Unachieved Racial Consciousness category in the Avoidant attitude because this attitude is for people who “have not consciously thought about their race or the racial experiences of other racial groups, often dismissing, ignoring, or avoiding race until forced to address their denial” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 262). Throughout Nick’s interview’s he did not have an opinion on his racial identity or the experiences of other racial identities. He kept repeating that one was not better than another, but that they were just different. When asked about what being White meant to him he replied,

Not much, it just means that’s who I am, my parents were born White, I was born White. I mean that’s just the way I am, um cause I don’t think there’s anything special about being White. I just go about my day like everybody else does, um so yeah.
His racial identity had no real meaning to him. Also when asked about if he agreed with the concept of White privilege he said,

(Pause) I don’t. Um, mainly because of the way I was raised, I was raised around a whole bunch of White people so nobody treated anybody differently. Um, when I come down here yes I hear stories of people getting pulled over just because of their skin color, um or just because of the area they were in and yes it’s inconvenient at times and it’s not fair, but I don’t feel like me being White has anything to do with the difference.

He also attributed his success to his parent’s working hard and his grandparents working hard, and agreed with the concept of “pulling yourself up by your bootstraps” and the American dream. He did not believe success had anything to do with race, just work ethic. Similar to other participants who were resident assistants, Nick had been involved in diversity training through his position. He vocalized not enjoying the training and that he avoided conversations about race because he feels attacked for being White. Nick had only black roommates and felt that he interacted with diversity because he was the “minority” in his friend group, but indicated that he avoids talking about race with his friends.

Caleb

Caleb is a senior at Louisiana State University and was involved in a social fraternity that was removed from campus this school year. He was the oldest participant to be interviewed and had previously attended school at the University of Minnesota before coming to LSU. I placed Caleb in the Unachieved Racial Consciousness category and in the Dissonant attitude due to his uncertainty around his White racial consciousness, but was overall open to learning more in this area. When asked what it meant to be White to him, out of all of the participants Caleb gave the vaguest answer compared to the other participants and laughed the most while answering. Caleb’s response was, “(Pause) (laughs) Um, (long pause) that’s a really good question. I don’t know, I guess kind of like you don’t know anything else, so. Uh yeah, like I guess that’s like my
best answer I can give (laughs).” He did indicate that he is open to learning more and indicated that he does believe in White privilege because of his knowledge of how the country was founded. Caleb said,

Yeah, the country was set up from the start by White people pretty much exclusively for White people, so then once more people came over that weren’t White and didn’t fit that kind of mold then like… it wasn’t written for them.

Throughout the interview it was evident to me that Caleb had some knowledge of the advantages of being White, but had some difficulty relating that to experiences that people of color may have. He told me at the end of the interview about dissonance he experienced recently about being called a racial slur by a person of color. He recognized that this was something that White people did consistently to people of color, but was not sure how he felt about himself being called one. He seemed conflicted telling the story, but articulated that he was open to learning more. Although Caleb had some examples that may be considered to be included in the Achieved White Racial Consciousness category, his uncertainty about his own and his overall confusion was the reason why I placed him in the Dissonant attitude.

**Overview of Themes**

After analyzing the data four themes emerged, (1.) All Races are Equal, (2.) Exposure, (3.) Avoidance versus Embrace, and (4.) Association of privilege with money. In this section I will be discussing these four themes in detail, while also showing there relevance to the White Racial Consciousness Model and to overall student development. Figure 4.3 is a visual representation that has been created in an effort to aid the reader in envisioning my organization of the themes.
Table 4.3: Visual Representation of Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 1: All Races are Equal</th>
<th>Theme 2: Exposure</th>
<th>Theme 3: Avoidance vs. Embrace</th>
<th>Theme 4: Association of Privilege &amp; Money</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>➔ Colorblind Racism</td>
<td>➔ Public vs. Private Education ➔ Social Justice Oriented Assignments/Events</td>
<td>➔ Outward Displays</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theme 1: All Races are Equal**

The first theme that emerged was “No Race is Better than Another”. Throughout the interviews each participant made it a point to state that race should not be something that makes a group of people better than another on the surface level, which was interpreted as not trying to be considered racist or that was their perception of what racism is. The age groups of those interviewed would all be considered millennials who have grown up in a post-Civil Rights Era and are currently living in a post-modern world. This is important to note because this age range has grown up in a society where being perceived as a racist or to not denounce racism is something that is considered negatively. It also has the potential to follow an individual for many years. I believe that with this in mind, it is easy to understand the quick responses by each participant to denounce any idea that they believe one race is better than another. When I asked specifically if they believed that one race was better than another, each participant immediately said a firm no. Some participants would answer even before the question was fully stated and the nonverbal cues given off during this question were interpreted as disgusted that I would even have to ask that question to them and that I should already know their response. No matter the political spectrum the participant identified as, or where they were in their White racial consciousness, it was clear that outward, direct declarations that one race is better just by nature than another is not something they wanted to be associated with.
**Colorblind Racism.** The concept of being “colorblind” is ignoring or avoiding race in an effort to treat everyone equally or by their other characteristics such as merit and work ethic. Although some people believe that this concept is accepting and looks at people for who they truly are by only looking at their internal characteristics, it actually is a form of racism that ignores people of color’s identity and does not acknowledge the disadvantages they face due to their race. This is a sub category under theme one because some of the participants used this in their reasoning for why one race was not better than another. They communicated that being judged by race is not something they agree with and that all people are human which is what ultimately matters and also that they do not believe that people are treated differently because of their race. Although not believing that race by nature makes one person better than another is a general concept, being colorblind is problematic. By engaging in this ideology they are not acknowledging how race plays a defining role in the lives of people of color and has disadvantaged them throughout the course of history. By ignoring race, they are also ignoring that their own race has given them unearned advantages and they are attempting to invalidate the experiences and cultural heritage of people of color.

**Theme 2: Exposure**

The second theme that materialized from the data was that of exposure. Exposure was influential on all participants and their White racial consciousness. Being exposed to people of color at a young age, having them in a role of authority, or having them as a mentor were influential in how these White students developed their understanding about their own race and race of others. Overall the more exposure they had growing up and/or in college, the more understanding they had about their White racial consciousness. Two areas of exposure that were
prominent in the data were if they attended a public or private school and if they had ever participated in any type of social justice oriented assignment or event before or during college.

**Public vs Private School Education.** When asked about the racial make-up of their pre-college institutions, those who attended private schools would respond that their institution(s) were predominately White and either explicitly say or infer that they were so because they were private. There was the assumption from the participants that I would understand that by them attending private institutions that that meant there were hardy any or no students of color. These participants were aware that they were not exposed to students of color and some saw this as a disadvantage and others did not see anything negative about it. Those who attended public schools also were at predominately White institutions due to where their particular school was located, but for the most part articulated that they were thankful for not attending a private school because they would not have been exposed to the diversity that somewhat existed at their schools. Again, this common assumption that private schools lacked diversity was noted. Also those students who attended public schools were more likely to be exposed to a teacher of color than those who attended a private. Interestingly, some of the participants had attended both types of schooling before coming to college. They articulated that comparing their experiences, public school provided them with more contact with diversity in general from race to socio economic status.

**Social Justice Oriented Assignments/Events.** Being exposed to assignments, programs, and/or events related to social justice topics was another important factor when it came to the theme of exposure. Those involved on campus and required to do diversity trainings typically felt two ways: they either thoroughly enjoyed them and found them empowering or they felt attacked during them and they shut them off to future assignments, events, and programs. Those
who felt attacked typically had conservative values, avoided talking about race, or practiced the
color blind ideology that was mentioned earlier. Those who felt empowered usually had
experience with these types of programs in other capacities on campus and had more moderate to
liberal values politically. The participants who sought out these events on their own highlighted
enjoying learning about the experience of others and reflecting on their own in a way that helped
them understand that their race meant something more than they had realized in society. Overall,
those who could articulate that they were exposed to more than one social justice assignment or
event through school or involvement had a better understanding of their White racial
consciousness than those who avoided them or had never sought them out.

**Theme 3: Avoidance vs Embrace**

The third theme is avoidance versus embracement of recognizing race and whether or not
the participants sought out opportunities to discuss or interact with social justice topics or
avoided them at all costs. When it came to addressing race the participants either embraced or
avoided the topic, there were not many who were in-between. Those who fell into the embrace
category for the most part already had an understanding of their White racial consciousness and
had high levels of exposure coming into and during college through different avenues (friends,
involvement, classes, etc.). Those who avoided the topic echoed the statement of “not being
confrontational” and therefore avoided those opportunities because they typically led to them
feeling attacked or talked down to. Those who fell in the avoidance category did not have high
levels of exposure and some operated from the mindset that talking about race was not helpful or
positive because it concentrated on people’s differences and not on how everyone was human
and a person first. The few participants who fell in between the two categories were open to
more opportunities, but would not necessarily seek them out themselves. For the most part they
also did not like confrontation, but felt that it was necessary to talk about topics like race in order to better society.

**Outward Displays.** Those who avoided these opportunities also outwardly displayed uncomfortableness through nonverbal cues. When asked if they enjoy talking about race, these participants would often talk with their hands, or sped up their words, or rock in their seats as they responded with how it made them uncomfortable. Their verbal responses matched their outward responses. Interestingly, those who embraced these opportunities would often do the opposite. They would open their body to me, for example they would unfold their arms, sit up straighter in their seats, and smile or laugh while responding. The outward displays further supported the emotional response connected with their responses.

**Theme 4: Association of Privilege with Money**

The final theme is the association of privilege with money or monetary value. When asked about if their race had advantages attached to it, the participants either identified they believed in White privileged or they strongly opposed that concept. What was interesting is that participants who did and did not agree with White privilege or advantages attached to their race, associated the idea of privilege with monetary value. This was more prevalent with those who opposed White privilege because their family did not have a high socioeconomic status or they knew White families that did not and would describe how if White privilege was true then all White people would be wealthy.

The few participants who did believe in White privilege and associated privilege with money did so in the context of the top wealthiest people in the United States were White, but their wealth was not strictly from their hard work. They would describe how historically White people have been the wealthiest and that continues. This was interesting because “advantages”
and “privilege” is not limited to money, but many of the participants associated it to only that. Privilege is defined as, “having special rights, advantages, or immunities (Privilege, n.d.).” Nowhere in this definition does it indicate that only includes money and monetary wealth, the participants association of it to wealth is a larger indication that society is opposed to accepting the idea of the White race having advantages because they (society) are limiting privilege to a single meaning.

One participate even talked about when other races think of White people they probably associate it with being “fancy”, which can be interpreted as an indication of monetary wealth. This theme is articulated in other literature sources as well and needs to be addressed at the societal and individual level in order to expand the understanding of what White privilege is and how it functions in today’s society.

**Noteworthy Interview Questions**

While interviews were being conducted I noticed some consistencies among responses when certain questions were asked, but were not necessarily something that could be coded or included into a broader theme. The consistent nature of the reactions to these questions such as physical movement or visible emotions that occurred not only stood out to me, but warranted some analysis by itself.

The first question that evoked consistent outward displays of emotion was, “Have you ever had any teachers of color in any schooling before college?” The response to this question typically included laughs, long pauses, and phrases such as “I never thought about that before.” I observed that when most participants answered this question they were often surprised that they had never considered this question before. The surprise was evident with their facial expressions among all participants, but some participants also moved their hands to the bottom of their chin
to signal that they were perplexed by this question or their response. The majority of the participants had never had any teachers of color and for the ones who did identify that they did only could recall a handful. After asking this question a few participants seemed outwardly upset that they had never thought of this question before or were upset at the lack of teachers of color that they had had. It is not clear which caused the outward display of emotions or if it were a combination of both.

“What does it mean to be White to you?” was another question that had some consistency not in the verbal response, but in the emotional response to the question. This question seemed to puzzle many of the participants or make them uncomfortable because they did not know how to articulate a response. It seemed from the long pauses on this question that the majority of the participants had never had to think of their race and its impact on them before. Many of the participants would move in their seat or change how they were physically sitting when answering this question and often their faces would contort with a look of confusion or dissatisfaction in having to answer.

A question that seemed to puzzle participants was, “Do you agree or disagree with Affirmative Action?”. Each participant eventually answered the question with a definitive “yes” or “no”, but almost all participants needed to have the definition of affirmative action provided because they were not sure what it was. I found it interesting for those needing the definition not for refreshing their memory, but for those who were not familiar with the topic that they took a stance on the issue. Those who asked for the definition because they did not know the concept always provided reasons for why they do or do not support affirmative action and were outwardly passionate in their answers. This was not the case for those who did not need the definition, they did not seem to express as much passion or strong emphasis in their answers.
Overall I found it notable that the majority of the participants were not aware of what affirmative action is since they were all current university students and its educational history associated with it.

The final question that I found to be of particular interest was the question, “What is the racial make-up of your intimate friend group?” Those who had expressed believing that White privilege exists and that they were actively involved in educating themselves and others on social justice issues, tended to be shocked when they could only identify White friends in their intimate friend group. Some of the participants after indicated that their closest friends are White would list their extended friend groups to show that they did indeed have connections with people who were other than White. During the interviews those who would answer that they had mostly White close friends would divert their eyes from me and look down until the next question.

**Conclusion**

The participants in this study expressed their reflections on their racial identity and other racial identities, as well as defining how they believe being White impacted them and impacted others. “White” had a different meaning and significance to each participant which was influenced by their past experiences, their education on social justice related issues, and their exposure to diversity and their environment. Also, the participants understanding of race and racism has been influenced by growing up in a post-Civil Rights Era as Millennials. Many of the participants could not fully articulate what their race meant to them, which can impact how their race impacts others. Another aspect I noted was that all of the females who participated were classified in the Achieved White Racial Consciousness category. Although, I did not specifically design the study to see if females are more likely to end up in either category, this may have been
influenced by their experiences of being female in a patriarchal society. Being reflective on one of their identities could have potentially made them more reflective on others, such as their race.

Student affairs professionals need to be actively engaged in self-reflection and be aware of themselves and their identities in order to work with students who are struggling to make sense of their identities or those who are aware of their identities but are looking for outlets to change the narrative in society. It is important to note that placing the participants on the model is subjective and may change depending on the researcher and their experience with this type of model.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe White racial consciousness among White students at Louisiana State University. The White Racial Consciousness Model was used as theoretical framework to interpret the experiences of the participants, as well organize their responses to determine how conscious they were of their own race.

In the previous chapter, I discussed the findings of the study. In this chapter I will interpret the findings to answer the research questions, provide implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.

Discussion

This research and study addressed the following research questions.

1.) How do experiences of White college students in the southeast at a PWI influence their awareness of White racial identity?
2.) How do White college students understand Whiteness?
3.) Where do White college students at a PWI in the Southeast fall on the White Racial Consciousness Model?
4.) For White students who are in the Achieved White Racial Consciousness category, what factors contribute to their awareness of White privilege?

When reflecting on the first research question, I found that White college student’s level of exposure to diversity or social justice orientated events at their PWI did have an impact on their awareness of their White racial identity. This exposure either opened them to dialogue about the influence their race has in society-whether that be historically or examples of how it does currently-or it closed them off to any dialogue about the subject. Those who had more exposure to these types of events were typically the students who were in the Achieved category
and sought out these opportunities. Those who did not have a lot of exposure in these areas at their PWI typically fell in the unachieved category. Overall the participants’ experiences at a PWI never made them feel targeted or that they were alone. The only time some of the participants felt this was when they were talking about race and took a colorblind ideology approach and received negative feedback from others who found this ideology racist and problematic. From the findings it is evident that the experiences of each participant were unique, but showed the need for more intentional programming for the White student population who does not seek out these opportunities.

The second research question questioned how White students understood Whiteness as a whole. White college students understand Whiteness in different ways. Some understand how Whiteness has a dominant and authoritative role in society, but others only see it as an indicator of your skin color. The drastic differences in the understanding of this concept are influenced by their pre-college experiences, their educational institution, their exposure to people of color growing up, their political beliefs, their religious influences, their socialization through family and friends, and through media outlets. From the findings there is no one answer to answer the second research question of how do White students understand whiteness, because it truly is dependent on a number of factors. There was a divide among participants of how they did understand the concept as mentioned above, but Whiteness is something that either is present in White students’ minds or it is not. There is not much in-between unless they are in a place where their previous belief systems are being challenged and they are more receptive to that new information.

The third research question centered around placing each participant on the White Racial Consciousness Model in order to see if the results were applicable to similar institution types. I
was able to place each participant on the White Racial Consciousness Model, but noted that doing so was a very subjective process. Also with the limited sample size, the results are not generalizable to all White students at PWIs in the Southeast. Although I was able to place participants in both the Unachieved and Achieved category, it was noted that none of them were identified in the extreme attitudes that had no concept of their White identity, felt superior to other races, or were completely cognizant of their White racial consciousness and aware of all of its implications in society.

For the final research question, participants who were places in the Achieved White racial consciousness category, there were a few factors that contributed to their awareness of White privilege. They typically had more exposure to diversity during college and before college and were receptive to learning more about their race and its influence in society. Those who agreed with the concept of White privilege but could not articulate examples of why they did usually responded by indicating that they did not have to think about their race on a daily basis and that was an advantage that people of color do not have. Although the participants in this category varied in their depth of understanding of White privilege, all were open to gaining more knowledge on it or were actively seeking out knowledge on this concept and their race.

Implications for Practice

This study should provide insight to any type of student affairs professional, administrator, or anyone in higher education. It is not limited to professionals at only PWIs, but does highlight how PWIs need to be intentional with creating environments and opportunities for White students to learn about the influence their race has in order to create a more inclusive and equitable environment for the students of color in these predominately White environments.
Higher education and student affairs professionals need to be actively engaged in being self-reflective about their own identities and their influence on society, their environment, and themselves. This is the essential first step because without being aware of one’s own White racial consciousness then the efforts to help students develop their own racial consciousness is driven by lack of overall vision. This is also an example of, “Do what I say, but not what I do.” Professionals needs to be aware of their own identities and should receive continual training on these areas in order to broaden their awareness of themselves and also continue to gain understanding of how their identities effect and influence those around them. This training needs to be consistent, and occur more than once an academic year. The Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies model is an example of being actively reflective on one’s own worldview and also the intersection of worldview by the client. This potentially can be tweaked to reflect higher education professionals and the students they work with in training sessions to help them be actively engaged in being self-reflective (Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies, n.d.).

It is also important for professionals to be aware of the political climate because it does tend to impact college students and the interactions they have with people who have different views. Political values tend influence White students’ openness about learning more about race influenced topics. Knowing how to connect with students who are not open or those who want more information is not a straight forward process. It is one that takes time, practice, but also needs engaged professionals who are willing to put in the work to meet these students where they are when they come to the institution.

From this study it became noticeable that those in the achieved category were the ones who initiated dialogue or sought out educational opportunities. Those in the unachieved category
did not. It is important for professionals, particularly at PWIs, to create intentional programming that targets the students who normally would not be in the audience. Incorporating this information in academic and non-academic settings is essential for the development of White students at PWIs. Having representation of different races in authoritative roles in the classroom, requiring a course that all new students must take to graduate, or even having a culturally competent section on a class syllabus would be beneficial in exposing students to this topic inside the classroom. There is a need for active participation of both the academic affairs and student affairs side of the institution for this to be effective. This is not an easy task by any means, but incorporating opportunities in non-traditional programming environments may be a start in reaching out to this population of White students.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

While this study provides more insight on the White racial consciousness of student at a PWI in a particular region, it also highlights room for more research in this area. I have identified four specific examples of future research, but please note that others are sure to exist.

The first area for future research would examine further how White students understand the idea of Whiteness. Although this study did have this as a component, I believe that having a study only dedicated to this could potentially produce insightful information on how these students view it, how they came to their beliefs, and any experience that occurred that made them change their perception of it.

Another area for future research would be to study White students’ White racial consciousness at different institutions types (ex. HBCUs, HSIs, community colleges) and in various regions to see what the similarities, differences and anomalies exist. Also, within this study potentially comparing their understanding of their race to students of color’s perception of
what it means to be White in the United States. This type of study has the potential to inform professionals of the disconnect that exists between their institutions’ mission to be inclusive and the perception of it to students and how to address it at their institution.

Another interesting area for research would be to compare White racial consciousness and self-authorship among students. Throughout this study, I noticed similarities in experiences of students depending on their classification in school and how far removed they were from the environment they were socialized in for the majority of their lives. Researching to see if these two concepts/theories correlate or are they just coincidental would create a new body of literature that does not exist, and could potentially have interesting results since these theories were not created to be used together.

Lastly, conducting a longitudinal case study on White students and their White racial consciousness at the beginning and end of their collegiate experience has not been done before. Although longitudinal studies are a bigger time commitment, this research would be a good opportunity to track what experiences change a White student’s understanding of their own race or what experiences and exposure keep it the same over a span of time.

**Conclusion**

In summary, White students and their White racial consciousness differ due to varying experiences before and during college. Understanding how these students perceive their race is essential in understanding what needs to be done in order to encourage opportunities for self-reflection amongst these students and ultimately make historically White environments more inclusive to those who do not identify as White. This study allowed for the participants and myself to begin to think critically about their race and how it is perceived in different environments, but also initiated these thoughts in some participants who had never considered
their race having any type of meaning before. This study has been such a learning opportunity for me and I hope that it has done so for the participants as well.
REFERENCES


KEY TERM REFERENCES


APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPLICATION

ACTION ON EXEMPTION APPROVAL REQUEST

TO: Victoria Callais
    Education
FROM: Dennis Landin
      Chair, Institutional Review Board
DATE: November 21, 2017
RE: IRB# E10791
TITLE: White Racial Consciousness among White Students at a PWI in the Southeast


Review Date: 11/20/2017
Approved X Disapproved

Approval Date: 11/21/2017 Approval Expiration Date: 11/20/2020

Exemption Category/Paragraph: 2a

Signed Consent Waived?: No

Re-review frequency: (three years unless otherwise stated)

LSU Proposal Number (if applicable):
Protocol Matches Scope of Work in Grant proposal: (if applicable)

By: Dennis Landin, Chairman

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING –
Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:
1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU’s Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects*
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
8. SPECIAL NOTE: When emailing more than one recipient, make sure you use bcc. Approvals will automatically be closed by the IRB on the expiration date unless the PI requests a continuation.

* All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU’s Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at http://www.lsu.edu/irb
APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Hello,

My name is Tori Callais and I am a Higher Education Administration Master’s student at LSU. I am working on my thesis research project titled, White Racial Consciousness among White Students at a PWI in the Southeast. The purpose of this study is to better understand the experiences of White students in the South and how they influence or are influenced by their racial identity.

For participation in the study, individuals must: (1) self-identify as White; (2) be an undergraduate or graduate student enrolled full time at LSU. This study has been approved by LSU’s Institutional Review Board. Interviews would take place at a time and location that was most convenient for you, and they will be recorded. Any information taken from the interviews in the final research document would be completely anonymous using a self-selected pseudonym. For additional information, please email me at vcalla1@lsu.edu.

I would greatly appreciate if you would be willing to help me and meet with me for an interview. If you would be interested in setting up an interview within the next few weeks, please follow the link below in order to let me know your availability.

Follow this link to the Survey:
INSERT LINK

Please contact me if you have any questions/comments/concerns about the interview or the research process in general.

Have a wonderful day,
Tori Callais

Tori Callais
Graduate Assistant
Title IX
Louisiana State University
Suite 123 University Administration Building, Baton Rouge, LA 70803
Pronouns: She/her/hers
vcalla1@lsu.edu | lsu.edu
Good Morning/Afternoon (Insert their name here),

Thank you again for participating in my Thesis research and for taking the time out to interview. I hope your semester has ended well and that you are enjoying the last few days of winter break! I wanted to reach out to allow you to express any thoughts, comments, or information you have had after reflecting on the questions that were asked during our interview. Again, this information is confidential and completely optional. If you do have any information you would like to add please email me with whatever you would like to share and in any format that you find necessary. If you do not have anything to add feel free to email me saying so, or I will take no response as such as well.

If you have any questions or comments please feel free to contact me at vcalla1@lsu.edu.

Have a wonderful day,
Tori Callais

Tori Callais
Graduate Assistant
Title IX
Louisiana State University
Suite 123 University Administration Building, Baton Rouge, LA 70803
Pronouns: She/her/hers
vcalla1@lsu.edu | lsu.edu
APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM

Please read this informed consent document carefully before you decide whether or not to participate in this study.

**Project Title:** White Racial Consciousness among White Students at a Predominately White Institution in the Southeast

**Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to describe white racial consciousness attitudes amongst white students at Louisiana State University.

**What you will be asked to do in the study:** An initial survey will be sent out to get your availability. You will be asked to meet one time with the researcher and will be interviewed based upon your availability. A follow up survey will be sent two weeks after the initial interview to allow you to express anything you did not mention and would like to have known or any reflection that you had after the interview ended.

**Time required:** Approximately one hour and 30 minutes.

**Anticipated Risks of Participation:** There are no anticipated risks for participants.

**Benefits/Compensation:** There is no compensation or other benefit to you for participation. Information gained from this research may benefit future education leaders in developing programs that help students become more culturally competent.

**Confidentiality:** Your identity will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will be used for each person so that names are not revealed. All identifying information will be removed from the data set. When the study is complete and the data is analyzed, the list of participants will be destroyed. Your name will not be used in any report. The consent forms will be stored in a locked cabinet SEPRATE from paper or electronic copies for a minimum of 3 years.

**Volunteer Participation:** Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating and you may withdraw at any time during the study if you choose to participate.

**Primary & Secondary Investigator Contacts:**
Tori Callais Phone: 225-328-3093 Email: vcalla1@lsu.edu

**Whom to contact if you have questions:** Please contact Dr. Joy Blanchard at 225-578-2192 or jblanchard@lsu.edu.

Who to contact about your rights in the study: Research at Louisiana State University involving human participants is overseen by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). For information about participant’s rights please contact: Institutional Review Board, Dr. Dennis Landin (Chair), 130 David Boyd Hall, Baton Rouge, LA 70803, (225) 578-8692.

______ I have read the informed consent.

______ I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

________________________________________________________________
Participant’s Signature Date
APPENDIX E: DEMOGRAPHIC SHEET

** Please only complete what you feel comfortable with and feel free to ask questions if you need any clarification**

Participant Name:
Participant Pseudonym:
Age:
Race:
Ethnicity:
Gender:
Classification:
Academic Field of Study:
Religion:
Political spectrum:
Interview Day:
Interview Time:
Location of Interview:
APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Project: White Racial Consciousness among White Students at a PWI in the Southeast Region

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore white racial consciousness among students at a large, public PWI in the Southeast region. Please remember to sign the consent form before we begin. All information shared during this interview and data collection will remain confidential and your identity will be protected. Do you have any questions at this time?

Questions:

1.) What are you involved in at LSU?
2.) How would you describe your cultural heritage?
3.) What was the racial make-up of your pre-college schooling?
4.) Have you ever had any teachers of color in any schooling before college? During college?
5.) Have you ever had any mentors of color?
6.) Have you taken a class where racism, privilege, and/or oppression have been discussed? If yes, what did you take away from that course?
7.) Have you ever participated in an assignment or event that was focused on educating on social justice issues? If so, did you enjoy the assignment(s)/event(s)? Would you participate in or attend more?
8.) What does it mean to be white to you?
9.) How would you define privilege?
10.) How would you define whiteness?
11.) How would you define racism?
12.) How would you define oppression?
13.) Do you believe in the concept of white privilege? Why or why not?
14.) What is the ‘American Dream’ to you?
15.) Have you heard of “pull yourself up by the bootstraps”? What does this mean to you? Do you agree with this or not?
16.) Do you like to talk about race? Why or why not?
17.) Have you ever used a racial slur before or do you currently use racial slurs in your vocabulary? If yes, please provide details.
18.) What is your opinion on Affirmative Action? Do you agree or disagree with it?
19.) Would you say that you shy away from conversations about race or enjoy these conversations? Please explain your answer.
20.) Do you believe that one race is better than another?
21.) What are some stereotypes you’ve heard of a race different from yours? Do you believe that they hold any truth?
22.) Do you believe that all races are treated equal in the United States?
23.) What is the racial make-up of your intimate friend group?
24.) Are you in favor or opposed to inter-racial relationships? Please explain your answer.
25.) Do you think the most recent presidential election had any influence on race relations in the United States? Please explain your answer.
26.) Do you find that you are impacted by the election in how you are perceived or how you perceive others?
27.) Is there anything else you would like to share?
VITA

Victoria Elizabeth Callais, from Denham Springs, Louisiana, graduated Cum Laude from Louisiana State University in 2016 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Liberal Studies with a concentration in Women and Gender Studies and minors in Sociology and Social Work. Victoria participated in many involvement areas during her undergraduate tenure including serving as a LSU Ambassador, orientation leader, orientation team leader, resident assistant, conference assistant, and STRIPES small group leader. In the Fall of 2016, she enrolled in the Master of Arts program in Higher Education Administration at Louisiana State University, where she maintained a graduate assistantship in Leadership and Involvement her first year and a graduate assistantship in Title IX her final year. She is currently a Master’s candidate and anticipates earning her degree in May of 2018.