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A Question of Comfort: Race, Whiteness, and the Creation of Diverse, Inclusive, and Engaged Learning Environments

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**A QUESTION OF COMFORT: RACE, WHITENESS, AND THE
CREATION OF DIVERSE, INCLUSIVE, AND ENGAGED
LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS**

A Dissertation Presented

by

H. ELIZABETH BRAUN

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2011

Anthropology

A QUESTION OF COMFORT: RACE, WHITENESS, AND THE
CREATION OF DIVERSE, INCLUSIVE, AND ENGAGED
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H. ELIZABETH BRAUN

Approved as to style and content by:

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Amanda Walker Johnson, Chair

_____
David Samuels, Member

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Joseph Berger, Member

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Elizabeth Chilton, Chair
Department of Anthropology

DEDICATION

To my husband Randy, who always makes the impossible feel possible

The first thing you do is to forget that i'm Black.
Second, you must never forget that i'm Black.
—Pat Parker, excerpt from *For the White Person Who Wants to Know How to Be My Friend*

Still So Many Things

There are still so many things to be told,
things we have lived, learned, observed;
and the meetings that occurred many times
and those that took place only once.

Every flower is waiting to be mentioned,
every handful of dust is worthy of note,
but only one among them will fit into the telling,
and of that one fragments only.

When it comes to memories, man is a multimillionaire,
but a pauper when it comes to recording them;
almost everything gets left out of a book,
and only bits and pieces, along with the dream remain.
—Sandor Weores (Translated by William Jay Smith)

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To Randy and Dexter, you are the center of my universe and the two loves of my life. Thank you for bringing me joy, home-cooked meals, lots of hugs, and a sense of wonder each and every day. I could not have embarked on or accomplished this without you.

ABSTRACT

A QUESTION OF COMFORT: RACE, WHITENESS, AND THE

CREATION OF DIVERSE, INCLUSIVE, AND ENGAGED

LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

MAY 2011

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Most colleges and universities in the United States today claim that "diversity" is an important institutional value, but it is not always clear what this term means or how "diversity" is actually experienced and understood by students at predominantly white institutions. This ethnographic study examines a predominantly white liberal arts woman's college in New England, applying data from participant observation, semi-structured interviews, autoethnography, and textual data. My research addresses three intersecting areas of inquiry: the experience of students attending a predominantly white institution in relation to issues of race and racial identity, institutional practices related to race, "diversity," and "culture," and examples of "white cultural practices" within the institution.

The study found that institutional discourse promotes an ideology that marks "students of color" as "other" and the embodiment of "diversity" and creates a dynamic where white students are placed in the role of cultural tourists. Throughout the college

community the invisibility and silences surrounding whiteness reinforced an ideology of white privilege.

The analysis focuses on four central themes or narratives that circulate through a predominantly white campus. The first theme is the articulation of "diversity" and the "diverse community" specifically through the lens of the college admissions process. The next theme is "culture" as understood through an examination of institutional sites where "culture" is named and deployed on campus such as student cultural organizations. The third looks at the invisibility of whiteness and "white culture." The final theme considers what happens on a predominantly white campus when there is a high profile racial conflict, or "racial incident."

The conclusion provides specific recommendations and interventions for the broader higher education community related to "re-framing" the "diverse community" and shifting towards the creation of "diverse, inclusive, and engaged learning environments." Possible interventions include integrating the academic mission of the college more closely with the goals of diversity and inclusion; providing more opportunities for white students to think critically about race and their own racial identity; and an increasing emphasis on the intersections and complexity of identity rather than a reliance on monolithic categories such as "students of color."

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Most colleges and universities in the United States today claim that "diversity" is an important institutional value, but it is not always clear what is meant by this term. Within the higher education setting "diversity" is often a more obscure and indirect way of talking about race; however, it is also meant to simultaneously encompass a broad array of identities: class, gender, nationality, religion, ability, et cetera. The enormous scope of issues and identities contained within this one word results in it being a term that can be perceived to mean everything and nothing.

In her linguistic anthropological analysis of "multiculturalism" and other related words such as "diversity" in higher education, Urciuoli notes that terms like these are problematic specifically because "what they actually signify may seem vague, underspecified, wobbly, even within a given field," and yet these terms are usually deployed with a sense that the meanings are "obvious and unproblematic" (1999: 289).[1] Since the emergence of the term and concept of "diversity" in higher education in the 1990s "diversity" has evolved over time to refer not only to racial demographics, racial inequality, or racial and other social identities. "Diversity" has also become a commodity that many colleges sell along with "leadership" as a marketable skill that can be obtained through higher education (Urciuoli 1999, 2009).

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[1] Urciuoli goes on to note that she initially referred to such terms as strategically empty shifters. "However it is not that they lack a signified, it is that they need not commit to any specific signified. So they have been redubbed strategically deployable shifters or SDSs: key elements of signification shift depending on the relationship, aims, and field in which an SDS is deployed; hence a shifter; and SDSs can be deployed to particular ends, hence strategic" (1999: 289).

Evolving definitions of "diversity" can be further explicated through Omi and Winant's (1994) uses of the terms "trajectory," "rearticulation," and "hegemony." Contested meanings of "diversity" are part of what Omi and Winant refer to as a "trajectory" or "the pattern of conflict and accommodation which takes shape over time between racially based social movements and the policies and programs of the state" (1994:78). Discussions of "diversity" within higher education originated from a social movement to increase demographic racial diversity at colleges and universities often through affirmative action programs. "Diversity" has undergone a series of "rearticulations" or "a process of redefinition of political interests and identities, through a process of recombination of familiar ideas and values in hitherto unrecognized ways" (Omi and Winant 1994:163 n.8).

The end result has been that "diversity" has been "rearticulated" as an "institutional goal" within higher education. This incorporation and absorption of "diversity" into institutional discourse becomes a hegemonic practice—or as Omi and Winant (1994, following Gramsci) explain, the combination of coercion and consent necessary for consolidation of rule. They further describe consent as being "extended to the incorporation by the ruling group of many of the key interests of subordinated groups" (1994:67). The use of "diversity" rather than—and often instead of—directly naming "race" provides further evidence of the success of what Omi and Winant (1994) refer to as the "neoliberal racial project" which they argue has promoted an ideology that it is better not to speak of race and which results in downplaying the significance of race.

I first began to think more deeply about the uses of "diversity" and its implications for higher education after spending several years working as an

administrator at a predominantly white liberal arts college, which I will refer to by the pseudonym Dexter College. I spent eleven years working as a student affairs professional at my field site, Dexter College, a small northeastern women's liberal arts college. The Dexter College campus exudes history, prestige, and a bucolic beauty. The ruddy brown rough cut stone buildings (many over 100 years old) are covered in ivy that gracefully cascades down their sides. The large expanses of open green spaces are filled with trees that are particularly glorious when festooned in their autumnal colors. Adirondack chairs are casually strewn around and serve as great perches for people-watching, socializing, and watching the seasons change. It's not unusual for students to claim that the beauty of the campus buildings and grounds was a prominent factor in their college decision-making process.

The population at Dexter is approximately 2,200 undergraduate students. At the time of my research the demographics of the college were as follows: the domestic student population was approximately 69% white, 8% Asian Americans, 4% Latina, and 4% African American and the international student population was roughly 15%.[2] The student population comes from 48 states and 70 countries. The campus is primarily residential with approximately 95% of all students living in on-campus housing. The college was known for its "diverse" population of students, particularly for a college of its size.

Dexter College clearly articulates the importance of "diversity" to its mission and emphasized that it should be cultivated and celebrated. It gives institutional support for student cultural organizations, cultural houses, and other programs and organizations for

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[2] At the time of this study, students who identified as multiracial were not broken out into a separate category but folded into the other existing categories.

African American, Latino, Asian American, and Native American (ALANA) students. The college website and publications feature photos from cultural shows and events as points of pride and as evidence of thriving campus "diversity."

I was trying to understand why domestic students of color on my campus continued to express dissatisfaction and frustration with their overall college experience, despite the college's expressed "commitment to diversity" and the things the college had put in place to support students of color. What caused the disconnect between our institutional intentions and the lived experience for many domestic students of color? In my role as a student affairs professional, primarily at small private liberal arts colleges, I have been both an observer and a participant in these discourses of race and "diversity." It was my professional experiences combined with my growing awareness of my own racial identity as a white woman that led me to pursue this research. In my work I have had the opportunity to witness how both colleagues and students interpret and experience the campus climate related to race and "diversity."

However, what I found was that different identities and standpoints within the institution impacted the ways people *experienced* the college's "diverse community." For example I have heard some white administrator colleagues express frustration about why students of color are still unhappy despite the many programs, departments, and institutional resources that have been devoted specifically to their needs as students of color. In contrast, many students of color have reported to me feelings of dissatisfaction with the college's commitment to diversity, painful experiences of individual and institutional racism, and a sense that there is an overall lack of support for them as students of color. They argue that the college puts more effort into getting them to come

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to campus than supporting them once they are there. These students describe a disconnect between the "diverse community" that is presented to them during the admissions process versus their actual day-to-day experience on campus as students of color. Other administrators and faculty members shared with me a sense of pride about what the College was doing to create a diverse, inclusive, and engaged learning environment, but were also concerned that our efforts were too diffuse and were hampered by resistance to change and the need to address systemic issues. These are just some examples of the multiplicity of experiences, viewpoints, and perspectives that are expressed through a variety of discourses about race, including everything from official college publications to casual student conversations in the dining hall.

I began my formal investigation of these issues by conducting two pilot studies where I interviewed students who identified as African-American, Latino, Asian-American, and multiracial. What I discovered through those studies was that the college was supporting an ideology which simultaneously held that race both does and does not matter (Pollock 2004). This ideology results in making race both visible and invisible on the campus. Further, the students talked candidly with me about their challenges navigating the overwhelming white culture of the campus. Their markedness on campus as "students of color" and the corresponding lack of markedness of white students and whiteness, which continued to be centered as normative, created a disorienting environment where it was often difficult for them to feel comfortable or safe.

These pilot studies also helped me to begin to explore my own positionality as a white woman who has lived and worked within higher education for almost 20 years. My primary goal (from my first Resident Advisor position as an undergraduate to my present

role as a Dean of Students) was always to help create inclusive learning communities in which all students have an equal opportunity to flourish, learn about themselves and others, and discover their life's passions. But my goals were not always easily obtainable. As a white woman, I spent many years invested in and operating from a place of "colorblindness" and, like many white people, didn't see myself as having a role to play in conversations about race on my campus. However, I realized—through conducting these pilot studies and my own reflection—that my silence actually spoke quite loudly about dynamics of race; specifically, I was reinforcing ideologies of white privilege and whiteness as "the norm." I also began to notice how my silence ran counter to my goal of creating diverse learning environments, particularly for domestic students of color.

Dexter College is far from unique in grappling with what are still critical questions for higher education: When and how should race be discussed? Is the best approach to race to adopt a colorblind attitude? What does a "commitment to diversity" mean and how should it be enacted? What does racial equality within the context of higher education mean today? How should colleges and universities respond to issues of racism?

I want to offer one recent example that demonstrates the complexity of contemporary issues of race within higher education. In 2007 the University of Delaware came under criticism from the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), a free speech organization, for a new residentially based education program. The program curriculum was designed to promote student dialogue on race, class, gender, sexuality and more through activities and discussion questions. FIRE argued that the program was "systematic thought reform" and that it pried too deeply into student beliefs and told them

what to think (Hoover 2007). The Residential Life staff argued that the program was part of a larger educational framework they had developed to promote citizenship and self-awareness. Ultimately the University decided to comply with FIRE's request to suspend the program. But as an article in the Chronicle of Higher Education pointed out,

> The conflict shows the difficulty of promoting meaningful discussions outside the classroom. . . . Politics aside, the uproar at Delaware is also a debate about comfort. In an era when colleges may view students as customers to keep happy, how many are willing to make their students uncomfortable in the name of learning, even for a few minutes. [Hoover 2007]

The theme that the college campus should be a "comfortable" place was one that was reiterated over and over again in my conversations with students at Dexter College. Their comments left me wondering about this question of comfort and how this question related to issues of race and the politics of "diversity" within a predominantly white college setting. In this dissertation I will argue that to make real progress in the creation of diverse, inclusive, and engaged learning environments, we need to first make visible and then reframe the discourses in higher education that lead to silence and "misrecognition" (Bourdieu 1977) related to race, "diversity," "culture," and whiteness. The reframing I will propose includes integrating the academic mission of the college more closely with the goals of diversity and inclusion; providing more opportunities for white students to view themselves as having a pivotal role in conversations about race; and decreasing reliance on monolithic, overly simplistic categories such as "students of color," shifting instead toward a model that embraces complexity and intersectionality of identity formation. Each of these interventions will require predominantly white institutions to exchange a concept of "diversity" that is "comfortable" for one that

directly engages the entire community in grappling together with the complexities of race in today's world.

As I have noted, within higher education "diversity" and race are intrinsically linked; "whiteness" is often invisibly present but unspoken and not part of campus discourses that circulate about race. One goal of this project is to disrupt the silencing of whiteness by solely examining individual experiences of students of color within higher education. Instead I sought to examine white students and the larger white cultural, organizational structures within these institutions. In his discussion of the "possessive investment in whiteness," Lipsitz argues for the need to look at the whole rather than focusing too narrowly on the individual, "As long as we define social life as the sum total of conscious and deliberative individual activities, we will be able to discern as racist only *individual* manifestations of personal prejudice and hostility. Systematic, collective, and coordinated group behavior consequently drops out of sight" (2006:20). Ferguson makes a related point regarding the ways that racial inequalities are produced within schools: "One is through institutional practices, and the other is through cultural representations of racial differences. Both operate in a covert and informal manner" (2000:19). These perspectives inform my own approach to present a "multi-sited" ethnography (Marcus 1995) treating students and their experiences from a variety of standpoints as one site alongside the institutional practices carried about by college administration along with the "culture" of place as the other site.

The second goal of this project is to examine what type of subjectivities are being cultivated amongst students who are participants in predominantly white college environments. I was struck by one student's depiction of trying to find her place within

the predominantly white environment of Dexter College. When we discussed how she experienced white culture on campus, Maria[3], a senior and a first-generation immigrant from the Dominican Republic, noted the fact that higher education was originally created for white, elite students and as a result she feels that she and other "students of color" have to carve out a space for themselves within this dynamic: "So I feel like I'm always . . . I feel like minorities are always trying to carve something that was not originally intended for them. But you still have the basic umbrella . . . maybe if you keep on working on it, it's [going to] ultimately look different." As Maria highlights, even as "students of color" make progress in changing the shape of higher education, they still have to contend with "the basic umbrella," which I would argue is white privilege and white culture.

Maria's comments and those I heard from other students prompted me to think about the institutional tensions that exist between notions of "diversity" that promote an image of global diverse citizenship and the expectations for students who are institutionally categorized as "students of color." Within the institutional definitions of "diversity," do "students of color" become trapped or directed toward a particular presentation of self that limits their possibilities for identity expression and exploration? How does the current narrative of race and "diversity" allow for fluidity?

Ultimately I hope that this project helps to shine a light on the challenges to and possibilities for the creation of a diverse, inclusive, and engaged learning environment within predominantly white colleges and universities. The way that I am conceiving of a "diverse, inclusive, and engaged learning environment" is informed by several sources.

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[3]All participants have been given pseudonyms.

Hurtado et al. (1999) conceptualize a diverse learning environment as one that takes into account multiple facets of campus climate including historical legacy of inclusion/ exclusion, structural diversity, psychological climate, and behavioral dimensions. What I find compelling about their model is how it considers the way that these different factors all contribute to the overall culture and environment. In a similar vein, a recent AAC&U report by Williams et al. propose a model of "inclusive excellence" for higher education that argues for coordinated organizational response that includes addressing the "disconnect between diversity and educational excellence" and "islands of innovations with too little influence on institutional structures" (2005:vii). Finally, I was inspired by what Melanie Bush refers to as her investigation into "everyday thinking" and "cracks in the wall of whiteness":

> This research aimed to illuminate the connection between everyday thinking and the institutions, policies, and programs that structure society. The primary objective was to identify routine mechanisms and dynamics of power that function to produce, maintain, and reinforce dominant narratives about race and openings (or as I call them, "'cracks' in the wall of whiteness") whereby these processes might be interrupted. [2004:2]

I hope to build on Bush's research by providing further examples and interrogation into both the patterns of "everyday thinking" that reinforce white privilege; I will refer to these as white cultural practices. I also want to add to her list of "cracks" or areas where I saw possibilities for interrupting these practices.

When I began this research, I thought of the ultimate goal as the creation of a diverse and inclusive learning environment, an environment that balanced having a "structural" or numerical "diversity," but that would also be inclusive[4] signaling a

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[4]My use of "inclusive" is meant to highlight that all students are *included* in "diversity," and also follows Williams et al. Inclusive Excellence Change Model (IE), "In the IE Change Model, diversity is no longer envisioned as a collection of static pieces—a programmatic element here, a compositional goal for the student body there. Within the IE Change Model, *diversity is a key component of a comprehensive*

departure from a conceptualization of "diversity" that excluded whiteness. However, by the time I concluded my research, I felt that I needed to add another descriptor: "engaged." My use of "engaged" in this context is meant to underscore the need for all students and more broadly all members of the college community to be active and take ownership of the creation of this learning environment. Too many times I have seen people, particularly white people, conceive of "diversity" as something that can be passively received from people of color, instead of them taking ownership for their own process of education, self-reflection, and action toward creating racial equality. Finally and most importantly I refer to the centrality of the learning environment to emphasize the necessity of the integration of race, "diversity," and the academic mission of predominantly white institutions.

It is my intention for this research to offer suggestions for policy changes, and encourage my colleagues and students, especially those who are white, to join me in this particular conversation and in learning to see the potential of the college campus in a brand new way. Hence, I believe that this study may be useful in helping to improve the educational environment for all students, opening up new possibilities for community reflection, growth, and change.

A Note on Terminology

As I've already mentioned, many terms that are related to race—like "diversity" and "culture"—have become so saturated with multiple meanings that they can feel inadequate or misleading. Throughout my writing I constantly grappled with how and

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strategy for achieving institutional excellence—which includes, but is not limited to, the academic excellence of all students in attendance and concerted efforts to educate all students to succeed in a diverse society and equip them with sophisticated intercultural skills" (2005:3).

when to use these terms in ways that lifted up their shortcomings, while still recognizing their practical utility as recognizable terms. I don't know how successful I've been in this regard, but I at least want to be explicit about these challenges.

As an anthropologist, my multiple uses of the term "culture" felt particularly fraught. In this dissertation I use "culture" in two distinct ways. The first is when I'm referring to "institutional culture," "campus culture," or the "culture of higher education." In these instances my use of culture is most closely related to Bourdieu's concept of "habitus."[5] Related to this is when I use culture in reference to "white culture" and "white cultural practices." My goal here is to help bring visibility to hidden discourses of whiteness. When I use the term "white cultural practices" I am directly referring to practices that reinforce white privilege and whiteness as normative. My second use is when "culture" is used as a modifier for entities within higher education such as "cultural organizations" or "cultural houses." Using "culture" in these ways does not mean that I view these "cultures" as monolithic, frozen, unified entities; rather I engage these conceptions more as a series of overlapping discourses and as a way of highlighting ruptures in the idea of "culture" as universal truth.

An even thornier issue for me was my use of the terms "student of color" and "multiracial student." Unlike many studies on race in education (Foster 2003, 2005; Bettie 2003; Aries 2008; Fordham 1996; Lee 1994; Ferguson 2001; Feagin et al. 1996), I decided to not focus on a specific racial group, but rather to examine the experiences of domestic students with a range of racial and ethnic backgrounds. Following Pollock

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[5] As Bourdieu elaborates, "The habitus is not only a structuring structure, which organizes practices and the perception of practices, but also a structured structure; the principle of division into logical classes which organizes the perception of the social world is itself the product of internalization of the division into social classes" (1984:170).

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(2004) I was interested in examining when and how racial lines and categorizations were drawn around students, both by the students themselves and by the institution. Pollock notes in her finding that these types of "lump-sum" racial terms still can serve an important function,

> In keeping simple racial identifications strategically available for inequality analysis despite their startling diversity of identities, Columbus students demonstrated that racial categories are in fact always birthed in inequality contexts—and that in a nation with a legacy of simple-race logic, negotiating toward equality will accordingly require using "racial" categories strategically even as we alternately call them into question. [2003:20]

While the term "students of color" may be strategically deployed in productive ways particularly by students who are categorized in this way, I know that it is also deeply problematic because of the ways that it universalizes the experiences of very distinctive racial and ethnic groups. One of the goals of my research project was to problematize and explore the use of this term, particularly the ways that it reinforces white students as "the norm" and places any student from a non-white racial group into an "other" or marked category. As Pollock notes, "Race language is indeed itself a powerfully simple force: we must *become* race group members, or we must negotiate and resist so becoming, every time we are referred to in racial terms; and talking racially does prompt listeners to see the world anew in racialized ways" (2004:5). This was a dilemma I had to confront throughout my writing: I was continuing to use a term that could end up reinforcing the very idea that I was trying to undermine—that students of color are a monolithic group whose varied experiences can be contained under a single umbrella.

I experimented with a number of different phrasings and found them all either inadequate or too linguistically clumsy. In the end, similarly to "diversity" and "culture," I decided to continue to use the term "students of color" to refer to the collective of

students that identify themselves as African American, Latino, Asian American, and Native American. Of course this is simply another set of racial categories that lump together massive groups of people from racial backgrounds that are unique based on their nationality, ethnicity, neighborhood, et cetera. But in the context of many colleges and universities, including Dexter College, all of these students become "students of color" in the eyes of the institution once they check a box on their admissions application. What I have attempted to do is to let the students' individual voices and experiences shine through as a way of working against the notion that there is a unified "student of color" experience. But throughout I do examine what it means for students to be put into this institutionally constructed category and some of the ways that students still find utility in this loaded category as a point of resistance and the benefits of "strategic essentialism" (Spivak 1995).

I want to make a final comment on two related terms, "multiracial student" and "first-/second-generation immigrant." I've highlighted both of these sub-groups throughout because one of my key findings was that many of these students had a distinctive perspective on issues of race within the campus community context. Most of these students would typically also be lumped into the "student of color" category by the college and I believe that their stories and experiences help to disrupt the notion of a monolithic "student of color" category. When I use the term "multiracial student," I'm referring to any student who identifies as having a background of two or more racial groups. Whenever possible I provide more detail about specific student participant's multiracial backgrounds to give more of a sense of their perspective. Similarly I noted when student participants identified as first-generation immigrants (born in a foreign

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country) or second-generation immigrants (one or both of their parents were born in a foreign country). Both of these groups are some of the fastest-growing populations on college campuses in the United States and there is a real need for more in-depth research about their experiences. I found their experiences to be particularly compelling and insightful in considering the current limitations of how higher education thinks about race and diversity and where we should be looking in the future.

Outline of the Dissertation

To frame my investigation I chose to focus on four central themes or narratives that circulate through a predominantly white campus. Each of these narratives is co-constructed by the students and the institution and shapes the way that students think about race and ethnicity and the overall culture of their college experience. The first theme I examine in Chapter 3 is "diversity," specifically through the lens of the college admissions process. I examine the way students receive institutional messages about "diversity" and the ways that they are categorized by the institution. This chapter also includes an exploration of what happened when I helped introduce a new pre-orientation program at Dexter College that focused on intercultural dialogue and issues of race and ethnicity.

In Chapter 4 I look at the theme of "culture" specifically by examining institutional sites where "culture" is named and deployed: student cultural organizations, cultural shows or programs, and cultural houses. Chapter 5 will focus on white cultural narratives, the invisibility of whiteness, and manifestations of white privilege on campus. The final theme I examine in Chapter 6 is about what happens on a predominantly white campus when there is a high profile racial conflict. I use three racial conflicts or "racial

incidents" that I experienced while at Dexter College as illustrative examples. Lastly, the

conclusion provides recommendations for the broader higher education community

related to "re-framing" the "diverse community." I also highlight several examples of

"cracks" in the walls of whiteness that I observed at Dexter College.

CHAPTER 2

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK, LITERATURE REVIEW,
AND METHODOLOGY**

My research examines how education constructs academic normativity in ways that claim to render race invisible while actually accenting race. On one hand, educators emphasize the importance of changing student demographics including increasing numbers of "students of color," but on the other hand conservative scholars complain that higher education is now ruled by "multiculturalism" (Feagin et al. 1996:4). Yet, there is very little acknowledgment that the overwhelming majority of United States colleges and universities continue to be populated predominantly by white students. Institutional attention to and acknowledgment of whiteness and white privilege is scarce, thus reproducing systems of inequality within education and beyond since the cultural capital acquired within education carry over into other stages of a student's life.

The frame that I used to conceptualize my study centers on how the construction of race, power, and privilege within predominantly white colleges and universities reflects the sociohistorical context of the constantly shifting dynamics of an interactive process of "racial formation," which includes the development, maintenance, and rearticulation of "white public space" (Page and Thomas 1994; Hill 1999) and the manipulation and negotiation of racial categories discourses (Foucault 1990, 1997, 2003; Hardt and Negri 2000; Hill 2008; Omi and Winant 1994; Williams 1977). I have organized my theoretical framework and my literature review around three thematic areas: (1) social reproduction theories of education; (2) critical race theory, theories of racial formation, and racial identity development theory; (3) theories of whiteness, white cultural practices, and white public space.

Social Reproduction Theories of Education

Following Bourdieu, I construe education as a major source of indoctrination and "inculcation" of students, faculty, and staff into regarding ideologies of race and white privilege in the United States. As Bush argues, "Schools, and the domain of education, provide social groups with different types of knowledge in order to reproduce the social division of labor. They distribute and legitimate forms of knowledge, values, and languages, and style that constitute the dominant culture and its interests and act as part of the state apparatus" (2004:12). Reed-Danahay adds that, "Bourdieu felt that if you want to understand systems of power in modern societies, you must look to the educational system" (2004:38). Bourdieu argues that the construction of the educational system favors the elite classes and assists them in maintaining their dominance in society, in a similar way to the system of aristocratic titles which helps to differentiate and create hierarchies of power.

For Bourdieu, hierarchies of power are constituted and maintained through a system of acquiring "academic capital" or "the guaranteed product of the combined effects of cultural transmission by the school (the efficiency of which depends on the amount of cultural capital directly inherited from the family)" (1984:23). One of the overarching goals for many students attending colleges and universities in the United States is the accumulation of "cultural capital"[1] and the possibility of class mobility. In her work with Latino/a students, Urciuoli notes that a student's racial identity within the context of higher education is less about their connection to a national identity but rather, "a form of belonging to a nation at a critical junction in a person's life in a particular

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[1]"Cultural capital" is related to "academic capital," but has a much broader scope and in particular relates to family background and circumstances.

institution whose ends are education, class mobility, and particular forms of socialization" (2003a:157). For students of color, attaining "success" often means adopting the dominant cultural ideology, i.e. white culture. Urciuoli (1999, 2003, 2009) has also noted the growing identification of "diversity" and "multicultural" as attractive commodities produced and generated by higher education to be consumed by students. As Urciuoli argues, higher education has increasingly marketed "diversity" as a distinctive piece of "cultural capital" that students can obtain as part of their college experience which will help them to be successful in the job market (where discourses about the value of "diversity" and being able to work in "diverse groups" frequently circulate).

Many landmark studies of the educational system have utilized theories of social reproduction to examine issues of class inequalities (Willis 1981), gender (Holland and Eisenhart 1990), and intersections of race and class (MacLeod 1995) and gender, race, and class (Bettie 2003). These studies all critiqued the notion that dominant ideologies simply determined students' actions, and argued rather that students actively negotiate and even oppose social norms within the educational setting incorporating their experiential knowledge and social networks. MacLeod further argues, "The interface between the cultural and structural is critical to our understanding of social reproduction. To capture this relationship, the agency-structure dualism must be bridged by an analysis of the interpenetration of human consciousness and structural determinants" (1995:136). Following these studies, I utilize an approach that seeks to understand both the cultural and structural components of Dexter College as well as how students make meaning of their college experience in relation to race and racial identity.

While Bourdieu's focus is on the reproduction of social class hierarchies, several researchers have applied his theories specifically to the reproduction of racial inequalities (Horvat 1999; Diamond et al. 2004; Ferguson 2001). Horvat et al. examine the dominant organizational "habitus" of an elite all-girls high school which they describe as, "white, wealthy, and marked by a sense of 'oblivious entitlement'" (1999:326). The members of the school community continually assume that everyone is operating under the same world view and set of circumstances, which is specifically white and upperclass. Horvat et al. (1999) argue that despite recent increases in diversity of the student body, a white organizational habitus is maintained through a variety of measures: the nearly all white staff, faculty, and school board; all-white representations in hallway photos; and the Eurocentric curriculum. These along with direct and indirect racist comments made by white members of the school community contribute to the maintenance of white privilege and the feeling of the few African American students that they are defined as "other."

Horvat et al. (1999) describe the ways that this othering or distancing creates a great deal of pain for the African American students and results in them "whitening" their speech and behavior in the hopes of fitting in. There are many things that the African American students take away from this high school experience: a sense of their "place" in the predominantly white society, knowledge of how to navigate the white world, the ability to alter their behavior to fit into a white environment, and a clear path to continuing their education at a selective college. Horvat et al. (1999) conclude that the organizational habitus of this white elite high school reinforces for the African American students that their best chance at educational and social mobility is to endure the "symbolic violence" and to "whiten" their behavior.

Diamond et al. (2004) similarly employed the concept of "organizational habitus" to analyze the "pervasive stream of beliefs, expectations, and practices that flow throughout a school" (76). In their study comparing five urban elementary schools where each school had a distinct racial and socioeconomic makeup, they found that intersections of race and class resulted in an organizational school habitus that produced a particular set of expectations and sense of responsibility for the students attending each school (Diamond et al. 2004). For example, one of their key findings was that in the predominantly white, the predominantly Asian, and the African-American middle-income elementary schools teachers tended to focus on students' assets, while at the two low-income African-American elementary schools teachers focused on students' deficits.

Ferguson (2001) also uses the work of Bourdieu as part of her primary theoretical framework. She describes Bourdieu's link to the "radical perspective" of schooling theory that

> assumes that educational institutions are organized around and reflect the interests of the dominant groups in the society; that the function of school is to reproduce the current inequities of our social, political, and economic system. It proposes that the crucial element for creating and reproducing social inequality is a 'hidden curriculum' that includes such taken-for-granted components of instruction as differences in modes of social control and the regulation of relations of authority, and the valorization of certain forms of linguistic and cultural expression. [Ferguson 2001:50]

Ferguson notes that the elementary school where she conducted her study consistently reinforces the message that success and failure is based on the individual, their actions and choices. This messaging masks the fact that because the school subscribes to the values system of white middle class students, it is these students who have greater chances and opportunities for success within that system. Ferguson's description here is

resonant with Bourdieu's concept of "misrecognition" and the ways that symbolic capital is misrecognized as legitimate rather than arbitrary (Bourdieu 1990).

In my research I am interested in building on these studies and also contributing to Bourdieu's specific mission which Grenfell characterizes as "to render visible these invisible operations as a way of making available the possibility at least of democratizing the product and processes" (1998:22). I would argue that this is a critical starting point for any project of social change, the ability to interrogate the "common sense" values and practices and the underlying structures of power and privilege behind them. As Bourdieu states, "The question itself has to be questioned . . . There is no way out of our game of culture; and one's only chance of objectifying the true nature of the game is to objectify as fully as possible the very operations which one is obliged to use in order to achieve that objectification" (1984:12).

Bourdieu's theory of "symbolic domination" or "symbolic violence" further describes the ways that institutional structures and practices manipulate the experiences of "students of color" and can result in a type of symbolic violence against them:

> Thus this system contains only two ways (and they prove in the end to be just one way) of getting and keeping a lasting hold over someone: gifts or debts, the overtly economic obligations of debts, or the 'moral,' 'affective' obligations created and maintained by exchange, in short, overt (physical or economic) violence, or symbolic violence, the gentle, invisible form of violence, which is never recognized as such, and is not so much undergone as chosen. [1997 (1977):191-192]

In the case of my research I consider how the student of color is invited into the predominantly white setting with the promise of receiving an education and is granted access to a variety of opportunities. In exchange for accepting this "gift" of an education the student of color is expected to simultaneously be a symbol of the institution's

"commitment to diversity" and educate others in the community about their difference, all while upholding and maintaining whiteness as normative.

Hardt and Negri's concept of "differential inclusion" (following Deleuze and Guattari) which argues that within the contemporary racial order differences are still recognized, but they are "celebrated" and "managed" within an inclusive order is particularly helpful in this case (2000:201). Hardt and Negri (2000) use Deleuze and Guattari to further explicate how the loss of boundaries and the lack of an inside/outside dynamic in the imperial era support this mode of racial domination: "Deleuze and Guattari challenge us to conceive of racist practice not in terms of binary divisions and exclusion but as a strategy of differential inclusion. No identity is designated as Other, no one is excluded from the domain, there is no outside" (Hardt and Negri 2000:194). According to Deleuze and Guattari race is always established in "degrees of deviance in relation to the White-Man face" (Hardt and Negri 2000:193), which locates whiteness at the center of this "inside."

The conceptualization of a "diverse community" is a particularly good example of this "strategy of differential inclusion." This concept equates the "college community" with a "diverse community" and discursively erases boundaries and subverts the obvious inside/outside dynamics that characterize "older" racisms as referenced by Deleuze and Guattari. Yet, there remains the institutional and cultural practice of "othering" which is apparent in the categorization of "students of color" and the perception that they are distinct from and should be understood in relation to whiteness.

As these studies show education plays a pivotal role in constructing and contributing to "common sense" ideologies of race, class, and gender. Students encounter

these ideologies with their own prior experiential knowledge and must construct their

own interpretation of the organizational habitus, which may involve acceptance,

resistance, or both. My research aims to explore the intersection of the institutional and

the individual with a goal of making visible institutional hegemonic practices,

specifically related to race.

<u>Theories of Whiteness, White Culture, and White Public Space</u>

This study also serves to build on several recent studies in educational settings

that examine white students, whiteness, and white cultural practices (Pollock 2004;

Urciuoli 1999, 2003, 2009; Perry 2002; Bush 2004; Bettie 2003; Castagno 2008; Feagin

et al. 1996; Ferguson 2000; Fordham 1996; Horvat and Antonio 2000; Villanueva 1996;

Aries 2008; and Hurd 2008). Several of these studies specifically examined language and

the ways that students and specifically white students and other community members talk

about race (or don't talk about race) within educational settings (Pollock 2004; Urciuoli

1999, 2003, 2009; Bush 2004; Bettie 2003; Castagno 2008). For example, Bush (2004)

found that white students tend not to want to talk about race or are very tentative in doing

so for fear of being labeled "racist." Other researchers examined racial identity

development in white students; Perry (2002) found that the more interaction that white

students had with students of different racial backgrounds the more complex their

understanding of their own racial identity became. Bush (2004) found that white students

rarely or never thought about their racial identity and that they felt that their racial

identity was of little relevance to their life experiences. Bettie (2003), Horvat and

Antonio (2000) and others noted the whiteness of the school curriculum and the physical

space of the school and its influence on the school's organizational habitus.

Within the realm of higher education whiteness and white culture is often expressed through silence and silencing practices which seek to support the assertion that race is no longer an issue within education (Bush 2004; Castagno 2008; Hill 2008; Harper and Patton 2007; Perry 2002; Pollock 2004; Urciuoli 1999, 2003). Castagno in her study of teachers in two different middle schools examines "how educators' silence around race result in the legitimation of Whiteness" (2008:319) with a particular focus on the ideological and institutional aspects of whiteness rather than one on racial identity. Castagno diagrams "one process through which Whiteness is entrenched in schools" as a self-perpetuating cycle that includes: "the rationalization of colormuteness; legitimation of meritocracy; continuation of business-as-usual schooling; maintenance of inequity and the status quo; and perpetuation of prior belief in meritocracy" (330). Following Castagno, my study examines the assemblage of discourse and practices within a predominantly white college that are part of a generative cycle that uses silence to construct the invisibility of whiteness, which in turn reinforces the hegemony and dominance of those who most benefit from whiteness and reproduces between the structures and experiences of racial inequality.

Frankenberg's (1993) definition of whiteness offers some insights into how this silence is constructed by linking three dimensions: "First, whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a 'standpoint,' a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, 'whiteness' refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed" (1). A central focus of my research is this third facet of whiteness: the investigation of "white cultural practices," specific practices "enacted by dominant racial subjects" (Page 1998:60) that result in the

preservation of white privilege. Page's approach requires the researcher to identify and analyze practices that often go unnamed and remain un-theorized due to the silence installed by the pervasiveness of racial control being exercised to preserve white privilege in institutions and white supremacy in the nation and world. White cultural practices can be difficult to identify due to the overarching discourse of "whiteness as normative" which contributes to their invisibility (Frankenberg 1993).

The invisibility and "common sense" nature of whiteness means that these white cultural practices often become unconscious habit for both white people and people of color. According to Page, "When we focus too heavily on describing the effects and experience of racism and pay no attention to the white cultural practices enacted by dominant racial subjects to preserve their entitlement to white privilege, we miss the point. We must systematically document and analyze white cultural practices if we want to resolve the race issue and ameliorate its intentional effect: racialized global tension" (1998:60). In addition to documenting within a college setting the white cultural practices involved with maintaining the campus as a white public space that is predominantly populated by whites, I also examine these practices as a primary tactic in the preservation of white privilege and white supremacy (Page 1998:60).

Perry's (2002) and Feagin et al's (1996) descriptions of racialized space within educational settings also shape my conceptualization of race and whiteness within higher education. Perry describes how racial spaces embody racial meanings within the two high schools she was studying: "in part because one racial group or another was numerically predominant, but also because certain use values of the space or practical behaviors within them simultaneously reproduced and constituted particular racialized styles or

stereotypes" (2002:63). Feagin et al. argue that "space plays a very active role in social life. Social relations are physically structured in material space, and human beings often view space expressively and symbolically" (49). In their study of a predominantly white university Feagin et al. found that the campus operates as a racialized space where African American students receive overt and covert messages reinforcing that they don't belong in the space and that the space is a white space. This sense of white space is exacerbated by white students' denial of racism being an issue at the university and complaints about Black student "self-segregation."

White cultural practices are undertaken by agents who circulate the discourses that use institutional resources to construct "white public space" as the venues where the advantages of structural racism are reproduced; and these spaces tend to be reinvented over time in the service of maintaining white privilege (Page and Thomas 1994:111). An important component of white public space that Page notes is how these "symbolic and material spaces" are propagated "through coercion and partly through deception and seduction, but it more often endures through the routine bureaucratic production and dissemination of mass-produced information" (1997). Given these insights, my research analyzes how, through its discourse, the actions of its community members, and its symbolic and material space one predominantly white college is an example of "white public space," with a goal to have this institutional case study point to broader implications for higher education as a whole.

The lack of an institutional interrogation of its own whiteness is reinforced by the historical construction of a racial binary of white and "other" established during colonialism (Fabian 2002; Fanon 2004; c.f. Said 2000). This insider-outsider dichotomy

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formed during colonialism helped to promote and solidify an inherent link between "whiteness" and an "American" identity over the course of time (Bush 2004; Fordham 2008; Hill 2008; Morrison 1993; Bettie 2003). This definition has been expanded by white cultural practices linking the identity of whiteness to success in United States society (Fordham 1996, 2008; Hill 2008; Omi and Winant 1994). The United States is similar to any nation where the "citizens who are members of the dominant culture will not have a collective definition beyond the national identity nor a sense of having a culture" (Perry 2002: 96). Students are socialized into this idea of American culture as interchangeable with white culture through the educational system.

I think that it is critical to include the concept of whiteness in my analysis because as Bush states, "The concept of whiteness has powerful utility as a means to critique systemic patterns of racial inequality. It reveals the ways in which whites benefit from a variety of institutional and social arrangements that often appear (to whites) to have nothing to do with race" (2004:15). Naming, identifying, and analyzing whiteness in discourse and culture is a central method for both making whiteness visible, which in turn interrupts the power it maintains due in large part to its invisibility and amorphousness. Some of the specific practices that I explore in my research include: lumping and homogenizing people of color into one group or category; invisibility of "white" as a race and a culture; marking "students of color" as "other"; colorblindness and the rhetoric that "race does not matter;" race as a taboo topic especially for white people; and white people embracing "diversity" as "cultural tourists" or observers.

Theories of Racial Formation and Racial Identity Development

I also draw on several theories to examine the institutional structures and

mechanisms that relate to the flow of logic into power and racial formations including

Omi and Winant's (1994) "racial formation," Gramsci's (1988) "common sense" and

Hill's (2008) "folk theories of racism." Omi and Winant define "racial formations" as the

> sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed. . . . First, we argue that racial formation is a process of historically situated *projects* in which human bodies and social structures are represented and organized. Next we link racial formation to the evolution of hegemony, the way in which society is organized and ruled. [1994:55-56]

Gramsci's (1988) concept of "common sense" or a conception of the world that attempts

to make sense of contradictory information by accepting certain ideologies passively and

uncritically: "Many elements in popular common sense contribute to people's

subordination by making situations of inequality and oppression appear to them as natural

and unchangeable" (Forgacs 1988:421). Omi and Winant (1994) describe Gramsci's

concept of "common sense" as a way for dominant groups "to elaborate and maintain a

popular system of ideas and practices—through education, the media, religion, folk

wisdom, etc" (67). The result is that "common sense" facilitates agents of racial

domination in the perpetuation of white privilege.

Hill's (2008) "folk theories of racism" (following Gramsci) and her identification

of white racism as a set of loose cultural projects (following Omi and Winant 1994, Page

1997) are also useful in understanding the maintenance of racial inequality in higher

education and in the United States. As Hill (2008) points out, people who are the direct

beneficiaries of this system are most likely to support the "common sense" perspective

(34). They shape these common sense ideologies or, as Hill (2008) calls them, codified "folk theories" related to racism into specific projects. Hill identifies four such projects:

> (1) the production of a taxonomy of human types; (2) the assignment of individuals and groups within the taxonomy of types through 'racialization' or 'racial formation' (Omi and Winant 1994); (3) the arrangement of these types in a hierarchy; and (4) the movement of resources, both material and symbolic, from the lower levels of the hierarchy to the upper levels in such a way to elevate Whiteness and denigrate and pejorate Color. [2008:20-21]

Hill is arguing here that white privilege is produced as an outcome of such projects. My research aims to identify where institutional structures within higher education support or further these projects and what "common sense" ideologies related to race are circulating and propagated within higher education.

Related to the issue of white cultural practices is the question: How do these practices impact racial performances, racial identity development, and the subjectivity of African American, Latino, Asian American, Native American, and multiracial students within a predominantly white institution? The placement of African American, Latino, Asian American, Native American, and multiracial students into a discrete "student of color" category ends up operating in a similar fashion to Mohanaram's description of the way that a woman's body serves a triple function to: "encode boundaries, reproduce sameness, and to reveal difference simultaneously" (1999:61). Minh-ha writes at length about the limitations of being placed into a "special" category; in her case she is speaking to the category of Third World women, "Difference or uniqueness or special identity is both limiting and deceiving" (1989:95). She further comments, "It seems quite content with reforms that, at best, contribute to the improvement and/or entanglement of the identity enclosure, but do not, in any way, attempt to remove its fence" (1989:96).

My research adds to several studies that have attempted to interrogate and trouble the simplification of racial categories. In her study of "race groups" Pollock (following Barth 1969) examines the dual process in which a high school drew lines around students that categorized them as race-group members and in which the students at the school drew lines around themselves as race-group members (2003:10). By focusing on "race words," Pollock was able to uncover the ways that everyone in the community were co-creating "racial orders" together.

Lee (1994) and Foster (2005) critique monolithic racial categorizations by illustrating the variety in perspective and attitudes within students in these categories. Lee provides a critique of Ogbu's work on the achievement of voluntary and involuntary minorities stating that his framework helps re-inscribe the idea that Asian Americans are a "monolithic group with shared achievement levels and shared attitudes toward schooling" (1994:414). She utilizes data from an ethnographic study on identity development amongst Asian American high school students to illustrate the intragroup differences between these students. While acknowledging that "perceptions regarding future opportunities and attitudes toward schooling are linked" (1994:427) as Ogbu argued, Lee identifies significant variation in those perceptions and attitudes. Finding "relation to whiteness" a common theme, she explores how students are affected by white privilege in a variety of ways.

Similarly Foster's ethnography illustrates different philosophies among African American high achieving college students, which he defines as "race conscious" versus "ethnic conscious." The former subscribed to the "historically rooted ideology of Black uplift" or the ideology that "African Americans as a people that strive and thrive against

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all odds" (2005:35). The latter were first- or second-generation African immigrants who saw themselves as members of the Black community, but have bought into the myth that African Americans are academically under-performing and so choose to identify themselves and their success in opposition to this group. The diversity of perspectives that Foster found between domestic students and immigrant students is a theme that was echoed in my own research.

As both Lee (1994) and Foster (2005) identify, too often "students of color" are grouped into a monolithic identity which is another example of white privilege. White students are allowed and expected to embody a variety of perspectives, while African American students or more broadly, "students of color" are narrowly defined and understood. Foster (2005) argues that more study needs to be done in order to understand cultural transmission of these ideologies and how students develop their belief systems. One of my primary areas of investigation was to look for how domestic "students of color" and white students responded to racial categorization as imposed by peers, the institution, and through self-definition.

In other words, Mohanaram (quoting Foucault) argues, "it is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our own social order, it is rather that the individual is *carefully fabricated in it*, according to a whole technique of forces and bodies" (1999:67). "Students of color" are fabricated into a category of "other" and difference throughout their educational experiences. Ferguson argues that, "In this contemporary racial formation the category of race has increasingly been defined through cultural rather than biological difference. Black people, in this form of racism,

can only redress their condition by rejecting the cultural modes that make them different"
(2000:20).

In order to analyze the student of color racial identity development process in
response to and in relation to the culture of a predominantly white campus, I will apply
Bettie's (2003) and Fordham's (2008) definitions of identity as performance. While
Bettie's focus is on class, her definition is directly applicable to race. She describes class
as performance or a "conscious attempt at passing" and she reworks Butler's notion of
"performativity" to make a distinction between performance and performativity
(2003:52-53). Bettie argues that "the subject is constructed by the performance" and that
there is no agent that exists prior to the performance (2003:52-53). In trying to
understand Mexican-American and white working class girls' process of identity
formation, Bettie found that

> Examining the process of identity formation, the ways in which the girls construct
> themselves in and are constructed by discourse, was in part a process of discovering what
> preexisting cultural discourses girls tap into to narrate their identities. Through their self-
> narrations they presented the intersection of those contradictory discourses that construct
> their subjectivity. [2003:195]

Bettie (2003) examines the ways that the students intertwine race and class, for example
Mexican-American girls' imaginings of "acting white" as a middle/upper class version of
whiteness. She also observes that the common usage of the verb "acting" when
describing an identity performance indicates that students see their actions as a
performance. In my own research I am interested in looking for how both domestic
"students of color" and white students utilize patterns of behavior and pre-existing
cultural discourses related to race that play a role in constructing their subjectivity within
the milieu of a predominantly white institution.

Related to issues of racial identity and performance are the concepts of "imagined community" and "racial authenticity" as well as the "myth of self-segregation." Urciuoli (2003a) in her examination of the contradictions faced by "multicultural" students within a predominantly white college environment describes the particular ways that race and culture, specifically for Latino students, help form a type of "imagined community." Urciuoli (1999, 2003a, 2009) and others specifically have focused on cultural organizations as a site that informs how a "multicultural imaginary" is constructed within predominantly white educational environments. Bettie (2003) and Urciuoli (1999, 2003a, 2009) both underscore the intersections between race and class that are expressed through participation in cultural organizations. Urciuoli found that "the students who are mainstays of the Latino, Asian, African American organizations are from predominantly working-class families, often of immigrant backgrounds. They are also the students most involved in multicultural programming" (2009:26). In contrast, Bettie (2003) found that in the high school she studied that it was Mexican-American middle class students who were more likely to be active participants in student cultural organizations. In both examples a student's class background played a role in their participation in cultural organizations, even though class remained unnamed.

In an earlier article Urciuoli explains that cultural organizations, "have the job of creating a multicultural imaginary that enhances the college. In an 87% U.S. white school, this means a considerable investment of effort in performing 'their culture' to the school at large, often referred to as 'educating the community'" (1999:292-293). My research builds on the work that Urciuoli has done on interrogating this "multicultural imaginary." I am particularly interested in understanding how the institutionally defined

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concept of a "diverse community" within a predominantly white college environment helps support and create a particular type of "multicultural imaginary."

Against the multicultural imaginary, schools and students construct the discourses of "self-segregation," a chronic discourse always linked to students of color and/or international students. Ironically, predominantly white institutions themselves create and maintain structures where students of color are separated and singled out for their difference. As Newswanger points out, "In terms of student life, the presence of white majorities in many campuses residences is rarely debated, whereas self-segregation of Black students is a frequent source of concern . . . and target of negative behaviors" (1996:541). What I found in my research is that the concern around self-segregation connects back to anxiety of white community members regarding "diversity." They mask this fear by couching their concerns about self-segregation in terms of students of color and how it may negatively impact their experience. As a solution they promote integration however as Feagin et al. point out, "At most such places [predominantly white colleges and universities], racial "integration" in actual practice often means the one-way assimilation of black students into white space and culture" (1996:20).

Aries (2008) had a number of interesting findings in her study of black and white students at a small predominantly white liberal arts college related both to "racial authenticity" and "self-segregation." Specifically Aries (2008) found that black students had varying feelings about connecting with other black students on campus. Some students felt like they should stick together as black students, particularly because they are such a small population on campus. Other students appreciated having the social support of other black students available but were concerned about the assumption that

they should be socializing with other black students. They also encountered criticism

from black and white students if they did not meet these expectations. Black students

deciding whether or not to participate in the Black Student Union was an instance where

many of these issues and expectations became highlighted. Other prevalent themes

included issues related to being "Black enough," "skin tone" and "acting white" (Aries

2008:139-143).

Another important consideration in thinking about student's racial subjectivity

within predominantly white educational settings is the relationship between hegemony

and agency. Bettie provides a helpful discussion over her struggle whether to highlight

structure over agency or agency over structure and concludes,

> I can have it both ways because, indeed, it is both ways. I find a poststructuralist focus on repeating structures but with historical contingency a useful tool here and an improvement on reproduction theory. Categories of identity and structures of inequality are not automatic but must be constantly reproduced in practice, and so there is a moment of possibility for social change. The reproduction of the structure is not automatic, but contingent on its repetition or iteration. [2003:54-55]

I agree with Bettie's theoretical approach and attempt to employ it in my own research by

highlighting both institutional structures within the predominantly white college

environment and how students make sense of these structures and adapt, resist, or

propose something different altogether.

A related theory I will utilize is Fordham's (2008) updated definition of "the

burden of 'acting white'" which she describes as a "racial performance" that resembles

"attempted identity theft":

> In exchange for what is conventionally identified as success, racially defined Black bodies are compelled to perform a White identity by mimicking the cultural, linguistic, and economic practices historically affiliated with the hegemonic rule of Euro-Americans. In other words, the wholesale appropriation of a society's hegemonic social and cultural personae—its identity—by another group. [2008:234]

Fordham's definition is useful in that it emphasizes that there are specific behaviors—cultural, linguistic, and economic—that relate to a white identity and that these same behaviors are linked with the ideology of "success" within a U.S. context. In addition I look at how racial difference is de-emphasized and instead is defined and understood as "cultural difference" within higher education (following Ferguson 2000). I explore the impact this has on how students understand themselves and each other as racial beings. While Fordham emphasizes the pressure on black students, and by extension all non-white students, to "act white," I would also argue that this equation becomes more complicated when you consider that "students of color" are also rewarded for their "cultural provision work" (Urciuoli 2009) and for enacting the role of a "diverse" or "multicultural" student as long as that performance remains within certain boundaries. As these studies show, there is an ongoing process of "rearticulation" of racial categorization and racial projects within education that impact the subjectivity of students of color (and by extension white students) within the predominantly white environment. One of the things I am interested in exploring is the intersection of hegemony and agency, particularly in relation to the "student of color" as both a monolithic category and an opportunity for "strategic essentialism" (Spivak 1995).

Linguistic Anthropology as Analytical Framework

My analysis is also strongly influenced by linguistic anthropology; specifically I utilize the concepts of discourse, identity, and socialization. Using linguistic anthropology helps me to identify the ways that knowledge has been and is currently being constructed around race and identity within the setting of higher education. Stuart Hall defines discourses as "ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about a

particular topic of practice: a cluster (or *formation*) of ideas, images and practices which provide ways of talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated with, a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society" (1997:6).

I will also use the term discourse in the way that Hill (following Foucault 1972) defines it "as shorthand for all varieties of talk and text" (2008: 32) and as a primary way that people make sense of their world.[2] Hill (2008) argues that discourses "divide rationality from irrationality, truth from error, madness from sanity. They make some things in the world noticeable and discussible, and others invisible, and, in the last analysis, even create 'things' themselves" (19). This point about what is made visible and invisible through discourse is a primary focus of my investigation related to campus discourses about race. My goal in analyzing these discourses is very much in line with Hill's (2008) description of critical theories of racism that: "aim to make [discourses] visible, to parse their terms and logics, and to interrupt their terms with constructive alternative anti-racist discourses" (19). As Hill (2008) points out discourse often serves as a mechanism to mask realities that we would rather not see and maintain a status quo that supports inequality, specifically related to race.

This dissertation also follows current trends in linguistic anthropology of using the study of language to understand social/cultural phenomena such as identity formation; Duranti notes a growing interest in linguistic anthropology in "capturing the elusive connection between larger institutional structures and processes and the 'textual' details

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[2] Hill (2008) distinguishes her definition of discourse from Foucault's in the following way: "In Foucault's theory, a 'discourse' is the set of fundamental preconditions not only for talk, but for thought and understanding itself. But when I write 'discourse' I include the actual material presence, in structure and content, of language-in-use in history and at particular moments of human interaction. It is in these material presences that ideas actually live, and it is through these that people acquire and share knowledge" (32).

of everyday encounters" (2003:32) or the "use of linguistic practices to document and analyze the reproduction and transformation of persons, institutions, and communities across space and time" (2003:333). Morgan echoes this in the introduction to her book on language and discourse in African American culture,

> Not surprisingly, while one aim of this book is to describe and analyze contemporary language and communication among African Americans in the U.S., its main focus is on language as an aspect of culture and the ways it mediates identity across cultural and social contexts. [2002:9]

One of my goals was to examine how language shapes and structures the culture of higher education specifically related to issues of race and racial inequality.

Contribution of this Study to the Literature

As I have demonstrated above, my study is in dialogue with many current trends in the literature and also extends them by examining white cultural practices within a higher education setting, the way that these practices shape and inform students' of color racial identity performance, and how these practices reinforce racial inequalities. The majority of ethnographic literature on race in education focuses on high school settings; so my study contributes to the need for more data from college settings (Urciuoli 1999, 2003a, 2005; Aries 2008; Bush 2004). Another unique facet of my research is that the field site was a women's college which enables me to provide insight into the academic experiences and conceptualizations of race by women and consider the role of gender in the production of white culture (Bettie 2003; Frankenberg 1993; Horvat and Antonio 1999; Holland and Eisenhart 1990). Most studies also focus on one particular racial and ethnic group or consider multiple groups as distinct entities; instead, I was interested in analyzing the experience of "students of color" as a collective. I wanted to see how this group definition is co-generated by the institution and the students. I am particularly

interested in multiracial students and their relation to a "student of color" identity in research that I believe will add to a growing body of scholarship on multiracial students (Bracey et al. 2004; Page 2000; Pollock 2004). While I primarily focused on how higher education manages issues of race, I also realize the need to contribute as well to literature that examines the powerful intersections between race, class, and gender and tried to highlight areas where I observed these intersections coming into play (Bettie 2003; Bush 2004; Diamond et al. 2004; Flores-Gonzalez 1999; Fordham 2008; Horvat and Antonio 1999; Hubbard 1999).

My study analyzes institutional structures as well as the experiences of students (Ferguson 2000; Bettie 2003; Pollock 2004). Specifically I examined institutional practices and how they are embodied and experienced by domestic students. In addition, I was interested in how white students, faculty, and staff embody and engage in white cultural practices. Through this approach I hoped to gain an understanding of the ways that institutional structure and culture interact with and constitute student experience and identity. My goal was that this work would provide policy insights and recommendations both for the field site, specifically, as well as for higher education, generally. It also would provide a research model applicable to other colleges and universities. Finally, my insider status within the institution and long-standing connection to the field site (11 years) gave me an unusually high level of access to participants, data, and opportunities for observation. I fully embraced the participant observer role and used this opportunity to interrogate my own behavior within the institution through auto-ethnography, which adds a distinctive contribution to the literature.

Methodological Approach

My overall methodological approach was informed by concepts from the critical

and constructivist paradigms. The critical ethnographer seeks to understand "tacit rules

that regulate what can and cannot be said" and seeks not only to understand value

systems, but to challenge them (Glesne 2006:16). Another key characteristic of critical

ethnography is that it interrogates

> ways in which 'lived experience may be distorted by consciousness and ideology' (Schwandt 1990:268). The incorporation of dialogue and critical reflection as part of the research process is a means toward revealing unexamined assumptions and the ways in which people may be accepting explanations of the dominant cultural group that serve to oppress those without power. [Glesne 2006:16]

A final relevant quality of a critical paradigm is that it

> calls for a focus on the ways in which gender, class, culture, race, and ethnicity, and power intersect to shape any possibly observed inequities. Included in this focus is the requirement that researchers themselves be aware of how their own class status; racial, ethnic, and gender orientation; and power relationships vis-à-vis research participants affect what and how phenomena are studied and how data are interpreted. [Lecompte 1999:46-47]

My methodology was also influenced by constructivist paradigm or examining the

"social construction of reality" (Lecompte 1999:48). A central tenet of the constructivist

paradigm "is that it always defines shared constructs and meanings as 'situated'; that is,

they are located in or affected by the social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, age,

gender, and other contextual characteristics of those who espouse them" (Lecompte

1999:49).

Three other standpoints contributed to my overall ethnographic approach. They

are Weis and Fine's (2004) compositional studies approach, Page's (1988) dialogic

principles of interactive learning in the ethnographic relationship, and Dominguez's

(2000) politics of love. Weis and Fine (2004) describe three analytic moves that

contribute to their "theory of method" or the "compositional studies" approach: (1) "the deliberate placement of ethnographic and narrative material into a contextual and historic understanding of economic and racial formations" (xvii), (2) "the importance and relevance of social identity categories as relational" (xviii); despite "theoretical ambivalence" they "analytically embrace these categories of identity as social, porous, flexible, and yet profoundly political ways of organizing the world" (xviii) and (3) "as a corollary principle to our interest in categories as fluid sites for meaning-making, we seek to elaborate the textured variations of identities that can be found within any single category" (xviii). What I find useful about their approach is the emphasis on fluidity and "dynamism" (Weis and Fine 2004:xix) in the ethnographic process and the opportunities that this approach creates to "sites for possibility" that stems from their "ethical belief that critical researchers have an obligation not simply to dislodge the dominant discourse, but to help readers and audiences imagine where the spaces for resistance, agency, and possibility lie" (Weis and Fine 2004:xxi).

Another contextualizing frame guiding my methodology was Page's (1988) dialogic principles of interactive learning in the ethnographic relationship. Page's conception places its methodological focus on capturing data on the dialogic relationship between ethnographers and their informants and the learning that is generated from their ethnographic encounters. Page argues that "the ethnographic task is not merely to record the indigenous view of a shared-life world, but to reveal the subject's and ethnographer's interactive assessment of, and response to it" (1988:165). His Batesonian model was particularly useful to my study due to the complicated layers of my relationship to my primary informants, domestic students of color.

Dominguez's (2000) conception of a "politics of love" was the final guiding standpoint for my methodological approach. In her article Dominguez wonders what would happen if we considered "love" as a criterion for value of academic projects: "The kind of love, respect, and affection I have in mind is the kind of love we feel for family members, tough love at times but never disengagement or hagiography" (2000:365). Dominguez further clarifies what a "politics of love" is not:

> Loving does not mean a) presenting only positive characteristics of people in our writing; b) eliding conflict, violence, or debate; or c) feeling so guilty about our own geopolitically defined position that we treat those we consult with kid gloves. [2000:366]

While the "politics of love" is not a fully-formed theoretical approach, I found it to be a helpful conception particularly as I researched and wrote about a community that I care deeply about.

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Research Questions

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My research questions addressed three intersecting areas of inquiry: the experience of domestic students attending a predominantly white institution in relation to issues of race and racial identity, institutional practices related to race and domestic students of color, and examples of white culture and white cultural practices within the institution.

Student Experiences:

- What groups do students choose to affiliate with within the institution?

- Where and how do they spend their time within the institution?

- Where or how is race most salient for students on campus?

- When and how do "students of color" choose to modify their behavior?

- How do "students of color" understand themselves in relation to other domestic "students of color"? White students? International students (white and students of color)?

- How is a "student of color" identity conceptualized both by students of color and by other community members?

- What factors contribute to a student of color's satisfaction and dissatisfaction with their experience attending a predominantly white institution?

Institutional Structures:

- What is the institutional definition of "diversity" and how is a commitment to racial diversity expressed at the institution?

- What sources of support are provided for students of color within the institution?

- How are these programs, positions, and offices dedicated to supporting students of color within a predominantly white institution understood, conceptualized, and experienced by different groups within the community (faculty, staff, students)?

- What policy changes would need to occur to create truly inclusive diverse learning environments (following Hurtado et al. 1999) at predominantly white institutions?

White Culture and White Cultural Practices:

- What are examples of white cultural practices within the institution?

- What are expressions of white culture and white public space within predominantly white institutions?

- Where is whiteness visible and invisible on a college campus?

I was also particularly interested in looking at the circulation of discourse and narratives related to race, diversity, and culture—including, when, how, and by who is race and racism talked about on a college campus? How does this "talk" or discourse shape the culture of higher education and the educational experience for students, specifically students of color? What linguistic strategies are used to create and sustain

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understandings about race within colleges and universities? How do these discourses reinforce the majority culture, which is white culture?

Specific Procedures

The procedures that I put in place centered on the "triangulation" method including participant observation, interviewing, and textual analysis and exploring how the data collected from each technique related to each other (Glesne 2006:36).

Participant Observation

I engaged in participant observation in multiple venues around campus over the course of the 2009-2010 academic year focusing on campus events (e.g. administrative meetings, event planning meetings, faculty meetings, institutionally sponsored community events, and student-sponsored cultural events, forums, panels, and speakers), locations (the campus center, the library, cultural houses, and academic buildings), and college programs that focused on race and diversity (the College's new pre-orientation program focused on issues of race, inclusion, and inter-cultural dialogue, the College's Intergroup Dialogue Project, and a faculty/staff/student committee that focused on issues of multiculturalism and college life). In the majority of cases I already had access to the events and locations where I planned to engage in participant observation. However, in settings that were not "public" gatherings or spaces on campus or in related academic sites, I received informed consent from the participants/informants. I continued to revisit the issue of consent and privacy throughout my fieldwork, especially with my primary informants with whom I had close and ongoing contact.

The goal of the participant observation was multi-faceted. First, it helped me to develop a baseline for formulating a "campus culture" that is simultaneously

universalized as Wallerstein (2006) argues, and also racialized particularly as in moments when "race" was visible or salient within the campus community, and when race was not named but played an implicit role in the overarching college narrative about race. My goal here was questioning how and where whiteness is reinforced as the norm through white cultural practices. Second, my participant observation also assisted me in seeing how students position themselves within the institution: where they are present and what roles they play in relation to each other and the institution. Finally, I explored how faculty and staff participated in campus life and culture and when and how they participated in issues related to race. All of my participant observation was guided by a "critical ethnographic" approach, described by Glesne as identifying "tacit rules that regulate what can and cannot be said" and seeking not only to understand value systems, but to challenge them (2006:16).

One of the challenges of being so fully immersed in my field site was trying to balance keeping a critical eye and recording observations while simultaneously fulfilling my job responsibilities. Sometimes I would only have the opportunity to jot down brief phrases or observations during the day, but I set time aside each morning to write and reflect in my field journal. I also recognized that because of my position and location within the institution that I would not be able to really enmesh myself in an authentic way within student organizations or in the residence halls. So I chose to focus my observations more through the lens of a college administrator, which included administrative meetings, college traditions, new student orientation, and student events. I often used these moments as opportunities for analyzing my own behavior and responses to what I was witnessing.

I was very fortunate to have institutional support for my project and the willingness of colleagues and students to be open to my presence as an ethnographer. I engaged in "member-checking"[3] throughout the process with several key informants that I identified early on. I made sure that within these primary informants there was a range of perspectives on the institution due to their positionality.

Semi-Structured In-Depth Interviews

The primary group of interview participants were 37 traditionally aged students (18-22 years old) currently attending Dexter College. I focused on seniors (17 participants) and first years (16 participants) so that I would be able to compare and contrast the experiences of students who had spent almost four years as participants within the "institutional culture" and students who had only experienced one semester. This sampling strategy allowed me to gauge the effect of the institution on the students' perceptions and attitudes over time. I also included two sophomores and two juniors as interview participants due to their involvement in the new pre-orientation program and the intergroup dialogue project (two sites I was particularly interested in examining).

I recruited student interview participants primarily through an email invitation that was sent out to all domestic students who were seniors or first-year students. These emails were sent from my University of Massachusetts email address to help students understand that I was communicating with them in my role as a graduate student rather than as the Dean. Included in the email was a copy of my lay summary and a brief questionnaire to collect baseline demographic information to help ensure maximum

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[3]Glesne describes "member-checking" as one type of verification procedure often used in qualitative research, "sharing interview transcripts, analytical thoughts, and/or drafts of the final report with research participants to make sure you are representing their ideas accurately" (2006:38).

diversity within the sample.[4] Some interview participants were also found through "snowball sampling" or students and staff recommending other students for me to reach out to. One of the challenges was the comparatively low response rate from students who identified as "students of color," particularly amongst the senior group. While this was disappointing, it was also not surprising seeing as this group of students is significantly smaller than the population of white students and this is a group of students who often experience interview fatigue as they are frequently tapped to discuss their experiences for institutional purposes. I'm sure that my identity as a white woman also impacted the response rate from "students of color."

However, in some ways the interview sample ended up being a strength of the study because it gave me the opportunity to focus more deeply on the role of white students and the ways that they make meaning of race, whiteness, and "diversity." I also was able to utilize some data from my earlier pilot studies that focused solely on domestic "students of color" to help ensure that there were a range of voices and perspectives included in my study. I used a maximum variation sampling strategy (Glesne 2006:35) for selecting my participants, meaning that I selected cases that cut across a range of variation, in this case students of varying racial and ethnic backgrounds attending the same women's college. This sampling strategy gave me the ability to look for common patterns amongst the varying racial backgrounds represented in the group of students who fall into the categories of "white student" and the institutional category of "student of color." I also selected interview participants who had varying levels of institutional involvement (student organizations, college programs, campus employment).

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[4] See Appendices A and B for copies of the invitation and participant questionnaire.

Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and they were one-time interviews. All interviews were digitally recorded. All interview participants were given a pseudonym and signed an informed consent form.[5] The interviews provided me with an opportunity to collect basic demographic information about the students as well as to address the following questions: what their perceptions of the institution were; where and how they were involved in the institution both academically and socially; how they viewed themselves in relation to the larger campus community; and where, when, and how race and whiteness have been salient for them.

In terms of the interview dynamics there were multiple issues to consider and I tried to take into account the critical ethnographic paradigm as described by Lecompte (1999) that requires researchers to be aware of the ways that their identities and power relationships and how that affects data collection and interpretation. This was especially the case regarding my position relative to the group being studied and how those interactions would be affected by the dynamics of power: I encountered my research subjects as a white woman, a Dean of Students, as a graduate student, as a mother, and as someone fifteen-plus years older than the students. These multiple identities of mine may have contributed to an unequal power dynamic between the students and me. While there is no way to completely eradicate this dynamic, I intentionally tried to offset it in a variety of ways.

First, all interviews were held at my house (within walking distance from campus) in order to ensure participant anonymity and to help participants to view me in the role of researcher rather than in my role as college administrator. This helped to create a more

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[5] See Appendices C, D, E, and I for copies of the informed consent forms and the debriefing statement.

relaxed and less formal dynamic for the interviews. Yet, I recognize that this may have also served to reinforce the power dynamic since the interviews were still held on my turf. I began each individual interview by sharing some information about my background and how I came to this research project; this approach was inspired by Page's (1988) "dialogic principles of interactive learning" and was an attempt to focus on the dialogic relationship and give-and-take between me and my participants. It also felt less intrusive to ask a student to share details about her own life after I had shared some similar information about myself with her. Because of the complexity of my position and the power dynamics implicit in my project, it was important for me throughout the process to continue to directly address and analyze the way that these factors impact my research.

There were a few additional dynamics that emerged in the interview process that are worth mentioning. One thing that I found useful was beginning the interview with questions that would help build rapport between me and the interview participants. In particular I asked them questions about how they selected the college, how they had met their friends, selecting a major, and what types of activities they were involved in on and off campus. It wasn't until later in the interview that I started asking questions about race and their racial identity, which many indicated through their body language and increased linguistic hesitancy that it was a less comfortable topic. Not surprisingly I found that the upperclass students I interviewed were much more comfortable and talkative than the first-year students.

The tenor of the interview was also impacted by whether or not I had a prior relationship with the student. There was a nice balance in my sample between students I

knew and students who I was meeting for the first time. In some cases I found that the interview actually created a connection and several students continued to seek me out after the interview for continued contact. In general I found the students were candid and unguarded. After the interviews most students expressed that they had enjoyed doing the interview and that it had provided them with an opportunity to think deeply and reflect about their college experience. I saw this as evidence of why colleges should provide more types of structured reflection opportunities for students.

I was originally concerned that I would only get student participants who were already engaged in thinking about race, but as my data reflects, there was a real range in perspectives on issues of race and racial identity. For many of the white students I interviewed, this was clearly the first time they had ever had an extended conversation focused on race and specifically their own racial identity. One challenge I faced was that I did have several students express a concern that they were not saying the "right things" or that their comments would not be useful to my study. I tried to reassure them as much as possible that their contributions were valuable and interesting.

I also specifically chose to do all the upperclass interviews in the fall and the first-year interviews in the spring and found that this schedule worked well in terms of making sure that the first-year students had had enough time on campus to have gathered some more in-depth perceptions. Since the senior interviews tended to be more ethnographically rich, it helped to have their interviews in the fall and then to begin to identify emerging themes that I continued to refine over the spring semester. While I had my list of possible questions, the interviews were really designed as semi-structured and I rarely had the opportunity to ask all of the questions and allowed for the conversation to

stay focused on a particular point or go off on interesting tangents. This approach also helped to keep the tone of the interview more conversational and dialogical (Page 1988).

I also interviewed seven members of the college who were staff or faculty members. I was specifically interested in interviewing administrators and faculty who, as authorities, play a role in envisioning, supporting, and/or directing institutional initiatives that are focused on "diversity" or more specifically providing support to domestic students of color. The majority of these interviews took place in the individual's office or in my office, which felt more appropriate and also respectful of staff/faculty busy schedules since we were often fitting these interviews into the pre-existing work day, whereas my interviews with students happened mostly in the evenings and on the weekends. As with the student interviews, I had a list of general questions[6] but because of my pre-existing relationship with these participants the interviews were even more open-ended and conversational in nature.

Textual Analysis

I analyzed a variety of secondary text and visual data including student newspaper articles, the college website, student flyers and letters, event flyers, written materials from new student pre-orientation and orientation, meeting minutes, college announcements, college reports, college admissions publications, student films, and videos of panels and speakers. These materials provided thematic information, historical background, and institutional context. These documents were collected through a variety of means including web searches, college archival searches, and participant observation. These data added to my ability to analyze the campus culture with regard to race and racism. I

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[6] See Appendices F, G, and H.

was specifically interested in assessing the material culture shaping student identity and using discourse analysis to look at how these materials illuminated trends and themes about how, when and where race is openly discussed within the institution (Glesne 2006; Weis and Fine 2004). I paid particular attention to the use of the terms "diversity," "diverse community," "culture," and the institutional category of "students of color," and noted where race was implied (stating what contextual cues prompt this evaluation), but not specifically named. I was also interested in looking for when "whiteness" or "white privilege" was discussed or—more often—its absence from discussion.

Survey Data

I drew on existing Dexter College survey data to provide aggregate information about student satisfaction, involvement, skills, and attitudes. Survey data sources included: The Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) survey (a national longitudinal study of the American higher education system), the Cycles Survey, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), the Dexter College Senior Survey, the New Student Orientation Assessment Survey, and the Student Conference Committee Survey. This data provided helpful baseline information about student perceptions, attitudes, and satisfaction with the institution. I particularly focused on the qualitative "open comments" sections of the Senior Survey and the Student Conference Committee.

Pilot Studies

Between 2003-2009, I conducted four pilot studies that helped contribute to the development of this current research project. The first pilot study took place in April 2003 at my field site. My hypothesis was that domestic students of color at predominantly white institutions experience racialized forms of social and academic

pressure from students, faculty, and administrators to take on white cultural practices or "whiten" their behavior. In order to investigate this hypothesis I interviewed six domestic "students of color." Of the six students one identified as Asian American, two identified as Latina, and three identified as African American. Within this group half of the students also identified as first- or second-generation immigrants. Through the course of the interviews I was able to identify five common contexts/arenas where students of color experience whiteness or may feel pressure to "whiten" their behavior: language and communication style, curriculum and faculty, clothing and personal appearance, residence halls and peer interactions, and the role of cultural organizations.

In May 2008, I subsequently interviewed 6 more domestic "students of color" divided into two focus groups at my field site. Of these six students, three identified as Asian American, one identified as African American and two identified as multiracial. One of these students also identified as a first-generation immigrant. These interviews reinforced the common contexts or arenas where students of color may feel pressure to whiten their behavior that I had identified in the 2003 study.

During the fall semester of 2008, I used one predominantly white institution, a large northeastern university, as a case study to begin to explore the disconnect between institutional structures and the lived experience of "students of color." The public university used for this project had an undergraduate population of a little over 20,000 undergraduates, with around 3000 (19%) of the undergraduates identifying as "students of color." The campus is in a rural setting but is within a close radius to several urban centers. For this study I conducted participant observation at one of the university residence halls, a theme hall dedicated to multicultural living and social justice issues. I

conducted individual interviews with five domestic students of color, one student of color who is international, but has lived in the U.S. for the last seven years, and one professional Residential Life staff member. One interesting note about the domestic "students of color" that I interviewed is that all five of these students had at least one parent who was a first-generation immigrant, and three of the five had spent a significant part of their childhood/adolescence living and attending school in Africa or the Caribbean. I also examined several university publications and its website.

I also conducted an exploratory study involving five faculty members who were teaching at my field site in the fall of 2004. Of the five participants, two identified as multiracial (Asian American and white), two identified as white, and one identified as Latina. I narrowed my focus to faculty who foreground race in their courses or whose courses related to a specific minority group. I examined the following questions: What role, if any, can college courses that focus on race play in creating a liberatory educational experience? What have we gained by the addition of these courses into the curriculum and what are their limitations? How do faculty and students experience these courses? I used the following guiding questions during the faculty interviews:

- What led you to teach about race?

- How do you prepare and decide what to include in the course?

- What pedagogical approaches do you use to teach about race?

- How do you deal with difficult conversations and conflict within the classroom?

- How do students experience courses that are focused on race?

- What happens after the class ends?

Method of Analysis

Throughout the process, I kept two field journals, one focused on participant observation and one focused on my own reflections on the process. I created "contact summary" sheets (Miles and Huberman 1994:51) for each field note. These summaries helped me to do some early analysis, identify emerging themes, and provided another way to capture my impressions and reflections.

The core method involved conducting a content analysis on all data collected. The first step was identifying and coding emergent categories and themes. Next, I identified these categories using a variety of methods including memo-ing, frequency counts, mind-mapping, and creating a "code-book" that enabled me to index the significant themes. The main coding categories that I used were descriptive, interpretive, setting/context, perspectives, and activities/events. I looked for relationships between the participants' context, words, and the categories I identified. I interpreted uses of symbolic language in my data including metaphor analysis, category analysis, and narrative analysis (Yanow 2000:41-73).

Discourse analysis makes use of this content analysis as a strategy for interpreting both participants' talk and the speech encoded as institutional documents and texts. However, I recognized that this textual analysis of verbal behavior did not capture the full range of behavioral expression, and particularly the gestural depictions of emotion. To gain a more complete picture I also attempted to analyze the role of emotion in communicating power dynamics and as a site of social control within education (following Boler 1999; Page personal communication).

Limitations of Study

The challenges and issues in using this site included balancing my research agenda and my professional role within the college, providing transparency about my research agenda with colleagues and students, and grappling with ethical issues about what to include in my research because of my level of access to institutional information. In order to address these issues I used a protocol for informed consent and also checked in with my informants throughout the process regarding their consent and participation. Another challenge was grappling with my own white privilege and its impact on this research project, particularly related to my career as a student affairs administrator. I think that utilizing auto-ethnography and keeping my field journal focused on my process and my positionality helped me in contending with these ethical issues and examining my conscious and unconscious choices and actions.

The scope of the study focused on a single institutional field site in order to make it possible to provide an in-depth analysis that can serve as a model for replication at other colleges and universities. As has already been discussed, my positionality as both a white person and an employee within the field site presented certain challenges. However, based on the procedures that I put in place, I am confident that my insider status did not diminish the validity of the study.

CHAPTER 3

JOINING A "DIVERSE" COMMUNITY

"Congratulations, you've just joined a Diverse Community! So what does that mean exactly?"

This is the opening text from a postcard that I helped develop in the Dean's office at Dexter College several years ago. In the postcard we wanted to respond to several issues we had identified, the most specific one being that students understood the institutional naming of "diversity" to refer solely to domestic students of color and/or international students; if you did not fall into those two categories then by extension you were not "diverse." This perception was institutionally underscored by the fact that students who identified as international students, domestic students of color, and multiracial students were invited to special pre-orientation programs. The purpose of these programs was often shrouded in mystery for domestic white students, and the lack of inclusion led domestic white students to form their own (often negative) opinions about what was happening during them.

Some students discussed their concerns about pre-orientation in a 2009 student survey where students were given the opportunity to make open-ended "comments and constructive suggestions regarding Diversity and Inclusion." One student commented, "Although I feel that everyone at [Dexter College] is included and accepted, I do think there is a large amount of racial segregation on campus. With a separate orientation and some separate activities, 'racially diverse,' and 'foreign' students are drastically separated from 'white' students." Another student pleaded, "Don't have [students of color] pre-arrival orientation; it just creates a system of minorities being friends with minorities

from day one, like everyone is not equal, which is what we are striving for." Thus, the myth of self-segregation and fairness were common issues raised by domestic white students.

This postcard was a first step in trying to address these concerns and to provide all students with a frame for both how we would like them to conceptualize "diversity" and our expectations for them related to engaging with diversity. The text of the postcard went on to state:

> [Dexter College] is diverse across many dimensions—geography, race, social class, religion, politics, sexuality, ability, age, and more. Engagement with this diversity is a critical part of every student's education. Your coursework, extracurricular activities, roommates, and even casual conversations will offer many opportunities to explore both your own identity and those of your classmates. Ultimately, it will be up to you to seize these opportunities and take advantage of them. When we talk about diverse community, we're talking about *all* of our students. Every student is a complex combination of social identities and experiences. All of you engaging with each other is what makes our community diverse.

The way that "diversity" is characterized on the postcard intentionally emphasizes a multiplicity of social identities—that all of our students fall under the diversity umbrella. Second, the postcard highlights engagement and that the onus is on the student to take advantage of opportunities, many of which were listed on the back of the postcard. The creation of the postcard generated the opportunity to have a broader institutional conversation, at least in the student services area, about how we were conceiving of diversity at Dexter College and hopefully among our students. Finally, the postcard emphasized the unfamiliar, as the back side of the postcard opens with this statement, "Living in an inclusive, diverse community sometimes means putting yourself in unfamiliar and even uncomfortable situations. We invite you to jump in and immerse yourself in the familiar and unfamiliar, the comfortable and uncomfortable." One of the

central issues that my analysis will explore is that of conceptions of comfort and discomfort related to issues of race and the discourse of "diverse community" within a predominantly white institution.[1]

The Commodification of "Diversity" in the Admissions Process

As I noted in the introductory chapter the widespread use of "diversity" in higher education is in itself a fascinating example of racial discourse; it serves as a way to both reference race and obscure that reference. The term "diversity" is emblematic of the way that colleges and universities generally approach issues of race, where the relevance of race is acknowledged but is packaged and presented in the most positive and non-threatening way to the campus community (in most cases a majority white community), in other words, as a "comfortable" community (Urciuoli 2003b).

Urciuoli (1999) also describes how the college admissions process utilizes discourses around "diversity" and "multiculturalism" to help envision the United States as a place of "safe difference" (292). College admissions' offices achieve this process by creating the category of the "multicultural student" who becomes a "special case," "one in which certain objectified qualities are layered onto the person, so that *language* and *culture* become multicultural traits that one *has"* (Urciuoli:2003a, 153). Urciuoli (2003a) argues this notion has been reinforced by the creation of a "diversity index" as part of the *US News and World Report* college ranking system. This index delineates the total proportion of students of color and the breakdown of each racial group on a college campus. Simply by virtue of having a certain percentage of students of color, colleges

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[1]While the postcard does attempt to disrupt a discursive link between "diversity" and "students of color," I recognize that what remains unspoken are the systemic issues of power, privilege, and racial inequalities that are inherent parts of a predominantly white institution.

and universities that have a predominantly white student body can still proudly claim that they have a "diverse campus." While racial demographics are an important piece of information when assessing an institution's commitment to creating a diverse and inclusive learning environment, the numbers are only one piece of a more complex picture. The framing of the "diversity index" also shifts the focus away from the fact that the institution is still *predominantly* white.

Urciuoli further addresses how this plays out in the college admissions process: "Admissions recruiters are betting that smart white prospectives will choose a place with 'a lot of diversity' because that reflects how the white students see themselves as good citizens" (1999: 292). With the student of color population at large continuing to grow, institutions need to create an environment that is both attractive to students of color, but that won't feel threatening to white students. The perpetuation of the student of color category helps to keep "control" of and "manage" diversity; this lessens potential anxiety for white students. Urciuoli states, "Throughout these discourses, difference figures in the construction of market value only insofar as it is safe: safe for the 'community,' safe for the marked individual, and safe for the institution's market interests" (ibid).

As Feagin et al. (1996), Ferguson (2000), Urciuoli (1999, 2003a, 2003b) and others have noted, being able to display and promote that one is a "diverse" campus helps lend credence to the argument that "race" and racial inequality is no longer an issue on college campuses. If students of color are the embodiment of "diversity" then conversely white students do not have to consider their own race and racial privilege. For many white students the "benefits of diversity" at a college or university that is predominantly white is the opportunity to interact with students of other racial backgrounds and learn

about the "culture" of students of color. This way of thinking about diversity continues to define students of color as the "other" with white students continuing to serve as the norm. In this paradigm white students will always see "diversity" as something outside of themselves and leads them to enter into the "diverse community" as voyeurs or cultural tourists when it comes to issues of race and ethnicity.

This rhetoric around diversity can be seen as part of a larger process of the commodification and marketing of higher education. Urciuoli argues that this process links to neoliberalism and specifically "the idea that individuals own themselves (and their cultures) like businesses. This neoliberalized notion of culture as a possessable, marketable set of skills has become globalized . . . culture as a skill set gives it a place in the world of the (otherwise acultural) modern" (2009:24). The end result is that "culture" or "diversity" becomes viewed as part of a skill set that colleges and universities argue can be acquired along with other marketable skills such as "leadership" and "communication skills" (Urciuoli 2008; 2009). In some ways this evolution of "diversity" as a skill can be traced back to recent debates around affirmative action including the University of Michigan cases *Gratz vs. Bollinger et al.* and *Grutter vs. Bollinger, et al.* One of the key questions raised by these cases was: "Do the educational benefits of diversity constitute a 'compelling governmental interest'?" In Gurin's (2001) related report she presented evidence on the positive effects of racial diversity on learning outcomes, democracy outcomes, and living in a diverse society post-college. While the Court ruled in favor of the University of Michigan, there have been ongoing legal challenges to affirmative action. As these examples illustrate we are in a era where "diversity" is both touted for its educational benefits and as a critical marketable skill, but

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also scrutinized when it is attached to programs like affirmative action that are seen as potentially giving unfair advantages to minority students. In the next section I will examine how Dexter College promotes and defines "diversity" in the admissions process and how "diversity" factors into a prospective student's decision-making process, specifically for white students.

Admissions and "Diversity" at Dexter College

Many students told me that they felt like "diversity" was really emphasized in the admissions materials and the college website. As Eleanor (a white junior from Michigan) shared, she was trying to decide between Dexter College and another similar small liberal arts college, "but it doesn't sell itself on diversity the way that [Dexter] College did." The college's admissions website, which has become the central place for dispensing information to prospective students, highlights four central qualities that are institutionally distinctive: "academic excellence; a tight-knit, diverse, and international community; a worldwide network of alumnae; the conviction that women can and should make a difference in the world." The relative importance of "diversity" can be seen by the fact that it is the second characteristic listed, right after "academic excellence." It is also important to note that diversity is linked to community along with internationalism and the descriptive phrase "tight-knit." Describing the diverse community as "tight-knit" evokes an image of a community where everyone gets along well and has formed close bonds. This sense of Dexter College as a place where students could be "comfortable" and as a place where everyone appeared friendly and welcoming was something I heard over and over again in talking with students about why they selected Dexter. The

combination of an environment that would be both comfortable and "diverse" was clearly a strong selling point for students.

Students received the message that diversity was an important aspect of the college, but in many ways they are left to create their own interpretation of what "diversity" means and how it will actually impact their college experience. The institutional clues that are given to them include not only statements from the website and viewbook, but also photographs that depict students with a range of different skin colors engaged in a variety of activities, often in what looks like "diverse" groups of students interacting across racial lines, although there are also pictures of more racially homogenous groups of students. These photos serve to project several key images related to the manifestation of a "diverse community," including harmonious cross- and intra-racial friendships. Another piece of evidence from students that they knew Dexter College was going to be diverse was the memorable and oft-cited "1 in 3" statistic, namely: "Approximately one in every three students is an international citizen or African American, Asian American, Latina, Native American, or multiracial." As Urciuoli argues, "Higher education promotional practices depend heavily on the deployment of such categories, most directly in the advertisement of diversity numbers" (2009:22). Presenting these numbers and statistics is a way to provide countable, quantifiable evidence of "diversity."

Camille, a white senior from San Francisco, told me that she felt that Dexter College presented itself very well in terms of diversity. When I asked her what specific things stuck out to her she explained, "I mean part of it was numbers, just looking at the, 'one out of every three students is'—that whole thing really. And then I think also when

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you look at the brochures or the [viewbook], just seeing all the actual images of people—it's such a diverse population."

In a similar vein, Ruth (also a white senior) shared, "I really wanted to go to a place with a lot of diversity, and I was really excited that [Dexter College] had—I think I was really impressed by the like crazy international student percentage, and it's unlike any other school that I applied to."

Lindsey, a white first year from upstate New York, offered a different perspective and critique of the way that "diversity" is framed in the United States college admissions process:

> It seems like that diversity is based more on your outward appearance or, "I'm from Zimbabwe, so I'm obviously diverse," or "I'm from Vietnam, so I'm obviously diverse," which, is so weird to me, I mean, anyone can be diverse based on how they look on the outside, but might want to maintain a certain quota and the outward appearance of having a certain amount of students that they have to do that, but it's just always weird to me, cause anyone can be as diverse as the next person or not as diverse as the next person.

Students often note that one of the main things that attracted them to apply to (and eventually attend) Dexter College is the campus "diversity." How they define "diversity" varies broadly, but most often it refers to international diversity and/or racial and ethnic diversity. This growing trend toward linking "diversity" with international or "global" allows for colleges to further distance themselves from the messy complications of domestic racial issues. This characterization of global citizenship in the college admissions process does not take into consideration the complexities of international conflicts, but rather focuses on international harmony. As one student told me, she often heard Dexter College described as a "mini United Nations." I would argue that the recent rise in discourse in higher education around "global citizenship" and "international perspectives" is a "rearticulation" (Omi and Winant 1994) of "diversity" that produces a

new subjectivity that is one more step removed from "race" while still referencing it in a more obscure way.

In general "diversity" is seen as a desirable characteristic by college applicants. For many students the decision to be in a "diverse" college environment is motivated either by what they enjoyed or by what they saw as lacking in their high school environments.

As Jessica, a white senior that I interviewed, shared:

I had gone to a diverse high school and when I was looking at colleges, I remember [visiting one college]. I was sitting in a classroom and it was an entirely white classroom and I'm like, this feels weird. I've never been in a classroom like this and . . . there were many different reasons why I didn't feel like an environment I could learn in and then I visited some schools like [this one] and . . . it feels better. It feels more like something I'm used to and definitely diversity was something big I was looking for in a college.

Kate, a white first year student, shared a similar experience:

I was definitely looking for a college that would have a fair amount of diversity. I went to high school in Queens, NY, which has a lot of people from many places and just going from that to a college that was you know full of the same type of person would have been upsetting to me and I also think that open-mindedness can increase if you have a lot of people from a lot of places, so that's why I came [here], probably because the diversity [here] is almost unparalleled. It's just really great.

As both students indicate, their positive experiences being in a diverse setting in high school influenced a desire to have a similar experience in college. It's interesting to note that Jessica, the senior, more directly names racial diversity in reflecting on her discomfort sitting in an all-white classroom. For her whiteness has already been made visible and so being in an all-white classroom feels "weird" and artificial. Conversely Kate, the first year student, describes "diversity" in more generic terms as having "a lot of people from many places" so at this point her conception of "diversity" is still primarily focused on geography or "people from many places."

Several white students also described wanting to come to Dexter College because of the lack of "diversity" in their high school settings and a desire for being in a different type of environment. Nancy, a white senior from a small town that she described as racially homogenous, described her original intention to go to a large urban university that had been her mother's alma mater, but her perspective changed when she actually visited the campus:

> So I went to visit [that school] and I guess hadn't realized that it was going to be the racial makeup that it was. Somehow, somehow that didn't matter, I was going there no matter what. Went there to visit and predominantly white, middle, upper-class students, didn't appeal to me. . . . There is no diversity. Everyone is the same . . . I realized I needed to find a school that is the exact opposite in that it's inclusive and the diversity has a voice and it's prevalent on campus and all the students are aware that you can get involved and so that was kind of then one of my search points for looking at colleges and came across [Dexter] College and I guess the predominant thing from what I got from admissions and from my tour guide and from, you know, all my trips here was that, this is an inclusive campus where the makeup of diversity is so, so big, people from all different countries. I went to a very Caucasian high school . . . and came to [Dexter] and that was something that struck me, is that the diversity was prevalent and it was accepted, and it was welcomed, and it was almost required that you be aware of your own ideas on race and diversity, inclusion and then take what you, what your background has given you and mesh it to the [Dexter College] culture.

Jessica shared a similar perspective, "Yeah. I was looking for many different types of diversity. Definitely racial diversity, cultural diversity, people from like all different places, all different backgrounds. I mean, I didn't want to be going to college with people who were exactly like myself. That's boring."

So for Nancy, she felt that something had been missing from her high school experience and that she didn't want to replicate this experience in college where "everyone is the same." Nancy defines this "sameness" as "white, middle, upper-class students," so again for her "diversity" is equated with racial diversity and in this case socioeconomic class. Jessica similarly feels that it would be "boring" to go to a school with people who are just like her and she also specifically names "racial diversity" along

with "cultural diversity" as being an important part of that. Nancy's comments are also interesting because she clearly internalized the messages from the Admissions experience about the importance of diversity and inclusion at Dexter College. I was particularly struck by her comment that "it was almost required that you be aware of your own ideas on race and diversity, inclusion." These comments from white students are congruent with what Bush (2004) found in her study on student attitudes about identity, privilege, and intergroup relations at a large urban public university. Bush found that more generally white students took pride in being part of a "diverse" community and that this helped them to claim to be "colorblind, multiculturally oriented, and nonracist" (2004:86). Bush further argues that this "type of identification allows whites to deny how they are perceived while receiving the privileges of that perception" (2004:87). So while students describe feeling excited to be part of a "diverse community," from the beginning their vantage point is as an observer or viewing "diversity" as an anecdote to "boring" all-white environments. In this dynamic, they do not see themselves as adding to the "diversity" of the community, and "diversity" is an external element separate from them, an exotic commodity that they can consume as a cultural tourist.

In all of the above comments the white students tend to characterize "diversity" as racial, ethnic, international, or as many students broadly referred to it "cultural diversity." When white students equate "diversity" with "difference" this points to an underlying notion that people from different racial groups are all the same. While for many white students there is excitement about "diversity" as a desirable attribute along with academic excellence and student-faculty ratio, the issue of "diversity" and specifically racial diversity is more complex for students who fall under the large (and institutionally

constructed) category of "students of color." Whereas white students conceive of "diversity" as something outside of themselves, for students who are placed under the umbrella of "students of color," "diversity" is something that becomes an integral part of how they are viewed by their peers and the institution as a whole.

Just Check the Box: "Students of Color" and Racial Categorization

From the very start of the college admissions process, students of color are faced with multiple opportunities to identify their "race and ethnicity." They do have a choice to not "check a box" on their application form, but that decision may have other implications regarding everything from potential scholarships to inclusion in support programs designed for students of color. Even if they do decide to not identify their race/ethnicity through the application process, this does not mean that their race/ethnicity will not still be "read" and noted by faculty, staff, and peers once they arrive on campus. Hill argues that many white people are particularly concerned with people of color being correctly labeled: "American Whites obsess about racial labels (and take that obsession for granted as natural) because they make choices about how to think about other people based on racial categorization" (2008:12). Students of color are constantly in the position of being asked to define and defend who they are racially within the institution.

Samantha, a first-year student and a second-generation immigrant whose parents come from South Africa and who identifies as African-American, described her multiracial friend's discomfort (and her own) with filling out or "bubbling in" her race on standardized test forms:

> I remember she would really struggle with like SATs and stuff like that where you have to bubble in your race. That's difficult when you're more than three. There are always those students that would say oh, I have to raise my hand and ask awkwardly, "How

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many am I allowed to bubble in." . . . It's really terrible actually during that one part where it's really almost segregating us . . . and I didn't like, I never liked that. . . . I hate that so much.

For Samantha and other students, this moment of checking a box becomes a moment where race becomes highly visible and also a sense that these racial categories do matter. For Samantha, who attended a predominantly white high school, this was a moment that intensified her feeling of separateness from her white classmates.

Racial categories can be particularly confusing for students of color who are first- or second-generation immigrants, who often feel more affinity with their parents' country of origin, and multiracial students, who identify with multiple racial backgrounds. Over the years I've heard many students express frustration with being asked some variation on the question, "What are you?" One interview participant shared that one of her friends who identifies as multiracial would deal with this constant racial interrogation by giving a different answer to the question whenever it was asked.

In her ethnography looking at "race talk" in a multiracial California high school, Pollock (2004) describes the ways that students simultaneously highlight the complexity of their racial identities, while also accepting and utilizing the simplified racial categories that were used within the school setting. She refers to this phenomenon as "race-bending" and argues that since these categories stem from an original racial inequality that continues in the U.S. today that these categories still have utility and can be used strategically to challenge the simple race system, even as we interrogate and destabilize them (Pollock 2004:19-20, 43).

For many students who are incorporated under the "student of color" category, the college admissions process may be the first time that they think of themselves or are

identified as a "student of color." Depending on their background, the neighborhood that they grew up in, and the schools that they attended, this very phrase "student of color" can feel either comfortable and familiar or strange and disorienting. Many colleges host special admissions programs for prospective and admitted students who fall within the "student of color" category. These programs developed as part of the recruitment strategy for attracting students of color to campus. While some of these programs have evolved or changed based on recent legal cases to allow for white students to attend, these types of "diversity admissions programs" are still common practice for many predominantly white colleges. They are also still widely understood to be designed with students of color as the primary audience.

At Dexter College prior to the spring of 2010, if a domestic student identified as African American, Latina, Asian American, Native American or multiracial during the admissions process they were sent a distinct invitation to a special prospective student weekend called "Experience Diversity," while the other prospective students weekend was entitled "Experience [Dexter] College." Both the separation of "students of color" and attaching the word "diversity" to their prospective student weekend immediately signal that they are in some way separate from the white student population. The implication is that domestic white students will not have a direct connection to "diversity" and instead will simply be introduced to the "normal" college experience and culture. The way that the program was formulated also served to further the linkage between "diversity" and "students of color" since the invitation was specifically sent to that population rather than also being sent to students who were coming from marginalized groups related to class, sexuality, religion, et cetera. The framework of

separate prospective weekends also continues the dynamic of Urciuoli's (1999) notion of

"safe difference," with an implied assumption that this arrangement will be more

comfortable for everyone. In addition, one of the main goals of the "Experience

Diversity" weekend is to encourage more students of color to attend the college; this in

turn will help to create the "diverse community" that is attractive to white students.

This distinction and separation often felt strange or even anxiety-producing,

especially for multiracial students who may have a racial background that is partially

white. Ann is a sophomore who describes her racial identity in this way: "My mom is

Chinese, my father is Polish/German, first-generation American. I'm first-generation

American on my mother's side. I identify as biracial, Asian American/Caucasian mix."

Ann reflected on how she felt when she got the invitation to Experience Diversity:

> The acceptance letter from [the College] came with an invitation to come to campus for
> Experience Diversity. That was a little weird too, as a student of color I'm invited to this
> specific event – I was a little nervous . . . I guess I'd never been really associated as
> specifically a person of color. And a lot of it is me being very self-conscious . . . People
> don't necessarily see me visually as a person of color a lot of the time, or they do—it's an
> ambiguous place to be. . . . While I was receiving the Experience Diversity information, I
> was wondering "what are other students receiving?" And I think that's a big question for
> a lot of students on campus—I might understand why I'm not receiving this information,
> but I don't know what's going on with other information that's being passed around. And
> that just creates weird dynamics.

Ann's comments reflect a discomfort on two levels, that she has been singled out by the

institution and that attending will open her up to scrutiny and criticism from white

students. This separation from the beginning of the college experience has ripple effects

that influence the way domestic students from different racial backgrounds relate to one

another and think about themselves in relation to the larger campus community.

Catherine, a first year multiracial student who grew up in San Francisco and

attended a racially diverse high school, told me that she attended Experience Diversity (or

as she referred to it, "Diversity Weekend") but that she thought it was really strange. When I asked her why, she responded, "I just thought it was weird because it was like let's invite all of the not-white students this weekend. Yeah, it, I don't know, I kind of feel like race here is a lot, it's paid attention to a lot more and it's like a bigger deal and that's kind of weird for me." Catherine went on to describe growing up surrounded by lots of Asian Americans and some white people: "So, being Asian was never like a big deal. I don't know. And then coming here where people are like, 'You're Asian, yay!'" I remember us laughing during the interview when she made this last statement because she had thrown her hands up in the air and shook them like pom poms, creating an amusing image of perky cheerleaders enthusiastically cheering on each student of color as they arrived at the College. Catherine's experience growing up in a predominantly Asian neighborhood made Dexter College's emphasis on race seem strange and created discomfort for her. For many years, much of the thinking behind these types of programs at the institution was based on the assumption that for a student of color or multiracial student entering a predominantly white institution, race would be their most salient identity and their biggest transitional issue. But what I found in my interviews and conversations with students is that the saliency of race and racial identity for incoming students depended on a range of variables including where they grew up, their class background, and many other factors.

Rashida, a first year African American student from Michigan, also commented on attending the "Experience Diversity" program, "Yes. Actually . . . I know that there are multiple Experience days, but that was the only event that I got notification for, even though when I tried to find more information about other Experience days, but that's all I

got was Experience Diversity." Rashida clearly was disconcerted that she had only been given this one option when other admitted students had multiple options. When I asked her if she thought this was strange she responded, "A little bit. And actually I remember telling my mom, I said it would be nice to like be able to go just any day and not just when Shaniqua was there." Rashida's comments clearly indicate that there was a discomfort with being singled out by race to attend a particular program and then not being given other options that were available to white students. Her tone and the way that she used the name "Shaniqua" in her comments also implied that she felt that having the "Experience Diversity" program promoted a particular stereotype of who students of color are. Catherine and Rashida's comments demonstrate that these types of programs can result in feeling alienated rather than affirmed through the creation of a racialized sense of space where the "Experience Dexter College" program was a "white public space" (Page and Thomas 1994).

This is also an area where it is important to think about intersections of identities, specifically race and class. Most of the students who felt like the "Experience Diversity" program was strange or unnecessary tended to come from middle class or upper middle class backgrounds, like Catherine and Rashida. One student I interviewed, Maria (a senior from the Bronx and second generation immigrant from a poor background), talked about how important this program was for her as someone who was navigating the college admissions process very much on her own:

> I think that I felt comfortable knowing that there were other girls in the same . . . situation as I was, that they didn't know which college they were gonna pick and everything. So I was asking, "So are you gonna choose [this College]?" trying to get as many opinions as I could. But I think it was the team-based activities that we did a lot that actually kind of

made me feel more comfortable. Because when I came, and I saw how fancy it was and everything . . . the whole environment it's so different. It's a small town, and I was like oh, wow, you know.

For Maria, the program gave her an opportunity to get support from other students that she felt that she could identify with in considering the college as an option. However, even though class is clearly a salient issue for many first-generation students of color from low-income backgrounds, the institution does not focus on or name socioeconomic class in relation to this program.

Tamara, a first-year student who identifies as half white and half African American, talked about how she had attended predominantly white schools and had always had predominantly white friends, but attending "Experience Diversity" gave her the opportunity to explore her identity as a student of color in a positive way:

> I liked it a lot. I think . . . it definitely helped me make a decision to come, because I think in a way I didn't feel like I would be completely connected to students of color, just stepping on campus, and being from a white community with like a major group of white friends. But I think coming to Experience Diversity, I was kind of, oh, these can be my friends too. I don't know, it definitely opened my eyes to see that I do identify with students of color as well, and so I can appreciate the power that comes with a group of students of color . . . And so it made it even more comfortable to come here knowing that I could identify with multiple groups of people, and be accepted and really be proud of that.

For Tamara, the program was an opportunity to explore a different facet of her identity; rather than a limitation, she saw this as an expansion of the different ways that she might connect to other students on campus.

Despite some feelings of ambiguity, many students of color expressed how much they enjoyed attending the Experience Diversity program—often connections they made during this program would lead to finding roommates and friendships that lasted throughout their college experience. As Ann described it, this experience also often

served to confirm a student of color's sense that the College was a place that emphasized

and was committed to "diversity." The 2009 invitation to the program stated,

> As an institution committed to affirming identity, we invite you and your parents to attend *Experience Diversity*, a great opportunity to delve into [Dexter] College's truly pluralistic community. Meet current and admitted students who share your interests, participate in cultural activities, and engage in dialogue about social issues. You'll also be able to check out our cultural houses and socialize with members of student organizations.

The invitation deploys several code words for race without directly naming race

including "diversity," "pluralistic," and "cultural." The focus of the invitation on

"cultural activities" and "cultural houses and student organizations" also creates a link

between "diversity" and race or racial and ethnic identity because these activities, houses,

and organizations are specifically designated for students from non-white racial

backgrounds. When Ann attended the Experience Diversity weekend, she was pleasantly

surprised to find other students she could identify with and that they appeared to be

interested in talking about race:

> And I don't remember a lot of specifics about Experience Diversity, but I remember that people were willing to talk about race. I asked a student here, "What does the [cultural house] do? Do you guys ever talk about identity and what it means to be Asian?" And she said "We could." Like, "Yeah, sure, let's get coffee." So that was a moment where I thought—where my idea that if we could talk about what it means to be a woman at a woman's college, then maybe we could talk about all these other identities. So I decided to come here with that in mind."

Ann provides an interesting example of the complexity of these types of programs and

the institution's use of the "student of color" category. Ann was the student that earlier in

the chapter talked about feeling uneasy when she first received the invitation to the

program, but ultimately she found that the program provided her with a sense of comfort

and belonging. Ann's experience is similar to many comments I have heard from students

of color who attended the program. They leave the program with a sense that Dexter

College is committed to supporting them and affirming their racial identity; that there is a vibrant and active community of students of color; and that students are interested in exploring issues of race and diversity.

When considering the admissions and orientation experience at Dexter College, I often think of the student who said to me, in one of my early interviews, "I remember being here for Experience Diversity, I remember being here for pre-orientation, and then I remember when orientation started. And it was like suddenly I was standing in the middle of a blizzard." For this student of color and many others the transition from being on campus at these programs with other students of color and then to suddenly shift to feeling surrounded by white students is disorienting and often has a negative impact on their overall sense of the college environment. In addition to the influx of white students many students of color also become disillusioned as they begin to experience racism within the institution. These encounters with racism can feel even more upsetting because it runs completely counter to the institutional messages they received throughout the Admissions process. As one senior commented in the 2009 senior survey:

> I came to [Dexter College] because it touts its diversity and grounding in social justice and because it was the best financial aid I received . . . and I have come to realize that [the college's] commitment to diversity is only at the surface level. It looks really nice on the glossy admissions brochures, but there is very little institutional commitment to changing institutional racism or classism.

Another senior shared:

> I wish there had been more administrative support for ALANA students. When I was a prospective student and came for Experience Diversity weekend, I was given the impression that that sort of welcoming community was the norm at [Dexter College]. When I arrived as a student and didn't find that welcoming community, I was surprised and felt that I had been lied to. The rest of my undergraduate experience seems to have revolved around trying to improve the undergraduate experiences of ALANA students who will come after me.

I asked a few Admissions staff members (both students and professional staff) about the challenges of talking about race and diversity with prospective students. An Admissions staff member shared her approach to talking about diversity with prospective students. What she found was that students often ask only about numbers. "It's hard, because I'm representing a place in as honest a way as possible, but the actuality when they come here is still hard. And I know that—there's nothing I can do to protect students from that. It's the reality still of the world we live in." The staff member's comments point to the fact that having a cohort of students of color attending the institution cannot protect these students from the realities of institutional racism. Sandra, a white senior, shared how she and other student staff members grappled with these issues:

> Inevitably race comes up and that was something that we talked [about] . . . and how can we represent the school when there are students who are saying that they wouldn't recommend it to other people of minority backgrounds and so we really had an interesting discussion with that . . . well are we selling something to kids who, that it's not true and that it's, are we just painting a rosy picture of oh we're all happy and we all get along and whatever.

As these comments from Admissions staff members show, it can be a difficult balancing act in trying to talk about "diversity" in a way that doesn't sugarcoat the challenges that are inherent in being part of a predominantly white community while still marketing the institution in a positive way.

In the last several years, the "Experience Diversity" program shifted to allow for the inclusion of some white students who have an interest in social justice or issues of diversity, partially in response to the controversy that has surfaced surrounding other college and university race-based programs. Despite these changes, the program has still been generally understood as designed for domestic students of color and multiracial students. However, in the spring of 2010 the Admissions office decided to completely

re-orient the Experience Diversity program and the invitation process for this and the

Experience Dexter College program. For the first time, all admitted students received the

same invitation. The front cover of the invitation is a beautiful glossy shot of the front

entrance of the library—a stately brick building with etched glass windows and a soaring

central tower that is gracefully framed by two tall trees bursting with green spring leaves.

The imposing architecture of the building is made to feel more hospitable by the presence

of a white sheet banner announcing an upcoming student event hosted by a social justice

student organization. There are students sitting at tables in front of the library and

walking in front of the library. Most of the students in the photo appear to be

phenotypically white, but it is hard to tell since they are in a slightly fuzzy focus and

several of them have their backs to the camera. In bold white font the invitation

enthusiastically announces, "You're in!"

When you flip over the invitation, the student is invited to go to the admitted

student website and register for the Experience Dexter College program. Underneath the

dates for Experience Dexter College program is a paragraph with the heading

"Experience our diversity" in bold. The text that follows explains that during one of the

three Experience Dexter College programs the Experience Diversity program will run

concurrently and that students can sign up for either one:

> Some program components will overlap while other elements will be unique to the
> diversity program. Diversity is who we are—it's not a separate thing, not a rhetorical
> claim, not an afterthought. In fact, diversity has as many meanings here as we have
> students and we don't presume to know what it means to you. Our Experience Diversity
> program offers a campus preview that emphasizes identity and experience in workshops,
> panel discussions, and activities that may be of special interest to our prospective students
> of color—and prospective white students.

The "Experience Diversity" program contains all of the same elements as the

"Experience Dexter College" programs, but has several additional workshops and panel

discussions that focus on identity. However, the message in the postcard that "diversity"

is not a separate thing is still undermined by the fact that only one of the admitted student

programs has this additional focus on "diversity." The question could be asked: If

"diversity" is "who we are," then shouldn't this be part of every admitted students

experience? I would argue that the answer lies in the need to continue to ensure that

students, particularly white students, are not made to feel uncomfortable, especially at

this key moment in the Admissions process when students will be selecting between

Dexter College and other similar institutions.

I asked an Admissions staff member to talk about what motivated this shift and

she shared:

> We've always felt a little uncomfortable, actually, inviting only students of color to the
> event. It felt so like we were putting a label—we were identifying with an aspect of their
> identity, and assuming that that was something that they would want to be picked out on,
> and told, "Here's the thing for you." We've never really felt comfortable with that, so
> that's always been sort of like an uneasiness, but we never knew how to do it otherwise,
> partly because our peers are doing the same thing that we used to do, so there are many
> student of color programs elsewhere, where only students of color are invited. And so we
> thought about what is the alternative to that? And I mean on a like practical level, once
> kids actually came to the Focus on Diversity or Experience Diversity Program, I knew
> some of them didn't really wanna talk about those issues. So we thought that those kids
> should have the option to not do that if they didn't want to.

As this staff member's comments indicate, one of the challenges of making changes

specifically within the sphere of Admissions is remaining competitive with peer

institutions and knowing that college applicants and their families will be doing a lot of

comparison shopping.

While terminology related to racial categorization in higher education has shifted

over the course of time from *minority student* to terms like *ALANA student* (African

American, Latina, Asian American, and Native American) or *student of color,* the result is the same: from the beginning of their college experience all non-white students are assigned to a discrete category within the institution. Both the terminology and the related programs result in constituting these particular students as both the "other" and the embodiment of "diversity." In other words it simultaneously erases and re-inscribes their difference. This type of categorization exemplifies the way that race continues to be a central organizing principle within higher education. It is particularly important to note that power differentials impact who and how groups of people are racially and/or ethnically labeled and identified. As Williams (1989) argues, "not all individuals have equal power to fix the coordinates of self-other identity formation. Nor are individuals equally empowered to opt out of the labeling process, to become the invisible against which others' visibility is measured" (420). I would argue that this power to name, label, and categorize is another central white cultural practice that reinforces whiteness as invisible or the norm in relation to students from non-white racial backgrounds.

This categorization process also relates back to Hardt and Negri's (2000) "strategy of differential inclusion" where differences are recognized, but managed within an inclusive order and Minh-ha's (1999) description of the "identity enclosure" created by "special categories." These concepts are useful in considering the ever-shifting racial terminology within higher education. Even though the terms may shift, the "identity enclosure" for students from non-white racial backgrounds remains and they must grapple with how and where they want to situate themselves.

Eleanor, a white junior from Michigan, explains her sense of the term "students of color" and the role it plays within the college:

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I think it contributes an "us," white person, versus "them" mentality. And I think it contributes to a desire of fixing because it's—students of color seems like a large enough group, that there's an issue that we have to deal with, and the white folks only need to serve as like fixers—it's not something that happens together. I think it's problematic because it looks at the race issue as a black and white issue. Because then it's the white folks and then students of color, and the image that often comes up as someone who's black. It's the idea of working with the construction of race, even knowing it's a construction.

Eleanor's comments highlight several interesting threads including the idea of students of color as a "large enough group" almost as if they can be thought of as a type of "interest group" and she also points to the fact that for many white students "race" is equated with blackness. She also describes the idea of white folks as "fixers" when it comes to issues of race; this is a reference to the idea that white people's involvement in issues of race should be to help or save people of color. As Eleanor points out, in the "fixer" model white people are still separate from, and in a position of power over, people of color.

Several of the students I interviewed expressed concern about these types of racial boundaries being drawn. Catherine (a multiracial first year student) describes her sense of this separation which feels much more acute to her at Dexter College than in her hometown of San Francisco:

Part of my problem with having all this racial celebration stuff, is that if you want to get rid of racism, creating those lines between who is what, if you didn't create them, there could be no racism and I think it's weird that back home . . . we don't do things that would create those lines as much, or at least not, that hasn't been my experience, but here, they are being created. So I think it's odd to like separate it out . . . students of color and then the white people.

Catherine's comments reflect another theme I heard from students of all racial backgrounds who felt that if we just stop naming or categorizing, racism will disappear. These comments coming from both white students and students of color are also evidence

of hegemony and specifically what Omi and Winant (1994) refer to as the "neoliberal racial project" which promotes an ideology that it is better not to focus on race because focusing on it will lead to negative consequences such as racism. I further view this focus on naming (or not naming) race as another white cultural practice, because it places the emphasis on getting an individual student of color placed into the correct category or politically correct "name" rather than examining the structures that led to the creation of the names and categories in the first place.

Baugh (1999) notes similar limitations regarding "changing terms of self-reference among American Slave Descendants" and traces the shift among slave descendants from Black to African-American. Baugh uses DuBois' warning to not confuse names with things:

> Do not at the outset of your career make the all too common error of mistaking names for things. Names are only conventional signs for identifying things. Things are the reality that counts. If a thing is despised, either because of ignorance or because it is despicable, you will not alter matters by changing its name. If men despise Negroes, they will not despise them less if Negroes are called "colored" or "Afro-American." [1999:87]

Baugh's (1999) solution is to encourage more analysis of who is doing the naming and why. He further notes that debates over terminology can be understood as part of a larger attempt to sort out identity. Williams provides a further caution about not recognizing that larger racial and ethnic categorical distinctions within society always inform the possibilities and limitations of individual identity formation processes:

> The ethnic aspect of identity formation, like the other categorical aspects of any identity formation process, must be understood in relation to the societal production of enduring categorical distinctions and not simply in terms of individuals adopting and "shedding" particular manifestations of those categorical identifications. To do otherwise is to make the mistake many of our informants make—to believe, for example, that a nonwhite can "whiten" into invisibility. [1999:428]

As I discussed earlier in this chapter, within higher education it is the institution that begins the naming process during the Admissions process and continues to play an active role in both naming and structuring racial categories through a variety of institutional practices. The institution uses the naming process to assist in the management and control of racial categorization and "diversity." As one white staff member I spoke to stated, "assigning racial identity is an act of privilege and power that says 'I have a right to define what's going on.'" In this case the institution assumes the right to define who belongs in the "student of color" category. The end result is that higher education as a whole plays a hegemonic role in reifying and structuring a certain type of racial identity and subjectivity with terminology like "students of color."

Other important pieces of analyzing the impacts of the category "students of color" or "ALANA" within colleges and universities are the dangers of universalization and homogenization. Both Minh-ha (1989) and Spivak (1988) speak to the issue of lumping a large number of nations with distinct identities into categories such as "third world" or "subaltern." They argue that these types of categories flatten differences and create a universal "other" whose source of commonality is being defined in opposition to a majority population. Similarly, while the term "ALANA" attempts to indicate that there is a multiplicity of races contained within this unifying term, I am not convinced that it is completely successful in this regard. When colleges and universities use the ALANA category for statistical purposes, this umbrella category does not reflect the differences between the racial groups. For example, African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans continue to be more significantly underrepresented at colleges and universities in comparison to Asian Americans. By combining all of these racial groups into one

statistical figure it can give an elevated sense of racial diversity within a college or university. I also observed an increasing shift away from the term ALANA toward the term "students of color" during my time at Dexter College, which further homogenizes this complex group. These types of categories also do not account for the ways in which race intersects with multiple other social identities, specifically class and gender. Despite the problems that I have identified with the "student of color" category, I don't want to lose sight of the fact that many of the students I interviewed found it to be a category that helped contribute to their success and survival within the predominantly white setting. This dynamic is part of what makes this such a complicated issue for both students and higher education.

These examples illuminate the complicated ways that racial categorization shapes a student of color's experience and subjectivity at a predominantly white college or university. Omi and Winant's description of hegemony is useful in articulating the process of racial categorization during the Admissions process, "Hegemony operates by simultaneously structuring and signifying. As in the case of racial opposition, gender or class-based conflict today links structural inequity and injustice on the one hand, and identifies and represents its subjects on the other" (1994:68). Students of color are not only identified in the Admissions process, they are also homogenized into several umbrella categories (African American, Latina, Asian American, and Native American) and ultimately into the overarching category of "students of color." The Admissions programs that single students out based on racial categorization further this project. These practices also reinforce whiteness as normative through silence (Castagno 2006) and reinforce the idea of students of color as "other." However, some students comments

reflect that these types of programs can also serve as an opportunity for "strategic

essentialism" (Spivak 1995), and as Pollock (2004) argued many students still find utility

in lump-sum categories. I would argue that one of the important factors in considering the

usefulness of this type of racial categorization is noting who has the power to do the

naming and categorizing—is it the student or the institution?

Pre-Orientation: Reframing "Diversity"

Fieldnote, September 1, 2009:
Kickoff Event for New Dexter College Pre-Orientation Program:
"Promoting Intercultural Dialogue and Creating Inclusion"

The auditorium is a space I am intimately familiar with—the site of so many orientations, programs, forums, cultural shows, performances, and dance parties—it is one of the central hubs of campus. It is a beautiful old theater. The hard wood floors are worn, but still glow with a golden hue. The walls are covered in wood paneling in a square framed pattern and gracefully curve, making the overall shape of the room an oval. There are two levels of balcony; the main balcony is supported by simple, clean wood pillars. The ceiling and proscenium are cream-colored plaster with an ornate scalloped design. The space feels cool even in the summer when the dark heavy green and gold brocade curtains are drawn shut. The balcony seats are covered in a deep red velvety fabric with wooden frames and reminds me of an old-style movie theater.
     It is September 1, 2009, and as I enter the auditorium, I hear a soft lilting music playing with a woman singing. I'm suddenly overcome with emotion and exhaustion. I think about how much has gone into creating this moment and now it is here. I look at my colleagues huddled by the front of the stage and feel a rush of tenderness towards them. It's one of those moments that is so cinematic, I know it will stay with me forever. Tonight is the kick off for our new pre-orientation program, "Promoting Intercultural Dialogue and Creating Inclusion." I take a deep breath and watch as things unfold.
     Fiona has been our outside consultant on the program, but tonight she is acting as our keynote speaker. She is commanding in her bright blue wraparound jacket and her pin mike. She is a tall, thin, angular white woman with short spiky hair and her movements are almost stork-like, but more graceful and fluid.
     She is clearly in performance mode. It is a style that I am unused to seeing at Dexter College—a little bit motivational speaker, a little bit Oprah—but it seems to really be working and the students are responding. The room is literally pulsing with their energy. She introduces the "bingo" activity and the students rise up from sitting on the floor and get moving. There is a cacophony of voices rising and falling like a waterfall. They dash around the room attempting to meet other students who can help them fill out their bingo sheets.
     Now that we've got them warmed up, I take the stage to help introduce the program. I have always loved being on stage and tonight is no exception; I feel myself basking in the warmth of their laughter and applause. I have learned over the years that new students will applaud for anything; they are inculcated into a culture of cheering with

the upperclasswomen showing them the ropes. Half of them may not even know what they are clapping for but everyone else is doing it and it's an outlet for them to physically express their enthusiasm, excitement, and nervous energy.

After our introductions, we set up the common ground activity. Fiona does a masterful job setting the stage and hitting all our themes around inclusion. For this activity people move into the center of the circle when something they identify with is named. We really have too many people even for the large open floor of the auditorium, so our circle is unwieldy with many people squished close together. It's interesting to watch what happens when racial groups begin to be named—a rhythm has been established of cheering for all who enter the circle—cheers of acceptance, praise, being seen and acknowledged. Some students enter boldly and move into the very center of the circle, some dance in, some take one tiny step in still hugging the periphery, while others leap into the middle.

When Fiona starts calling out different racial backgrounds I ask my colleagues, "Will they cheer for the white people?" already pushing up against my own discomfort and Tabitha, my African American colleague, responds, "of course, they are cheering for everyone" and yes I know they will but I can't get past my own awkwardness—cheering for whiteness just seems inherently wrong. When "white" is called out, students do enter the circle and they are cheered by their classmates, but most of them enter timidly, or with their heads down, not making eye contact. Their reluctance is in stark contrast to the jubilant entries when African/African-American and Latina were called out. I feel and empathize with their discomfort; instead of proudly claiming that space, they are furtive, as if hoping no one will notice they are there or fearful that something might get thrown at them or jeered at them. Still, despite my discomfort, I find myself hoping that in this moment, where whiteness is made visible and named that this might in some way help break the link between whiteness as normative. And begin to introduce a new model where a white racial identity is one amongst many and that, as messy as the very topic of race is, we are all in it together.

The Planning Process

In the summer of 2008, I proposed to my colleagues that we should consider revamping our pre-orientation program. I was motivated in large part by many of the issues and concerns that I have already outlined about the way that "diversity" was conceptualized within the college community. I wondered if we could begin to shift some of these dynamics if we altered the way that new students started their Dexter College experience. From the beginning I tried to embrace two (not always complementary) goals. The first goal was to continue validating the need for domestic students of color and multiracial students to have separate space if and when they needed it, particularly if we gave them the choice to decide if they wanted to participate in this separate space. We

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also felt that it was important to continue to acknowledge that there are unique challenges for domestic students of color and multiracial students who enter into a predominantly white setting. The inherent dynamics of power and privilege that are part of a predominantly white campus cannot simply be ignored or set aside. Plus, as I have shown earlier in this chapter, there can still be positive outcomes from having a space for "students of color" even with the problematic aspects of this categorization. However at the same time, I had also been persuaded by my colleague Tabitha that it was important to provide students of color and multiracial students with opportunities to think about themselves as people with multiple and intersecting identities and that they should have the chance to fully explore all of their identities, not just race.

My other goal was to give white students an opportunity to become aware of their own racial identity and to think critically about the impact that it has on their lives and relationships. I wanted them to make cross-racial connections and have an opportunity to participate in facilitated dialogues about race and ethnicity. For both groups, I wanted them to begin to interrogate the construction of racial categories, power, and privilege in the United States. I wanted to help frame for them what a "diverse and inclusive community" can look like and help give them some skills to sit with their own discomfort when conversations became challenging or difficult. From the outset I, along with the planning team, recognized that this was a very ambitious set of goals for a mere 2½ day program, but we also saw the program as just the beginning for ideally a host of experiences that students would have over their four years at Dexter College. One of the areas that the program was not able to address was an interrogation of the fact that Dexter College is still a predominantly white college and that our demographics will continue to

impact our ability to fully realize the idea of a racially diverse community. What we wanted to do was to try and orient them to the culture in a way that would encourage all students to engage more deeply and critically with race and "diversity" in all of its complexity.

While I had these specific educational goals for the program, in the end it also became a very useful case study for how people respond when you start to shine a light on whiteness. Over the course of planning and executing this program, I was bombarded by a slew of white cultural practices and also found myself having to critically examine some of my own practices and responses. In this section I will focus on issues that emerged during the planning process and the feedback that we received from students about the program.

Three central issues loomed over the planning process: (1) the issue of naming, (2) assumptions about the program related to whiteness and race, and (3) the new program in relation to the former pre-orientation programs. When it comes to talking about race on a college campus one of the biggest roadblocks, particularly for white people, stems from the issue of naming (Hill 2008). Many white students with whom I spoke, both in my interviews and in casual conversations, described their uncertainty and anxiety about how and when to refer to someone's race who was non-white. From an institutional perspective this is where the terms "students of color" and "multiracial students" come in handy because they provide safe and comfortable umbrella terms that can be used broadly. In comparison, within the college setting it is very rare to ever hear "white students" referred to as a collective group by administrators, faculty, or students.

I recognized this dichotomy in a poignant way when we first started working on creating the new and expanded pre-orientation program. We wanted to make it clear to the student committees that helped plan the existing pre-orientation programs (one for students of color and multiracial students and one for international students) that we still recognized that they had distinct needs and should have their own separate space within the context of the program to address their concerns. However the goal was also to bring the students of color/multiracial students and international students, along with domestic white students, for intergroup dialogue and cross-cultural conversations. The curriculum of the pre-orientation program was heavily inspired by educational models of intergroup dialogue.[2] The planning team understood that these three groupings (students of color/multiracial students, international students, and white students) were created from a white majority perspective and that these groupings grossly oversimplified the complexity of racial and ethnic identification. Our hope was that we could be transparent with the students about these categories, but still find some utility in using them as a jumping off point, a starting place from which students could begin to think critically about how these categories had come to be and why they still were such an organizing principle within higher education and U.S. society as a whole.

When we began talking about the program with other campus constituencies, people understood it within the current framework of our pre-orientation program and saw us as adding a "white student pre-orientation." The invisibility of whiteness hit me

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[2] "The intergroup dialogue program provides a unique setting within the academy for students from different back-grounds and cultural identities to discuss commonalities, learn about differences, and address issues of conflict. An intergroup dialogue is defined as a face-to-face meeting between students from two or more social identity groups that have a history of conflict or potential conflict. These groups are broadly defined by ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, mental and/or physical ability, socio-economic class, religion and other social characteristics" (Zúñiga and Sevig 1997:23).

full force the first few times I heard myself describe the new concept of the program to my colleagues. I would say something like:

> We're planning to expand and build on the current pre-orientation program. We will continue to have a domestic students of color/multiracial students group, an international students group, and a domestic white students group. These groups will spend time separately focused on issues particular to their group and also time together in cross-racial conversations.

When I gave this explanation, I would begin confidently enough, but each time I got to the part where I said "domestic white students group," I would stumble a bit—it just didn't sound right—in fact, to my ears it sounded really wrong. I would try to rush on to the next part, not wanting to linger on the "white student group" and my own discomfort in saying it out loud. After the first few times this happened, I thought about the difference between the confident, nonchalant way that I tossed off the categories of "students of color/multiracial students" and "international students" without a second thought versus the furtive and awkward way I would say "white students." In analyzing this distinction I realized how deeply I had internalized the ideology of whiteness as normative and the related sense that it was not something that should be highlighted or spoken about. When I shared this epiphany with my colleague Tabitha, she and I started ruminating about what would happen if institutionally we started using "white students" as a category for bragging rights in the same way and with the same frequency that we did for "students of color." For example, "We just admitted X percentage of white students!" or "X number of white students received fellowships!" We laughed as we engaged in this exercise because of how ridiculous it seemed, but for me it brought the point home of how often race is made visible within the college community, but only for one segment of the population.

What was both surprising and frustrating to me were the assumptions that people made—primarily white people—about the goals of the pre-orientation program. Many white students conveyed concern that the purpose of the program was to tell them they were racist or to make them feel guilty about white privilege. Charlotte is a junior whose racial background is both Native American and white, but identifies as white based in large part due to her appearance of fair skin and light hair. Charlotte was one of the white students who signed up to help run the pre-orientation, and she talked with me about the comments one of her friends made about the program, "Basically, she said something to the effect of like, I don't want to be told that I'm white and have, something I don't want to be told that I've oppressed people. I don't want to be blamed for racism. I don't want to be told I'm racist." Another student, Ann—who is multiracial and also helped out with the new pre-orientation program—reflected on the negative comments she read on an anonymous online forum that Dexter College students use: "It was just so bad, it was a lot of 'they just want to indoctrinate all the first-years into thinking that they're privileged and racist.'" These comments illustrate one of the major obstacles in getting white students to engage in conversations about race: the fact that they associate white people talking about race with guilt, blame, and accusations of racism.

Repeatedly, I watched many white students (and some faculty and staff) view the program through this lens of fear and anxiety. In the white student's imaginings a group of students of color are pointing a finger at them and accusing them of being racist. This framework also informed another common critique of the program—that we were supporting "segregation." The word "segregation" is a term that many students (white students in particular) frequently use, often in a way that completely removes it from its

original historical context. Students seem to understand that segregation is a serious word and use it in the hopes of giving weight to their claims. In the case of the new pre-orientation program the claim was that by having students spend some time in what we eventually called three "affinity groups" (domestic white students, domestic students of color/multiracial students, and international students), this was segregation and would lead to more separation on campus between racial groups. The part that students and others continued to miss was that the affinity groupings was just one piece of a program whose overall focus was on intercultural dialogue between students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

The extreme emotion of the responses and the hyper-focus on whiteness were clear illustrations for me about what happens when you attempt to shine a light on whiteness. I could also tell that the program had hit a nerve when it became a popular press item starting with the student newspaper and spreading over the course of several months to other neighboring college papers, the local town newspaper, and an online journal for higher education. All of these articles focused on whiteness, with the headlines most frequently including the phrase, "white orientation." This phrase not only put a disproportionate emphasis on whiteness, it also eliminated the "pre-" from "orientation" and that fact that this was a program to precede the general orientation. The fact that this phrase was featured so prominently and so consistently made it clear to me that this was the component that was newsworthy about the program. Even though several of the articles did include information about the focus on intercultural dialogue and inclusion, this was clearly not the primary focus. I would hypothesize that at the core

it's about fear, fear of losing privilege, fear of conflict, fear of being accused of racism, and a fear that talking about race would lead to all of these things and worse.

The pre-orientation program and its direct invitation for white students to both talk about race and consider their own racial identity felt threatening for some white students because it interfered with their ability to keep "diversity" at a safe distance. However there were some white students who viewed the program through an alternative frame, one that allowed them to see the program as an opportunity to reflect on their own racial identity and come together with other white students and students of color to think about how they could be anti-racist allies and work toward social justice. In the late spring of 2009, I put out a call for students to apply for a leadership board to help with "pre-orientation for white students interested in anti-racism and social justice."

Indeed we were still struggling mightily with naming and what to call this group. In general, I have seen college campuses struggle with the specific naming of whiteness particularly in relation to groups formed specifically to have conversations about whiteness. In my time at Dexter there were at least three different iterations of these types of groups: WWAR: White Women Against Racism, Debunking Whiteness, and DARC: Dexter Anti-Racism coalition. After getting student advice we decided for the purpose of the application to incorporate two common diversity buzzwords—"anti-racism" and "social justice"—in hopes of luring in white students who had a passion for these issues. Eventually after several long conversations with the student board members we decided to go the popular route of many college organizations of using an acronym and named the group "WARP"—White Anti-Racist Pre-orientation Board.

I will admit I had very low expectations for how many students would apply to be a part of the white students pre-orientation planning board, partially because of the negative feedback I had heard from white students and partially due to the poor timing of having the applications go out at one of the busiest points in the semester. I was hoping that maybe I would get 4 or 5 really committed applicants. Imagine my surprise when over 20 applications came streaming in. Every applicant submitted a written application detailing their interest in the board and then had a one-on-one interview with me. Of the many interesting themes that emerged from this process, one of the most striking was the clear presence of a cohort of white students on campus who *did* want to participate in conversations about race and thinking about their racial identity. Most of these students described feeling isolated because no one else in their immediate friendship group was willing to talk about race. For me the whole process reinforced the real value in providing an institutional space, support, and permission for white students to participate in conversations about race.

The white students who applied for the board had a variety of motivations. Many of them had previously participated in the Dexter College Intergroup Dialogue program. This is a recurring theme that I found throughout my research: students—both white and students of color—who had participated in intergroup dialogue had a more nuanced and sophisticated sense of the complexities of race and racism in the United States. One student applicant mentioned that a racial "incident" involving the student newspaper had been a catalyst for her and that she wanted students to see "how racism harms everyone in our community." Another applicant wrote that when she first arrived at Dexter College, "issues of racism overwhelmed me and depressed me . . . I would like to help

other students through that step of denial, show them that there is hope for a society without racism as long as we work together." A common thread throughout the interview process for the white pre-orientation planners was the need for a safe "comfortable" space for white students to have the conversation with each other about race and to shed their fears, embarrassment, and shame. The student applicants expressed that white students need to *consciously* seek out these opportunities to engage in race. When I asked Eleanor during her interview why she chose to apply for the white student pre-orientation board she stated, "I didn't really like my orientation experience, and when this opportunity came up, I think I like doing anything that involves engaging people in talking about some of the harder issues. And so that's what drew me to it, and I knew it was something different."

Ann, who was involved with the student of color/multiracial pre-orientation planning group talked during her interview with me about how she was disappointed with the way that students were responding to the idea of the new program because for her it exemplified a "disconnect between wanting an inclusive campus and not necessarily getting it, yeah. Because the one thing that frustrated me a lot is that people would talk a lot, and then not really be, 'Oh, I know there are problems on campus, but I don't like what people are trying to do about it, and I don't really have any solutions.'" Ann's comments highlight the contradictory space that students of color and multiracial students inhabit within a predominantly white environment. They receive messages from the institution that their racial background is considered a positive attribute and something valued by the "diverse community." They are invited to participate in special programs and events based on their racial background, but at the same time those programs and

events are often questioned and critiqued by their white peers. Bush found a similar discrepancy in her research in that white students tended to put forth a general belief in the idea of equality, but that conversely, "whites feel vulnerable and resentful that measures taken to equalize opportunity could work to disadvantage them" (2004:13). Some white students may direct their frustration both at students of color who they see as a direct threat to their white privilege and the institution that puts these programs in place.

The Bridges Program

The pre-existing pre-orientation program for students of color and multiracial students, Bridges, had been a long-standing source of contention between students of color/multiracial students and white students on campus. For many students of color/ multiracial students, this optional program was a cherished moment to come together with other women of color prior to the start of orientation. As Gloria, a senior student of color who is a first-generation immigrant, described it:

> The best moment ever . . . So [Bridges], for me, was awesome to see other people, and also to meet other people that weren't just—meeting other New Yorkers, other students of color that weren't stereotypes, "We're all from New York, so we're all dressed like this or talk like this" or whatever. It was, "Wow, you live ten blocks away from me, but we're completely different, and that's fine." And I think also what was really cool to me, other students of color who weren't raised here. Also some of the conversation where I was, "Wow, I'm not the only one."

For Gloria and other students of color Bridges was a moment where they described finding that space of comfort, belonging, and forming relationships that lasted. Many students described making friendships and connections that they maintained throughout their Dexter College experience.

However, over time the program had floundered a bit partially due to several years of constant transition in the staff position that organized the program. Without a

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clear vision for the program it had devolved into a few workshops and lots of "getting to

know you" activities. The enrollment for the program was typically about 80-90 students,

but by 2008 only about 30-35 of those students were actively participating in the entire

program with the majority using it as additional time to move into their dorm rooms and

get settled. This ability to move in early was of course one of the biggest complaints from

domestic white students who felt it created an unfair advantage for students of color.

They also argued that the program as a whole segregated students of color from the white

student population and ensured that there would be little mixing across racial lines

because the student of color friendship groups would already be formed.

Many of these comments also questioned the relevancy of the program in this day

and age. Kim, a white senior, remarked:

> I don't think I heard about [Bridges] so much until I became an orientation leader my
> sophomore year. I remember hearing other orientation leaders talking about [Bridges].
> And even students of color who chose to or chose not to participate, and listening to their
> reasons about whether yes, they think it's a good idea. Most were "no, it's unnecessary,"
> and "I don't want to be singled out like that. I don't think we should get something
> special," was a lot of what I heard. I think that it makes sense for—I guess part of me
> thought they were getting special treatment . . . But at the same time, also wondering why
> isn't there like a [Bridges] kind of program for white students and things that they may be
> thinking about. I think those were my thoughts.

Kim's statements reflect the ambivalence that many white students feel about programs

and services that are targeted specifically for students of color. However, it is important

to note that throughout Kim's reflections there is no indication that she has reflected on

white privilege and the power dynamics and inequalities related to race.

One of my key points of anxiety in initiating the new program and adding white

students to pre-orientation was the potential loss to students of color and multiracial

students. I didn't want them to see this as something being taken away from them or as

white students invading their space. But I also had become increasingly convinced that one of the things that was keeping the institution from being a positive place for students of color and multiracial students was the sense that white students were not invested in or knowledgeable about issues of race. My hypothesis was that having white students think critically about issues of race and presenting the opportunity to form cross-cultural connections through dialogue as part of their first encounter with the institution could have a transformative effect on the way that they engaged with these issues throughout their college experience.

While there are many positive outcomes and experiences that students of color have with attending programs for students of color, the experience of some multiracial students with these programs highlight the growing complexity of students and the ways that higher education needs to continue to rethink categories such as "students of color" and "multiracial" students and who is institutionally placed under these large umbrellas. Charlotte (a multiracial student who culturally identifies as white) provides an interesting example of how this complexity plays out for students when they interact with higher education. Because she checked the multiracial box on her admissions application, she received an invitation to Bridges as an incoming first year student. Charlotte describes her experience as a Bridges attendee:

> Great, you're multiracial, on we go, which was nice, cause I was allowed to identify as I would like to, which was kind of refreshing and you know, getting the forms in the mail, all of the brochures and everything else that [came], was nice and up until when I got here, I was feeling pretty good about it and clearly decided to do [Bridges] and then got here and just the way in which everything was said, everything was "students of color," nothing was "students of color and multiracial students." I mean, I was very attentive to the wording of a lot of things and I really felt like I was in a room that I did not belong in and I really felt, even when I walked in, just people's expressions of why are you here.

Charlotte shared that she attended a few sessions, but then decided just to hang out in her room because of her sense that she was an outsider and didn't belong. After this somewhat rocky beginning Charlotte decided to get involved in the Intergroup Dialogue Project. The program gave her an opportunity to reflect more deeply on her multiracial identity, her white skin privilege, and her experiences of growing up in a predominantly black neighborhood. Charlotte also decided to join the white student pre-orientation board. She was excited, but still clearly nervous about participating in the pre-orientation program both because of its direct naming of whiteness and for fear that she would again feel like an outsider invading someone else's space. She even sent me a long email over the summer about a month before the pre-orientation program detailing some of her nagging concerns. However, when I interviewed her in the late fall and asked her to reflect on her experience with the new pre-orientation program she shared the following:

> We're all coming together to have these conversations and address these issues in a very purposeful way to just deal with them instead of just beating around the bush and kind of not accomplishing things. I mean, we are here to make a difference and I think that, just having such a specific goal that includes everyone in the room in the goal, was just a phenomenal experience.

For Charlotte, the new pre-orientation program helped re-orient her own sense of what "diversity" meant within the context of Dexter College. She liked having her individual identity recognized, but also being given the opportunity to bring everyone, including white students, into the conversations about race and ethnicity.

Responses to the New Pre-Orientation

During the interviews I conducted with first-year students in the spring of 2010, I was interested to find out what they thought about the invitation that they had received to the pre-orientation program and how they had determined whether or not they would

attend. Sarah (a white first-year student) describes how she decided to attend the pre-orientation program:

> I got an e-mail about it and I was . . . I have always loved cultures and learning about different cultures and diversity and different people and traditions all around the world. I love traveling and all that, and I thought it would give me a really good perspective into, cause I know diversity was huge at [Dexter College] and stuff like that, but I knew it would help my start into [college] and what could be better?

In contrast, when I asked Kate (a first-year student from New York) if she remembered getting the invitation for the pre-orientation program, she responded, "I don't think, if I did get the invitation, I didn't give it much thought. Because I probably glanced at it quickly and thought it was for students of color only and just didn't sign up for it, so that's probably what I did." Again these two first year students reinforce two of the central themes that I discussed at the beginning of this chapter: (1) the conceptualization by white students of "diversity" being linked to learning about cultures, traditions, and a global perspective, and (2) the sense from white students that if something mentions learning about or discussing race that it must be for students of color and by extension, not for white students.

As I continued my conversation with Kate, I asked her if there was there anything else that she took away from the orientation experience, or if any of her initial impressions had been challenged. Kate commented:

> Yeah, I actually learned that the pre-orientation program was for also for white students, it wasn't only for students of color and that the ones that they wanted, that the crowd they were trying to draw from were like well-off people who come from areas that are not diverse at all and are not used to the diversity they might encounter when they first get to [Dexter College], so I think that's beneficial, but at the same time, I was kind of surprised that it is as serious as it is.

I thought it was very interesting that through Kate's conversations with other students about pre-orientation that she had made a link between race and class and thought the

target white student audience for the program would be wealthy or upperclass white students. Kate appears to be making an assumption that upperclass white students would be more likely to need help in dealing with racial diversity. Bettie (2003) found in her study of white and Mexican high school girls that for the white middle and upper class students typically neither race nor class are necessarily visible to their sense of self and identification. Both Kate and the white students in Bettie's study consider themselves to be "normal," a notion that is reinforced by the fact that they are the dominant group that others define themselves in relation to.

Like many white students I interviewed, Kate also makes the assumption that the existence of the pre-orientation program and other discussion-based projects about race and class means that there is a problem or an issue. Again this casts the purpose of these types of opportunities for engagement in a negative light—as a problem that must be solved—versus thinking about these programs as opportunities to create connections or pursue self-exploration. At another point in the conversation Kate mentioned that she would "be interested in going to one just to see what people have to say." She thinks of herself entering into one of those types of conversations as an observer rather than a full participant with something to bring to the conversation. I would argue that this sense of distance and de-personalization from issues of race and ethnicity for white students is one of the biggest obstacles in creating more diverse, inclusive, and engaged learning environments. Kate's comments also reveal several "common sense" understandings that are part of the hegemony of a predominantly white institution, namely that white students have no relationship to the concept of "diversity" and that race is no longer a significant

issue on college campuses, especially at a place like Dexter College that has a "diverse community."

Several of the white first year students I interviewed who attended the program talked about how much they enjoyed the program overall, but that they did not like or understand the reason for the white student affinity groups. Heather, a white first-year student from the west coast, described her experience in this way:

> I liked the pre-orientation program for the most part. I didn't really like that we were separated into affinity groups and, because I felt that just made it less inclusive overall and also that we were separated as one group of just white people and then one group of everybody else, so it's, you're white or you're something else and so, I actually went to the other group, which was interesting, but overall I did like it and I'm glad that I went and got to know people there, cause actually a lot of people that I feel like I still know, are ones that I met there.

Heather was so resistant to the idea of the white affinity group that she decided to attend the affinity group for students of color and multiracial students. I agree with Heather's assessment that it is problematic to have a white group and a group of "everybody else," but part of what we were trying to help the students understand is that this type of grouping happens all the time, so we need to be aware of it and understand how it shapes our experiences. I would also argue that Heather's sense of entitlement to join the student of color and multiracial group was informed by her sense of white privilege and doesn't reflect any consideration of how her decision impacted the students of color in the group.

Miranda (a white first-year student from the southwest) expressed a similar sense of discomfort with the white affinity group:

> The only part that I didn't really enjoy was—or maybe for lack of a better word that I didn't find as engaging—maybe was when we separated all of those of us that are racialized as white, altogether, just because we didn't really have that much to talk about, which I mean it seemed, I know some of us were, before we did that, we were a little confused as to why it's about creating inclusion and then we were separated based on ethnicity, and I got it afterward, but, or maybe spent a little less time. We were there for a while and we, I mean, we didn't have that much to say about, you know, seeing as most

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of us had the good fortune of not having been treated unfairly based on our racialization in our lifetime, so and I didn't get the feel that many of us needed, as if we were racist or had, I don't know, we just didn't have as much to talk about.

Miranda's comments underscore one of the common themes that I will continue to develop: the idea that white students don't have much to say about race, because they haven't experienced racism first-hand. Miranda's comments imply that the other reason to pull white students together to talk about race is if some of them were racist, of which she could see no evidence of their group. Again, students like Miranda have been socialized into seeing race as something that is external to them rather than an integral piece of their own social identity.

For Samantha (a first-year student who identifies as African-American and is a second-generation immigrant) the pre-orientation program was very positive. Samantha shared with me that she had continued to develop close friendships with the other students that she had met during pre-orientation. When I asked Samantha what she had enjoyed most about the program she responded, "The discussions we would have." Jessica, a white senior who helped out with the program, also reflected on the value of the open dialogue that the pre-orientation program promoted:

> Yeah, and I was actually really impressed by the pre-orientation program. . . . I think what pre-orientation did was it threw a lot of issues on the board and said, look, we can talk about them, we can be open with each other, and I think it was a small enough group that they could start . . . breaking out of, I don't really want to talk about stuff. They were all these cool people are here and these are all things we want to talk about and think about and we're really not sure what we think about them, but let's talk about them and figure that out and I think they sort of jumped into it with an open mind, which I think can carry over, really, really well.

Gloria, a black senior who is a first-generation immigrant, was someone who had been very active in the Bridges program and helped plan and run the new pre-orientation program. She also had a very positive impression of the program:

> I thought it was amazing, I was so impressed. The fact that everybody had the time to do their affinity groups and talk amongst themselves. But then the fact that everybody was able to speak for themselves in the small groups—we're like, "Hey, what did you do in the white group? What did you do in the students of color group?" "International students?" so that way, it wasn't us, the leaders or administrators—anybody saying this is what happened, but the students themselves were able to share with each other. And it just took away the pressure and the tension of what were they doing behind closed doors.

Here Gloria refers to the fact that the students spent time not only in their affinity groups, but also in cross-racial small groups. As she points out, inviting the students to share openly what had happened during the affinity groups lifted the veil of secrecy and suspicion about what was going on in those groups and introduced students to the value of caucus or affinity groups.

While there is still more that could be done to improve this pilot pre-orientation program, particularly in the way that we frame the affinity group experience for white students, I did feel like it was a step in the right direction toward building a more diverse, inclusive, and engaged community. Despite the multiple critiques (especially during the planning process) new students responded very positively to the program; in fact, an evaluation survey of the pre-orientation program revealed a 99.5% satisfaction rate.[3] The main pieces of the program that I think are worth noting and replicating are including *all* students in the "diversity" conversation, giving students opportunities to engage in and practice cross-racial dialogue, and providing students a space to individually and collectively to reflect on their own racial identity and the larger system of power and privilege that operates in the United States.

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[3] Out of 196 respondents, 146 (74.5%) said "very satisfied," 49 (25%) said "somewhat satisfied," zero said "somewhat dissatisfied," and one (0.5%) said "very dissatisfied."

After Orientation: The Lived Experience of "Diverse Community"

In conclusion I want to return to the question of how students think about "diversity," particularly once they've become acclimated to the Dexter College community. One common theme from the interviews was that over the course of time some students appeared to develop a more nuanced and critical understanding of "diversity" and what meaning it had for them.

For example, Ruth (a white senior who came from a predominantly white high school setting) notes how her understanding of "diversity" has shifted from a focus on international diversity to a broader, more critical view:

> I think one of the areas that I was most focused on at the time was the number of international students. And that's certainly something that I'm still very much aware of and really appreciate about [Dexter] College. But I think as I've done more intergroup dialogue and other group work around race, I've realized that international students . . . they bring something really different to [the College] than domestic students of color. And that I don't think I was as aware of that at the time. I think if I had thought about it, I would've understood the difference. Thinking about—well, it's great that [Dexter] College admits all these international students, but what about their commitment to affirmative action in the U.S.? What about domestic students of color who are coming to [the College]—how does that work?

Ruth, like many students, thought of diversity primarily in relation to international students—or as many students described it, "cultural diversity"—when they were applicants in the Admissions process. But as Ruth learned more about the dynamics of race, it led her to reevaluate her initial understanding of "diversity," ask herself a different set of questions, and interrogate the difference between international students and domestic students of color.

Eleanor, a white junior, made the point that based on her experiences that not just the College, but higher education as a whole employed too narrow a definition of "diversity":

And so I just find talking about diversity so problematic on a higher ed campus because there is such a lack of disconnect, I feel, between students who wanna make a difference in the world in sort of their own identity, and students—and how their identity contributes or facilitates to what they decide to do. And that not recognizing sort of the whole array of diversity, and that higher ed ultimately won't be as diverse as it ever sells itself on.

Nancy, the white senior who had selected Dexter College in large part to avoid replicating her homogenous high school experience, spoke eloquently about how her ideas about "diversity" have shifted:

Okay, so I mean diversity has this, this, this word is . . . so overwhelming and looming to people and it's hard to really place and pick apart and . . . I think students really learn that here and no matter where they're from, diversity is something that is so powerful at this school and so prevalent, you can't not face it. You can't not be forced to pick it apart and take your own backgrounds and take your own experiences and add to that giant blackboard term and there's so many different facets of diversity that students can work with, I guess and that's definitely something that I realized. Knowing that diversity was such a broad general out-there thing for me in high school, coming to [Dexter] College definitely brought more awareness to that, but also made me want to pick it apart and not just have it in my mind as this big general not-related-to-me thing and realize that because I'm at this school and I've chosen to be here and I want to be here, it's going to be related to me and it's gonna be related to me and to be around me, it's not gonna be this big blackboard term. It's gotta be, it's gotta specific so that I can relate to it and people can relate to it and we can kind of create this collective diversity for the context in the people we're with.

What I find poignant about Nancy's description of diversity is that I think for many white students "diversity" unfortunately does remain, as she calls it, "a big blackboard term" that does not feel related to them and in some cases can feel not just unrelated, but eventually become something they view as negative, as was exemplified by the survey comments earlier in this chapter.

During a training exercise for students who would be helping out with new student pre-orientation we asked the students to write down on an index card answers to the following questions: "What does diversity mean to me?" and "What is my vision of a diverse/inclusive community at [Dexter College]?" The responses were anonymous, but

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the group of 50 upperclass students included a broad range of students, international and domestic; white students, multiracial students, and students of color. Their responses further illuminate the different ways students think about diversity. The two key components that emerged from their answers focused on "difference" and "interaction." In terms of how they expressed their ideas of difference, some provided a list of social identities (i.e. race, class, gender, et cetera); others mentioned culture, perspectives, experiences, ideas, and backgrounds. Their definitions exemplify that for some,"diversity" is about your place of origin and other core pieces of your identity, while for others it is more theoretical in nature.

Many students combined these concepts of "difference" with some type of "interaction" component or something that students needed to do in order to bring about a diverse and inclusive community. These were typically described with words and phrases such as: openness, respect, cohesive community, listening to, learning about, growing and learning, curiosity about others, tolerate, acceptance, and coming together. These comments indicate that at least from a theoretical perspective students think of diversity not just in terms of sheer numbers or demographics, but also in terms of people interacting with one another. Many students specifically mentioned a need to combat "self-segregation" and a sense that this separation was one of the things that needed to be overcome in order for their vision of a diverse and inclusive community to be realized. Students recognized that this would take effort and initiative on the part of individual students. As one student put it, "more voluntary connections with people different from themselves" and another shared that we need a "conscious effort to reach out to people who are different."

This is not surprising, considering many students' first exposure to the idea of a "diverse community" stems from the popular United States mythology of the "melting pot." There is evidence of this rhetoric in the food-related metaphors many students chose to use in writing their definitions of diversity: "a mixed plate"; "diversity means everything blends together well like in a pot of good soup (or stew) which is different from homogeneity"; "mixture/a pot filled with different ingredients to make one delicious meal." The problem with this conceptualization is that in a predominantly white college environment, the reality is that people of color are expected to do the majority of the "blending"; to state it another way, students of color are expected to assimilate into the majority culture, which is white.

The majority of the white students with whom I spoke during the interview process targeted domestic students of color and international students to stop segregating themselves and never connected white students to the concept of self-segregation. The desire to diminish self-segregation as expressed by white students is portrayed as a desire to "bring the community together." But I would argue that the anxiety around self-segregation is also an anxiety about what students of color and international students are doing and saying in those groups—specifically an unconscious fear from white students that in these racial and ethnic groups, students are saying negative things about them. The underlying discourse puts disproportionate responsibility on students of color and in this case international students to assimilate and uphold the white cultural norms to meet the white students' idea of a "diverse community." This ideal includes the sense from white students that they are entitled to and should have access to learning about other cultures and from their perspective, self-segregation denies them this opportunity.

Interestingly, in her study of race and class intersections at another small New England liberal arts college, Aries found that out of the four groups of students she examined (affluent whites, affluent blacks, whites with high financial need, limited family education or both, and blacks with high financial need, limited family education or both), the affluent white group was most likely to self-segregate across lines of race and class, which contradicts the "common sense" ideology that black students or students of color are the main culprits of self-segregation (2008:66-70). In addition she found that the assumption that black students wanted to self-segregate led white students to wait for black students to approach them; white students also shared that they felt intimidated about approaching a group of black students and that they felt much more comfortable in one-on-one situations (Aries 2008:85).

The topic of "self-segregation" also frequently emerged during conversations about how and when students formed their friendship groups on campus. I found it particularly striking the way that white students would explain matter-of-factly the way that students form friendships based on common interests, but at the same time would express criticism and concern about students of color and international students who would hang out together. Again I would argue that this is an expression of a white racial frame; viewed through this lens, when white students form friendships with other white students they consider themselves as unique individuals who make a connection with another individual. But when these same students observe a group of students of color or international students all together it is often viewed pejoratively as "self-segregation." Beverly Daniel Tatum's (1997) discussion of the visibility and surveillance related to groups of people of color in her very aptly titled book, "Why Are All the Black Kids

Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?" kept coming to mind as I listened to white students' lack of awareness of their double standard about when it was acceptable for people to be in mono-racial groups.

There were also several white students I interviewed who did recognize that they had cultivated a predominantly white friendship group even though they might have entered the college with a different vision of what their friendship group would look like as members of a "diverse community." Ruth (a white senior) described her feelings of disappointment when she discovered that she had two white roommates. Kate (a white first-year student) talked about the fact that it was "upsetting" that her friendship group was racially homogenous. There appeared to be an underlying sense from some white students that part of being in a "diverse" college environment means having a racially and internationally diverse friendship group and if you don't then you are doing something wrong.

But often students expressed uncertainty about how to actually form those connections across lines of difference. Ruth talked about the need to be intentional about seeking out cross-racial connections:

> I mean I think it is a kind of thing that, if you don't make a conscious effort about, it will happen that your friends will be more like you. And you're sort of gravitated towards people who come from similar places that you do, and I think race definitely has to do with that, and I grew up having mainly white friends. And I think as I've become more conscious of that, I've tried to make an effort not to go out of my way to sort of pursue friendships with people who I like a lot who happen to be students of color. I think it's important.

Ruth went on to share a story about a friendship that she had pursued with a student of color that she had met in a gender studies class and how she felt when she went to ask her to have dinner with her, "I was so nervous . . . I think it was first year anxiety in general.

. . . But I think it did make me think is it because she's black that I'm scared to ask her if she wants to hang out? . . . Race questions that I hadn't really thought about before." Ruth's comments demonstrate there can often be an added layer of anxiety for white students about forming cross-racial friendships that require stepping out of their comfort zone. In part these feelings link back into the earlier discussion of a general fear and reluctance of white students to talk about race. It is not surprising that this discomfort with race as a general topic would translate into discomfort around forming cross-racial relationships. Once such a friendship is formed, it is inevitable that race will at some point come up as a topic; therefore one way to avoid being in that position of unease is to pursue friendships with other white students where race is not a typical topic.

The endless discussions—both at Dexter College and nationally—about the issue of "self segregation" is another key example of a white cultural practice. The invisibility of whiteness and the related hyper-visibility of students of color results in a greater level of surveillance for students of color on a college campus including who they choose to be friends with and what activities they choose to engage in (Foster 2005). Interestingly most of the students talked about diversity in terms of self reflection—all of their definitions were focused on external relationships.

In this chapter I've presented some of the ways that students and the institution co-create an understanding of the concept of "diversity" within the predominantly white college setting. As I have shown, "diversity" as a term holds many meanings within the college setting: a valuable commodity to be obtained; a modifier to describe the type of community this is; a referral to students of color and international students (or any non-white student); and as a synonym for interesting and exotic. Over the course of this

dissertation I will analyze some of the factors that may influence how students within the same college environment can end up having such disparate ideas about "diversity."

All of these discourses of "diversity" that run through the admissions process highlight the "rearticulation" of "diversity" as something that an individual can possess. Urciuoli (2003b) argues that she has seen a shift away from another popular related term *multiculturalism* toward *diversity* because "*Diversity* is more flexible semantically, as it can belong to the individual, or the institution, and is not tied to an idea of group membership" (396). However, the way that "diversity" can be obtained is different for students of color and white students. For students of color "diversity" is embodied; they possess diversity because they come from a non-white racial background. Throughout the admissions process they are racially categorized and identified, not only by "checking the box" on their admissions application, but also by invitations they receive to programs for students of color. In contrast, white students learn through admissions discourse that they can acquire "diversity" by attending Dexter College and being part of a "diverse community."

The end result of the admissions discourse on "diversity" is that the "common sense" notion about the "diverse community" is that it is a community where all students will be comfortable and that race and racism are no longer issues. The discourse places the focus on "community," but similar to "diversity" this is another of what Urciuoli (1999) refers to as a strategically deployable shifter—a word that gives the impression that it has a shared meaning, when actually what it signifies is quite vague and varied. The signification of "diverse community" is particularly complicated because it is used to reference the entire college community, as in: "Dexter College is a diverse community."

Yet "diversity" is most often used in institutional discourse to signal race and students of color only, so strictly speaking only students of color belong to the "diverse community."

One of the goals of the new preorientation program was to disrupt this notion and rearticulate "diversity" as something that included white students as well. While resistance to this "rearticulation" was evident throughout the planning process, particularly by white students who displayed a desire to maintain their white public space and their white privilege, the program also provided a "crack" in the walls of whiteness (Bush 2004) by breaking the silence and creating a space for white students to talk about race and contemplate their white racial identity alongside students of color and international students.

CHAPTER 4

CAMPUS "CULTURE"

In this chapter I will examine how domestic students make sense of themselves and their peers within this "diverse" community, specifically by examining how they come to understand the concepts of "culture" within the "diverse" community in relation to themselves and others. I will also explore how institutional structures assist in creating a hegemonic view of "culture" through the discourses that circulate on campus related to cultural organizations, cultural houses, or cultural festivals.

A central feature of many college campuses are student-run "cultural" organizations, houses, and festivals. These entities are typically organized around racial and ethnic identity groups (i.e. The Black Student Union, the Asian Student organization). On some campuses this umbrella of the "cultural" may also include organizations related to sexuality (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, and Transgender groups). However in all cases, "cultural" refers to a group that is a perceived "minority" on a predominantly white campus. The inclusion of LGBT groups under the "cultural organization" helps creates a sense of "misrecognition" that elides the fact that within the discourse of the predominantly white institution, "culture" is most prominently talked about as something belonging only to racial and ethnic minority groups (Urciuoli 2009). This operates in a similar discursive fashion to the way that institutional definitions of "diversity" often include a broad spectrum of social identities, but in practice "diversity" becomes a more obscure way of talking about race.

One of the things I will explore in this chapter is the complicated relationship that students of color/multiracial students have to the cultural organizations and houses. For

some the cultural houses and organizations provided a place of safety and support that they were not able to find anywhere else on campus. But for many others, particularly students of color who were multiracial or first- or second-generation immigrants, the cultural houses and organizations often became a site of confusion and anxiety around issues of "where do I fit?" and a fear of not being "racially authentic" enough to belong.

Cultural organizations, houses, and festivals are often cited as creating a sense of separation between students of color/international students and domestic white students. I've observed that this sense of separation has led domestic white students to embrace one of two discourses in how they relate to students of color/international students on campus: the discourse of "self-segregation" and the discourse of what I will refer to as "cultural tourism." It's important to note that these discourses are not necessarily mutually exclusive; as my interview data will illustrate, it was not unusual for the same white student to express concerns about "self-segregation" on campus and minutes later relay her delight in attending a cultural festival. In some ways these two discourses reveal what types of interactions with "diversity" domestic white students feel the most comfortable with and what makes them feel uncomfortable.

In this chapter, I will look first at student interactions with cultural organizations in relation to discussions about "self-segregation" and "racial authenticity." Next I will examine students' experience of and interactions with cultural festivals and houses. Within this section I will use some recently proposed changes to the cultural houses—and student reactions to these changes—to highlight some of the conflicting institutional discourses related to the cultural houses. These varying conceptions of "culture" (similar to the dissection of "diversity" in Chapter 3) help to illuminate the way that students of

color become marked and made visible, while white students and whiteness is unmarked, invisible, and normative within the predominantly white campus setting.

Cultural Organizations

Cultural organizations are a particularly interesting site to examine within the predominantly white college campus. First of all, they are primarily organized and run by students; thus it is also a place where students—specifically domestic students of color and international students of color—get to express how they define "culture." Second of all, while these organizations are typically student-initiated they then become institutionally sanctioned and are often touted as "evidence" of the existence of a "diverse community." In many ways cultural organizations become a site of "culture" that is co-created both by students and their experiences and by the institution through its role in shaping and informing the cultural organization structure. In the remainder of this chapter I will examine cultural houses and cultural festivals as distinct entities, but they clearly have many overlaps and linkages that tie them together.

One of the overarching themes that informs this discussion is the way that cultural organizations, houses and festivals promote a link between "culture" and people of color; by extension the implication is that people of color have a culture and white people do not have a culture (Urciuoli 2009). Student organizations that have a racial/ethnic focus typically "serve as social and to some extent cultural education clubs" (Urciuoli 1999:289). Urciuoli points out that one of the things these cultural organizations achieve is the translation of race into culture, "In effect, students who get involved with the organizations take on the job of defining their racial category as a culture" (1999:292). The end result is that the student cultural organizations become a product that informs the

way that white community members "imagine" students of color and also perpetuates a sense that they are part of a "diverse community": "In effect, these organizations have the job of creating a *multicultural imaginary* that enhances the college. In an 87% U.S. white school, this means a considerable investment of effort in performing 'their culture' to the school at large, often referred to as 'educating the community'" (Urciuoli 1999:292-293, emphasis added). This "multicultural imaginary" reinscribes whiteness as the dominant culture with students of color forming a subculture that serves and supports this dominant culture. The student cultural organizations also serve to highlight students of color within the college and university; by extension, white students are allowed to remain an invisible, unmarked norm.

On the other hand, cultural organizations also create an "imagined community" for students of color. These organizations can provide a place for students to connect to other students from similar racial and ethnic backgrounds, but also explore their differences and explore the fluidity and complexity of racial and ethnic categorizations. At the same time, organizations can become venues where ideologies of "racial authenticity" is significant. To this point, many of the students I interviewed found that the cultural organizations created anxiety for them around not fitting some perceived "cultural" ideal, particularly for multiracial and first-generation immigrant students.

Gloria, a black first-generation immigrant in her senior year, described feeling initially very accepted during her experience at the pre-orientation for students of color. But following this positive experience at pre-orientation, she was very confused about how to navigate the cultural organizations, specifically the organization for African and Caribbean students versus the organization for domestic African students. Gloria shares:

I was so confused. . . . So I didn't know, because I got this feeling I wasn't authentic enough to be in [the organization for African and Caribbean students]. . . . And I don't speak my language . . . and then also . . . with the domestic stuff, I was, okay, I get it because I've been living here for a couple years, 10-11 years, so I get it. But then I don't understand—I learned about slavery in class, so the stuff I learned in a book, so I don't feel like I have the right to talk about racism sometimes. Because I know [what] everybody always talks about stems from slavery and America, and I understand that, but also from a textbook perspective. And I've definitely been profiled and felt instances of racism, but sometimes I feel I don't understand it because I'm not from here, or I'm not black. Also definitely, growing up in Harlem, I always felt I'm not black enough, I can hang out with the African Square part of Harlem with all the Africans, but the black girls, the hip-hop girls, I'm not black enough for them. So I was always so confused when I got here . . . I was just, oh my god, there's so many cultural org groups . . . So I was so confused and really frustrated, because I didn't know.

Tiffany, a senior who is a first-generation immigrant from Ghana, described her journey to find her place within the cultural organizations. After feeling that students in the African/Caribbean student organization weren't receptive to her, Tiffany decided to pursue being a part of the African-American cultural organization.

I decided to become part of [the African-American cultural organization] and most of my friends were African-Americans so I went to the meetings with them and I was actually one of the social chairs my first year, so I immediately got involved and was planning an event and everything was going well and then the end of my first year, I got elected as the co-chair of [the organization], so I was the co-chair my sophomore year, except that my co-chair actually left . . . so I was just the chair, exactly, yeah . . . I was on the track team, I was an [RA], I was trying to apply to go study abroad in France. . . . It was a lot, a lot, a lot of stuff going on and the people who were on the board with me were actually not as supportive as I thought they would have, as I thought they would be and so, I ended up doing a lot of stuff. I took a lot of responsibilities, I wanted to get things done . . . but at the end of the year I was burnt out. I was ready to go abroad, to get away from [Dexter College] because I just couldn't take it anymore. Just too much going on. So I went abroad and when I came back, I'm not as involved anymore. Yeah, it's, that was just, I felt sometimes when you have so much into something and then, you feel like all your hard work, people didn't appreciate it, I couldn't be bothered anymore and then I turned to [the African-Caribbean organization] because when I came back in the fall, my friends, the people that I came, came in the class of 2010 with, they were the ones who were in charge or the chairs and co-chairs, I knew them . . . so you know, we were fine, and most of the young people didn't know me, so I felt like I could start all over again and that's what I did.

As Tiffany's story illustrates, it can be complicated for students to figure out where they fit in the cultural organization structure. Then, even once they find a place that feels like a

good fit, they can end up devoting so much time to helping to run the organization that they want to distance themselves from the organization altogether. Tiffany's experience had many similar elements to casual conversations that I have had with students of color over the course of many years. While many student organizations on campus can take up an inordinate amount of time, what I have seen as distinctive about cultural organizations is that students experience a level of heightened responsibility for the success of the cultural organization and the ways that the organization provides support for other students of color while also educating the campus.

Multiracial students shared similar experiences with me regarding concerns about where they belonged in relation to cultural organizations. Their concerns were most often expressed as not knowing where they fit or a sense that they didn't belong in a cultural organization, fearing a lack of "racial authenticity." Amy—a senior who identifies as half-Korean, half-white—explained why she had decided not to join a cultural organization, "I was always concerned that I was going to be judged if I joined the Korean student organization I wouldn't be Korean enough." Amy pointed out that this is an issue that goes beyond the college and is emblematic of the way that society looks at race in a dichotomized way. Nina, a senior who identifies as Black and Creole, had a similar experience as a multiracial student. She was interested in participating in a cultural organization particularly because she had gone to a predominantly white high school. Nina tried joining both the African-American student organization and the multiracial student organization, "I still felt out of place in both of those groups even though I identify as Black and I . . . racially am mixed, either way I didn't feel comfortable." For Ann she found as a multiracial student that, "I don't necessarily always

feel that's my place to be, at a Chinese students association event," but unlike Nina she did find that the multiracial student organization was a better fit for her: "That's something I'm more comfortable jumping into."

Devaki (a junior who is multiracial with a white mother and a father who is a first-generation immigrant from India) was most frustrated by other students' assumptions and subtle pressure that she should be involved in a cultural organization.

> People who I vaguely knew would try to get me involved in that, because they knew I was involved in other things and we all kind of were in the same involved-people group. And I kind of would be polite, but I wouldn't take them up on it, ever, because I just felt there was this idea of what it was, what I was supposed to be doing. They were saying, "Oh, you need to be more involved in your culture," and stuff like that. And I'm . . . my culture is not this idea of . . . wearing saris and stuff like that. And also, why is it . . . it would seem like really false to me to overly embrace one side of my race versus the other.

Based on her phenotypical appearance and her name, other students might not even realize that Devaki was multiracial; for her participating in the cultural organizations would have felt like an implicit denial of her mother's racial heritage as a white woman. She went on to further describe this sense that other students wanted to define her by her Indian background which she saw as just one aspect of who she was:

> I feel like, I guess one of the main reasons why I was so hesitant to be involved in any of those things in the past was because I didn't, I felt that's what people were trying to do, they were trying to isolate this one experience that seems bigger to them, and I didn't want . . . I don't know, I didn't want to say like, all right, well this is the most important part of me, or something like that, or this is more than just one nuance of my experience.

It is clear that student cultural organizations are a critical site within colleges and universities where students of color both re-imagine themselves and become part of the larger imaginary of the institution as a whole. The cultural organizations can also contribute to the myth of "racial authenticity." As the above examples illustrate, this can

lead to some students feeling isolated within colleges and universities from both other students of color and white students.

Students of color who do not subscribe to the dominant multicultural imaginary of cultural organizations as "cultural education clubs" will often feel frustrated as they push up against their proscribed role within the institution. Maxine (a Chinese-American senior) shared with me that initially she was drawn to join a cultural organization, particularly since she had come from a community that was predominantly people of color, but she was disappointed by what she found there: "I was really disappointed that because I felt they were buying into this idea of authenticity like the reason why they were getting together was that they could show that they were authentically Chinese or like authentically Asian." Maxine felt that this search for authenticity was linked to a focus on creating "awareness" of cultural identities and educating the campus about Chinese culture rather than overturning systems of oppression. Maxine states:

> I guess [the] social political awareness of that I wanted to overturn the systems that create ignorance as opposed to wipe out ignorance, I mean telling people this is the kind of food I eat, this is what language I speak doesn't mean, doesn't mean in the future . . . there's going to be a whole line of other people who don't know what that is.

Maxine identifies an inherent contradiction within cultural organizations. These organizations create a space within a predominantly white institution that students of color can own and define, seek out support and connection, and resist assimilation into the predominantly white campus culture. However the organizations also often support the status quo where students of color who participate in cultural organizations are placed in the role of cultural educators for the predominantly white community.

While some students choose not to participate in cultural organizations because it feels uncomfortable or they don't feel racially or culturally authentic enough to

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participate, others choose not to participate because they see it as limiting themselves and

that they will be perceived as part of a group, rather than as an individual. These concerns

emanate from a persistent and realistic fear of being stereotyped based on their race and

ethnicity. Monique talked about her own struggle between wanting to hang out with

primarily African-American students, but at the same time feeling concerned about how

she might be perceived:

> My first year I did kind of, like when I saw myself with a lot of Black people. Every now
> and then I was like, Damn, I should probably like and even though I didn't move you
> know, I was thinking, Damn I wonder if everybody thinks that I only talk to Black people
> and I didn't want to give that, I didn't want to give that off, you know because I talk to
> everybody.

The inequity here is that you rarely hear white students on campus expressing

similar concerns about being seen as part of a large group of white students. The fact that

Monique felt that she had to monitor her own behavior and who she spent time with is a

real issue that I have heard expressed by many other students of color. Monique also

talked about trying to sit at different tables in the dining hall, but that each time she ended

up going back to the "black table." While she felt comfortable sitting at the other tables

with white students, Monique found that they weren't talking about things that interested

her. She did note that white students are always welcome to join her at the black table,

but she felt that the white students were frightened when they saw a group of black

students sitting together.

Another student I interviewed, Kiana (an African-American senior), hypothesized

that many first-year students want to start off their college career as an individual rather

than being associated with a group:

> Especially in a group that they visibly can be associated with from the get-go in terms of
> race. They want to probably state their own personality and their own passions and they
> don't want people to see them as "Oh, that African American woman is in that African

American group." They may want to be seen as, "Oh, okay this woman, she's also African American, she's also in theater, she also dances." You know, and so maybe people want to start off with that individual identity before they go into a group identity.

This example is similar to the ones that Ferguson gives where the strategy is to downplay blackness and shift toward whiteness. Fordham refers to this strategy as "racelessness," "wherein individuals assimilate into the dominant group by de-emphasizing characteristics that might identify them as members of the subordinate group" (Tatum, 1997:63). While this rationale makes sense on one level, on another level we know the reality is that students of color will most likely be identified as a member of a minority racial group regardless of whether or not they join a cultural organization and hang out with other members of the same racial group.

The final reason that the students I interviewed offered for why students of color don't participate in cultural organizations was a fear of being affiliated with stereotypes about people from a particular racial background as a result of joining a cultural organization. I asked Monique what assumptions she was afraid that students made about her because she was active in the African American student organization and had a primarily African American group of friends. She responded:

Negative ones, stereotypes. You know of just being loud and, and ghetto, I hate that word, just thinking that the white man is against you and blah, blah, blah, like, I don't know, just thinking that I'm very, that I think every white person is out to get me you know like in that sense that I'm just like, [*exasperated sigh*] part of the Black Panther movement still and you know like that's not how it is.

Monique's comments highlight what she imagines that a group of African American students is indexing for the larger, predominantly white community. Racial stereotypes are significant, although often covert, discourse that circulates within higher education. In addition to the types of stereotypes that Monique lists, there are often assumptions made

about a student of color's academic background and potential. These assumptions are often coded in conversations about "achievement gaps" between white students and students of color.

Despite the inherent challenges and limitations that cultural organizations face—the burden of feeling responsible for educating the rest of campus about their "culture," the fear of propagating racial stereotypes and feeling constrained within a racial category, internal issues around belonging and who should fit under the different cultural umbrellas—cultural organizations still have the potential to play a positive role on the predominantly white college campus. One possible vision for the cultural organizations could be as a place for exploration, connection, and self-reflection rather than reifying racial categorization and stereotypes. Tabitha, an African-American staff member who serves as an advisor to the cultural organizations, shared her concerns about the potential loss for students of color who choose not to affiliate with cultural organizations:

> Right, and I think, I can understand [why students of color choose not to be involved in cultural organizations] because it's the reality of the development of identity, racial identity, that some people are going to connect with race more than others, or have been made to think about race earlier, and some folks are not. I don't know how that's possible in the United States, particularly around African-American identity. But I don't want them running from race, because I think that that's what some people do once they get to campuses, like omigosh, you're going to only see me as a student of color, and I don't want that at all and so I don't want to be affiliated . . . because I don't only want to be seen as a student of color. And I don't want them running from race, I want to give them the opportunity to say, okay, I can do race today and really be in race and think about it, and that's okay. But I got to also know that someone else is going to see me as, I don't know, a classed student who has a class that I struggle with as well.

For Tabitha, cultural organizations, rather than essentializing identities, provide opportunities for students to explore multiple facets of their identities. She sees such opportunities as necessary for creating a diverse inclusive community, but sees that "lack of resources makes it hard to do that."

When I asked Tabitha what she thought about the challenge for cultural organizations of trying to balance celebrating cultural pride with a sense of duty to educate the campus about their culture, she responded:

> When you're educating other people about yourselves, you don't get to do your own self-reflection, and that's what they're losing. Students of color having to educate the campus about themselves, they're not getting to reflect and have someone else say, actually, let me give you this information so you can actually reflect on it. And that's a big loss.

In a 2008 opinion piece in the student newspaper, an Asian American student articulated what she gained from her affiliation with cultural organizations, specifically cultural organizations that focused on political and social issues relevant to Asian Americans. She describes that for many years she resisted being referred to as "Asian" preferring the more specific "Chinese American." But during her time at the college she decided to join several activist cultural organizations and describes the experiences in this way, "I found myself in a learning environment where we were bound together by our common interest and goals of social and political awareness rather than a cultural identity that had an 'authentic core.' Asian-American became my political identity that helped me tap into social networks from which I draw support and a sense of community." The author goes on to reference Spivak's theory of "strategic essentialism" in relation to reclaiming an Asian-American identity and "conceding to the grouping, or homogenizing, of many different ethnic groups under the category of 'Asian,' but recognizing the strategic power that the racial group can seize if organized and mobilized. Remaining aware of the 'strategy' counteracts the potential pitfalls of essentialism—the presumption that 'all Asians are the same.'" She concludes the article by sharing that through this reclaiming of an "Asian" identity, she has found power, support, and strong bonds with other students. The author's journey to discover her own sense of Asian

identity provides a helpful frame for considering how to support students of color with the dilemma of "racial authenticity." The author lets go of the idea of a cultural identity with an "authentic core" and instead discovers an "Asian" identity based on "common interest and goals of social and political awareness." While it is beyond the scope of this project, it would be interesting to explore in more depth the differences between cultural organizations with a specific focus (i.e. political and social activism) versus cultural organizations with a more generalized purpose of connection and cultural pride/education and their impact on students' sense of racial and cultural identity.

In the following sections we will focus on two closely related sites that add to the proliferation of a "multicultural imaginary" within the predominantly white campus: cultural shows and cultural houses.

Cultural Shows

Fieldnote, November 6, 2009:
African-Caribbean Day

The auditorium is buzzing as students rush around in last-minute-preparation mode, many dressed in traditional African and Caribbean attire, distinctive based on country and region. They whiz by bright and colorful, much like the African and Caribbean flags that festoon the balcony—the flags are perfectly spaced and each one bears a typed piece of paper with the name of the country. The hall is filled with tables with shiny slippery metallic plastic tablecloths, a slide show runs on a large screen on the stage scrolling pictures of students, most of whom phenotypically appear to be African-American, African, and Caribbean at various events, grinning for the camera, arms slung around each other's shoulders.

Along each wall there is a long line of chafing dishes ready and waiting to receive mouth-watering entrees from a local African restaurant (at one time the students did the bulk of the cooking, but as the event and food regulations have grown they have shifted towards catering). Jutting out from the stage is a long runway lined with lights for the fashion show—a staple of the African-Caribbean day (or A-C day as it is commonly known) show along with dances, singing, skits, spoken word, and an educational segment about an African or Caribbean charity that the event is raising funds for.

The weather has turned decidedly chilly so my husband, son, and I are fully bundled up in hats, scarves, and mittens as we walk from our house to campus. I note that this will be a busy weekend with "Experience Diversity" and the Alumnae of Color conference also happening. My husband asks if these were all planned to coincide with

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each other. I pause and then reply, "probably"—it makes me wonder how intentional this stacking of events, this combination was; is this part of our institutional calculation for prospective students to see us at our most "diverse"? I make a mental note to ask the Admissions staff about this.

        I find myself thinking more about A-C day as "diversity display." I note that one of our Communications writers and photographers are present busily taking it all in. At one point I'm eating and talking with Tabitha, enjoying my spicy vegetable curry—so hot my lips are tingling—and out of the corner of my eye I catch the photographer taking our photo. What has just been captured here? A white woman and a black woman eating African-Caribbean food together? Two college administrators enjoying a student event? Two friends having dinner and laughing? A photographic representation of how "diverse" our community is? In this instant I think about how students of color feel when their photographs end up on the website and in the viewbook as evidence of our "diversity."

Within the Dexter College setting there is a long tradition of "cultural shows." Several educational studies have looked at cultural shows or celebrations as a fruitful site for exploring racial discourses and narratives in school settings (Bettie 2003; Hurd 2008; Urciuoli 2008, 2009; Perry 2002). At Dexter College these shows are organized by different racial/ethnic groups, some are more broadly defined (i.e. "Asian/Asian-American Festival" and "African-Caribbean Day"), but in recent years there has also been a proliferation of new events that focus on more specific ethnic groups such as "China Night" and "Korea Night." Students who are in the cultural organizations tend to be the primary organizers of these events. The shows typically share a similar format: a catered dinner of ethnic food, followed by a show filled with different acts showcasing traditional songs and dances, a fashion show, spoken word or poetry, and short sketches that may be political or humorous in nature. The shows also usually serve as a fundraiser for a particular cause tied to the ethnicity/country being celebrated and there is a part of the show that focuses on educating the audience about the cause. After the show there is a dance party, again with music heavily influenced by the focal race/ethnicity. Many of the

shows involve participation by both international and domestic students who identify with the ethnicity that is the focus of the show.

The cultural shows are one particular aspect of the role and the burden that students of color take on in terms of "educating the campus" about their race and culture at Dexter College. This is related to Aries' finding that the majority of black students that she interviewed saw themselves as having "a contribution to make to students' learning based on their race"; particularly through countering racial stereotypes (2008:93). Cultural shows and other types of cultural programming became a primary site for students of color to provide that education. These students are encouraged to share their cultural heritage and background, but only up to a certain point and in ways that will be palatable to the majority. Urciuoli (2003a) notes that in her study of Latino students, their role as campus educators about their "culture" was organized through "carefully framed cultural performances and products" (153) that were "done in ways that are as racially unmarked as possible" (154). These themes have been reflected in my own research with students of color when describing their experiences of cultural programming.

For example, Monique, an African American senior, was very involved in coordinating some of the large-scale programming events on campus, such as Black History Month. She shared with me that one of her challenges was simultaneously providing programming that would meet the needs of the majority of campus (white students) and the needs of the African American student organization members.

> We're responsible for trying to educate everybody on this campus about who we are, you know what I mean, I don't know, it just gets a little tricky, because it's kind of like, who am I doing this for? Every now and again you have to sit back and say, okay, let me make sure, and the thing sometimes is you have to do it for the greater [college] community

which is okay, but I think sometimes it allows you to not necessarily address some of the things you initially wanted to address because it's like you have to be kind of hush-hush on that or you won't get funding for it.

I asked Monique if it was white students who were deciding on the amount of funding that the African-American student organization would receive and she responded, "Oh yes, primarily. The ways and means committee." The ways and means committee is one of the committees that falls under the jurisdiction of the student government. Monique was clearly frustrated with the fact that, even though the African-American student organization tries to plan events that will give back to the community, there seems relatively little interest from the white community in their events. Monique explained:

> Everybody doesn't necessarily want to learn about [the African-American student organization members]. It's the same people at all the events. Why should I even pretend anymore? Why should I try to figure out what members of the community want when it appears that they don't want anything? It just gets frustrating, because it feels like even though no one is coming we still have to come up with events that will cater to the larger community. That's a waste of days in Black History Month; we could have done other things.

Dionne (a first-generation Filipino-American) shared a similar example related to the planning of "Fiesta Filipina," a cultural event put on by the Filipina student organization: "When we were planning the menu we definitely had to be like, 'Okay, what would a white person eat?'" As Dionne explained, if you want the larger white community to attend your event, you have to accept that they may not be open to trying new things and so you need to cater to what you think they might like in order to get them to attend. As these examples show, in their role as "cultural educators," students of color have to be strategic in what aspects of their culture they present to the larger white community. These shows are also another facet of the packaging of "diversity" as a commodity, particularly in the way that students of color are trying to attract a white

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audience. The result is that the students of color present to the white students a discourse on their culture that is influenced by their "imaginings of whiteness" (Chun 2001) or what will appeal to white students.

These events often end up reifying a conception of "culture" that is often referred to as a "fabric, food, and festivals" model of multiculturalism, rather than interrogating racial and ethnic complexities, distinctions, and larger historical, social, and political issues. Ironically while many students of color are motivated to participate in producing the cultural show by a desire to represent themselves in a positive way to the majority white community, what they actually end up "representing" or performing is a version of their "culture" that will be palatable to white students. Another chronic issue is the fact that I witnessed many students of color put so much time and energy into the preparations for the show that their academic performance was negatively impacted. I always saw this as evidence that we were not meeting our goal of creating a diverse and inclusive learning environment when students of color felt the need to seek this validation for themselves (and in some ways their existence within the institution) at the expense of their academic work. Urciuoli had similar findings in her investigating of culture at a small predominantly white liberal arts college and underscores the complex relationship that students of color have to cultural organizations and programming.

> When they engage in cultural activities they may do so to make a public statement about what it means to be marked, but their very markedness is what makes them available for those enactments. . . . Sometimes the institution rewards them more for their cultural work than their schoolwork, and sometimes their involvement in activities gets in the way of schoolwork. As members and officers of student cultural organizations, their job is to craft projections of culture, built from recognizably authentic elements that are also performable in institutions not really looking for social change. However much the prior existence of culture is presupposed, it only exists insofar as it is enacted, and only as those enactments. [2009: 35]

In my conception of a diverse and inclusive community, students of color would have multiple opportunities to express their cultural backgrounds in a way that felt authentic to them, including through their academic work. In addition, the entire campus community—including white students—would take an active interest in engaging with and learning from cultural perspectives that were different from their own.

Another deep irony is that as Monique indicated above, despite their best efforts to attract white students, the majority of the audience for cultural shows and events are other students who identify with the culture being celebrated and other students of color with a sprinkling of white students. Similar to the cultural organizations, questions of "who belongs?" at the event are still pervasive. Ann, a sophomore who identifies as half-white and half-Chinese shared in our interview, "And I think this year, I've become more comfortable going to like China Night and stuff like that. But that also just plays into me being more confident in asserting my identity, stuff like that, yeah." I found it very profound that despite China Night being clearly advertised to the entire community, even someone who was half-Chinese might not feel comfortable attending. As I reflected on Ann's remark, I commented to her that this would be a logical area where we needed to make some institutional shifts, toward normalizing that everybody went to China night, and that it really was for everybody, regardless of whether you had any Chinese heritage in your background or not. I wondered out loud that if this was the case would it have created an opportunity for Ann to go and celebrate and explore her Chinese background, rather than have that be a moment of her grappling with whether or not she was Chinese enough to be there. Her response to my comment was that students often felt most comfortable attending a show when they know the people who are performing. If indeed

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knowing the performers is an unwritten prerequisite or draw for students to attend a cultural event and if students are not already forming cross-racial friendships, it is not surprising that the audience at these events is fairly homogeneous.

A few of the white students that I spoke to did mention attending a cultural show or event. Perry (2002) describes how cultural events create opportunities where "white students could pleasurably gaze upon racial-ethnic others without putting themselves on the line, [which] reinforced a sense of whiteness as center or standard (cultureless) and racial ethnic others (by virtue of having culture to display) as different and marginal to that" (2002:100). The responses of the white students I interviewed to the cultural shows varied, but the two major themes that emerged were on the one hand an enjoyment at experiencing another culture or what I have referred to as a "cultural tourist" model, and on the other a sense of wariness or discomfort about being in the "minority" in terms of event attendees.

One thing I found interesting was the way that white students described the cultural shows both in terms of the name and the content. Tricia (a white first-year student) described attending the Asian cultural show, "earlier in the year, I went to the, what was it called, the Asian, they had their fashion show, and they did a bunch of performances." I then prompted her with the actual name of the event and she went on to say, "Yeah, that was really neat. That's something that I'm not really that used to, I just haven't seen that much, so that was really cool." Tricia's comments highlight the fact that she saw herself at the event in the role of cultural consumer. While Tricia had a positive feeling toward attending the event, you can also sense that there was an underlying

discomfort and unease at encountering difference when she characterizes the event as, "That's something that I'm not really that used to, I just haven't seen that much."

When I asked Brianna, a white senior, when she had been prompted to think about issues of race or racial identity on campus she referenced some of the cultural shows:

> Honestly, the only times that I've kind of been wondering about racial identity is, you know, some of the dances where they have the African nights or whatever, you go to those and it's really interesting cause you see the people dancing, but sometimes it was a little awkward, because when we'd go, we'd be some of the only Caucasians there and some people would just kind of stare at you, you're just . . . it was fun, but at first when you first arrived that happened and it wasn't anything bad. You didn't really have anybody making any racist or derogatory remarks or just glaring at you, but it was kind of sometimes awkward, just cause they'd stare at you for awhile.

For Brianna, finding herself in an environment where she is suddenly a racial minority is very uncomfortable and disconcerting. Similar to Tricia she is somewhat dismissive in her description of the event, "the African nights or whatever," and she also felt that people are staring at her. Her comments made me wonder whether students of color were actually staring at her or if it was merely Brianna's perception based on her own discomfort with the situation. I also found it intriguing that she noted that "it wasn't anything bad. You didn't really have anybody making any racist or derogatory remarks or just glaring at you." Brianna's phrasing indicates that she was concerned on some level that there was a possibility students of color would harass her for being a white student at an African cultural event—despite the fact that the event was clearly advertised to the entire community.

When I asked Brianna if she had continued to attend cultural events or shows on campus after this experience, she said she had gone to a few, but not many. She went on to share that she does sometimes watch clips from the cultural events that get posted on YouTube, "Yeah, on YouTube there were recordings of some of the dances that they did,

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which, those are always really cool. I love looking at the ethnic dances that they do and the music. I could never do any of it, so . . . that's the coolest thing ever." Brianna has discovered a way to avoid the discomfort of being a racial minority attending a cultural event, while still getting to be a cultural voyeur, a consummate observer from the safety of her residence hall room. She describes the students featured in the videos she watches from a very disembodied impersonal perspective, "I love looking at the ethnic dances that they do." This does not sound like she is talking about fellow students who are part of the same small college community, live in the same residence halls and attend the same classes that she does. Similar to Tricia who is making an implicit connection between "culture" and fashion or performances, Brianna makes a link between "culture" and dance. Now of course singing, dancing, and fashion are all facets of culture, but what concerns me is if this somewhat limited take on culture becomes the only lens through which some white students think about culture. When this becomes the foundation for how a white student thinks about culture, it leaves them with a hollow and decontextualized understanding that does not incorporate the larger historical, anthropological, and sociological contexts that inform these cultural representations. I will explore this point more fully in the next chapter when examining what many white students feel as possessing a lack of "culture."

Camille, a white senior who was very interested in exploring cross-racial friendships and engagement, talked about frequently attending cultural shows with another white friend. She described how they stood out and her frustration about the lack of attendance at cultural events:

> [We were] the two white people that show up to everything. And—I don't know—because a lot of people don't—okay, it's whatever night or event, and it's mostly the people who are in that group, and not a lot of other students. Which is not the point of the

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event, because the people who belong to that group already know about their own culture, and they [want to] be educating other people. So yeah, I don't know, that's always kind of bothersome. . . . With the cultural part, because again, [like with] China Night, and then all the Chinese girls go—you already know about your culture. The point is to be educating everyone else on the campus to learn more about the Chinese culture or whatever.

Here Camille again raises the question: Who are cultural shows really for? Should the cultural shows be promoted and viewed as an opportunity to educate the broader community? If so, what exactly is it teaching them? Would the community be better served by shifting the function of the cultural shows from an "educational model," which unfortunately most often translates into a cultural tourism or cultural consumption model, to focusing on them as an opportunity for students to come together and celebrate different aspects of their culture with the larger community? Why are her white peers not attending these events?

When considering the educational merits of cultural shows, I do think it's worth highlighting the shift toward emphasizing the inclusion of information (often in the form of a short video or presentation) about the cause or social issue for which the event is raising money. In recent years this has spread to having some skits or spoken-word performances that also focus on social issues. The student planners of shows have clearly begun to recognize that they have a captive audience who may have been drawn to the event by the promise of ethnic food and dancing, but once there, can also be introduced to an important issue. Kate, a white first-year student, specifically mentioned one of these types of presentations to me:

But I did go to Korean night last night and there was a presentation by a couple of girls on how they're doing plastic surgery a lot over in Korea and dying their hair blonde and stuff like that, and getting their eyes widened surgically, so it's this western influence and

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I think that the Asian race is the most attractive race and I don't understand, I just can't fathom, why they would want to look differently and why they would want to look like people from western nations.

While Kate doesn't appear to have the tools to do a deeper level analysis regarding white privilege and its influence on Asian desires to whiten their appearances, the presentation clearly left an impression on her and may give her a jumping off point for further examination.

The narratives of white students about cultural events exemplify the contradictions of how "culture" is manifested and received by many white students. On the one hand the white students I interviewed spoke about enjoying other "cultures" from a safe and comfortable distance, or as "cultural tourists." On the other hand some also expressed discomfort with feeling like they were a minority as a white person at a cultural event. In a similar vein many students described the shows to me as providing some education and generally being a positive experience, but also creating some anxiety related to their being in the minority and feeling out of place at the event. The cultural houses often provoke similar feelings of anxiety from members of the white campus community, but unlike the cultural shows, the cultural houses are often viewed in a less positive light because they are not exposing "culture" in a way that is palatable and safe. For many white students the houses also generate discourses of "inequality" undergirded by a sense of privilege—namely, a sense that students of color are getting an unfair advantage through the cultural house system. This is distinct from the cultural shows where white students typically feel that they are receiving something, a commodified version of "culture."

Cultural Houses

In the last section of this chapter, I will focus on the role of the cultural houses at Dexter College. The cultural house model is one that is utilized on many predominantly white campuses; sometimes houses are for individual racial and ethnic groups and sometimes houses are for bringing together all underrepresented racial and ethnic groups under one roof. Dexter College is somewhat unusual in the number of houses that they have: one for African/African American students, one for Asian/Asian American students, and one house that is divided in two and shared by the Latina students and Native American students. In addition, there is also a house for LGBT students. The cultural houses have a long history on the campus and there is much that could be written about them. For the purposes of this context I am going to narrow my focus to look at the cultural house in relation to some of the larger themes that I have already presented: how students of color become linked to the concept of "culture"; the institution's role in shaping the meaning of the cultural house and how students make sense of the houses; how the houses contribute to the notion of a "diverse community"; and how the houses are linked to discourses around "self-segregation" and "racial authenticity."

At their best these houses, as with the cultural organizations, provide a lively, engaging space where students are able to come together, make connections, explore their multi-faceted identities, and grow academically and interpersonally. However I have observed over the course of many years some of the implicit and explicit challenges to attaining this idealized model. One of the obstacles is an overarching lack of goals and institutional vision for the cultural houses; in the absence of a clear institutional direction the cultural houses exist, but their vitality is often tied to the interest of individual

students rather than institutional support that would provide continuity and growth. At Dexter College the house with the longest history is the one established for African and African-American students. The Latina house followed years afterward and the other houses came much later, partly as an outcome of student activism in the late 1990s.

Related to the role the houses play as a symbol of "institutional diversity" is the geographic location of the houses. As Feagin et al. (1996) note, both the physical spaces and their symbolic representations are central to how the campus community ultimately makes sense of that space. At Dexter College all of the cultural houses are located on the very outer edges and share a lack of proximity in relation to the center of campus. They are not places that students will just casually walk by in their day-to-day activities. Students of color frequently comment on this feeling that the houses are on the periphery, which can be read in a larger sense as indicative of their own feelings of dislocation and marginalization from the campus community.

Partly due to their physical distance from the center of campus, the houses aren't utilized to their full extent. They are frequently used for cultural organization meetings and discussions. Some students still use them for the kitchens and the ability to cook their own food. Occasionally faculty and administrators will use the spaces for discussions, meetings, or other events. But despite these uses the houses often stand empty. For many years there has been a system of paid housesitters who are available in each house in the evening to help look after the space and be a welcoming presence. One student of color who worked as a housesitter told me that many times it felt "scary" being in the house and that she would often find herself alone for most of her shift.

For many years the houses at Dexter College subscribed to what I would refer to as a "multicultural affairs" model. This model developed over time as higher education recognized the need to provide more direct support for underrepresented students as a growing population. This included adding "multicultural affairs" positions and the creation of safe spaces on campus such as cultural houses or student unions for underrepresented groups. One of the central, though not often directly discussed, tenets of the "multicultural affairs" model was to try and help students of color carve out a comfortable space in what was assumed to be the uncomfortable environment of the predominantly white campus. What this model offered was an opportunity for students to come together from similar racial backgrounds to commiserate, to support one another, and to be in a "majority space" even if for a short period of time. It is also important to emphasize that this "space" was not always freely given and on many campuses, including Dexter College, cultural houses were the result of students of color protesting to get them.

However, aspects of this model no longer hold the same resonance for all students who—by institutional definitions—would be expected to be desirous of this type of physical space. The way that students who get grouped within the "student of color" category think about their racial identity and how they want to engage in the "diverse" college community has shifted, as evidenced by the comments from multiracial and first- and second-generation immigrants that I interviewed. Yet, with the lived realities of institutional racism and being a student of color on a predominantly white campus, there is still a compelling need for these types of "safe spaces" where students of color can gather for support and community in a space that they claim as their own. This presents

another dilemma: How should the cultural houses on campus continue to evolve to meet current and evolving student needs?

Another key issue related to the cultural houses is their symbolic role related to the ideals of a "diverse community." The cultural houses are often touted as a prime example of Dexter College's "commitment to diversity," proof that the college has "diverse" students, namely students of color and international students. Similar to the cultural organizations and festivals, the houses also promote a particular definition of "culture." The fact that these particular groups are assigned a "cultural" house implies that they are in possession of "culture"; by extension white students (unless they are part of the LGBT community) do not have a culture.[1] It should be noted that the houses have not been unanimously embraced by the student population—in particular, white students often point to the houses as further evidence of students of color "self-segregating."

These critiques from white students continue to highlight a lack of awareness on their part of their own racial identity and the predominant sense of white public space on campus. Feagin et al. (1996) discuss in their study of black students attending a predominantly white university the important role that physical space plays in how students experience the campus. "The experiential reality of space is at the heart of interpersonal ties and is a critical element of U.S. Racial relations. The experience of space around oneself, between oneself and others, and within oneself is deeply meaningful in many cultures" (Feagin et al. 1996:16). I can remember many years ago

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[1] Urciuoli notes some of the distinctions between LGBT students and students who fall under the legally inscribed identity categories such as Latino, Asian American, and African American mainly that cultural diversity becomes linked to statistics of students in these legally inscribed identity categories who are institutionally "counted" in a way that LGBT students are not. Urciuoli further found that the students she interviewed who were members of the lesbian and gay student organization "did not talk about *having a culture*, nor did they equate *culture* with social markedness" (2009:28).

one student of color expressing their frustration about white students inquiring why we didn't have a "white cultural house" on campus during one of a series of ongoing debates about the relevance of having cultural houses. This student stated bluntly, "This entire campus is a white cultural house!" The student's comment goes beyond the issue of space and points directly to the material challenges for students of color on a predominantly white campus. Students of color are caught between a hegemony at Dexter College that celebrates "diversity" and proudly displays racial demographics, but also places them under surveillance for "self-segregation" or critiques them for wanting a space like the cultural houses.

The cultural houses further highlight the themes of racial authenticity and the "myth of self-segregation." One way to think about the cultural house is as a site where racial categorization intersects with racial performance, or how students utilize patterns of behavior and pre-existing cultural discourses to construct their subjectivity (following Bettie 2003). There is an understanding on campus that the cultural house is a space for students who have been racially categorized by the institution as students of color. However it also becomes a primary site for racial performance, because not all students who have been categorized as "students of color" choose to affiliate with a cultural house. This relates back to the discussion of cultural organizations. I have had students of color report to me that white peers will often assume that they are connected to a cultural organization or house and these peers express surprise when they learn that not every student who falls under this umbrella category automatically chooses to connect to a cultural house. On the other side, peers who strongly identify as students of color and actively participate in the houses may question another student of color's racial

authenticity if she chooses not to be involved. And finally, those students of color who do choose to be active in both cultural organizations and houses are often accused of self-segregation and not "mixing" enough with the campus community (read: white campus community).

Based on this multitude of responses, it appears that no matter what decision a student of color makes regarding their involvement in the cultural houses that they are opening themselves up to potential critique from some sector of the college community. This leads me back to consider the role of the institution in creating and supporting the cultural house model. Once again, the white cultural practice of simultaneously acknowledging race and marking racial categories co-exists uneasily with the desire to speak as little as possible about race (and specifically racism). The mere existence of the house reinforces notions of racial categorization with distinct spaces for each racial group. The houses also serve as an implicit acknowledgement that racism still exists in our society and that it might be uncomfortable for underrepresented students to be on a predominantly white campus.

However there is very rarely any discussion of this or an explicit conversation about why the cultural houses are necessary and important. The end result is that the institution provides something—the cultural house—to signal an understanding that students of color may need specific types of support to be successful in a predominantly white setting. It also can serve as an external symbol of "how diverse we are" to others and continues to mark students of color as distinct and differentiated from the larger population of students. The lack of discussion about the larger justification for the houses—specifically the fact that racism is still a reality—becomes silenced, I would

argue, in part due to the fact that it pushes against the institutional definition of a "diverse community," where everyone gets along and where race is a taboo topic. In the absence of a prominent institutional discourse about the importance of the cultural houses to the community as a whole, students of color are placed in the difficult position of having to provide justification for the houses. The end result is that students of color who choose to participate in the houses can end up spending more time defending their existence than getting to enjoy them for their intended purpose of providing a safe supportive space for them on a predominantly white campus.

In the remainder of this section, I will analyze a specific case study to further illustrate the complexity of the cultural houses and how they are positioned within the community. My colleague Tabitha has oversight for the organization, advising, and programmatic components of the cultural houses as part of her job responsibilities. In the fall of 2009 she decided to initiate a pilot program to help increase the vitality of the cultural houses. What she had found during her time at Dexter College was a sense of benign neglect in the houses and she wanted to reposition the houses rather than have them further become an empty institutional symbol. She proposed that there be a change in access to the houses—instead of the houses only being open to the college community between 7:00 pm and 11:00 pm, all students would be given access to the houses via their student ID cards. In the past the only students that had this type of access to the cultural houses through their student ID cards were the leaders of the affiliated cultural organization and the housesitters. This change in access was coupled with changes to the housesitter role to make them programming assistants who would be responsible for planning events that would take place at the houses.

A March 2010 student newspaper article entitled "Student opinion ranges widely on new cultural house hours,"[2] summarizes the changes in this way: "Beginning last semester, [Dexter College's] cultural houses formerly open between the hours of seven and 11 p.m., became available to all students at any hour of the day through One-Card access." Prior to this change the only students that had consistent access to the houses were the housesitters and the leadership of the cultural organizations. Others in the community could gain access to the houses through a reservation system. The article goes on to describe the change being in response to time constraints and an opportunity to expose larger campus community to the houses with a quote from Tabitha, "I just felt odd about that time constraint, and the cultural houses sitting there for most of the time collecting dust unnerved me. There are no longer housesitters but instead we now have cultural house programming teams." In her quote Tabitha underscores two reasons for the changes, one being to increase overall usage of the houses by increasing ease of access to the physical space. The other part of her comment focuses on moving the students working in the house from a more passive role (housesitter) to an active role (cultural house programming team). She notes that these teams will host a broad range of programming including movie nights, cooking, educational programming, and planning cultural heritage month events. At the end of the news article, Tabitha is quoted as saying, "[Dexter College] is not perfect. My job wouldn't exist if it was. We're not there yet but this is one of the things we're working toward. You can create the [Dexter College] you dream of." Again in this statement, Tabitha encourages students to take

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[2] It is interesting to note that this article appeared several months after the change had been made. While this issue was widely discussed by students who were already active in the cultural house community, there was very little broader community discussion, with the exception of this brief article.

ownership of creating the type of college community they would like to see, in part by revitalizing the cultural houses.

As part of this pilot program Tabitha worked with the cultural house student workers to create a program to encourage all students to visit all the houses. On the flyer advertising the event was the mission statement Tabitha crafted that reflects both what the houses are and what they have the potential to be:

> The cultural houses at Dexter College are time honored, safe spaces claimed by members of the Dexter College community whose social identities are challenged, limited, and oppressed by the larger society and sometimes on campus. All are welcomed at the houses acknowledging that the spaces are gathering places where the cultural identities that the houses represent must be respected, honored, cherished as others with different identities seek to understand, learn, and educate themselves and share the space.

In this statement Tabitha begins by putting the houses in historical context as safe spaces for those who may experience prejudice. She makes it a point to note that this prejudice takes place in the larger society, but also on campus, helping to interrogate the notion that within the "diverse community" that there will be no oppression for underrepresented groups.

From here she shifts to the notion that while the houses were established for and are "claimed by" particular students, they are open to all students. This helps to debunk another myth that the houses are only for particular students and not open to the broader campus community. She ends with putting forward a philosophy that the houses are places where individuals are expected to be active in their own learning process, encouraging to students to both "seek" understanding and learning and to "educate themselves." The other side of the flyer includes a map that highlights the locations of the different cultural houses. This map tries to undermine that the houses are far away from the center of campus and to help students visualize them as being more connected to the

campus as a whole. This statement, printed on a rather unassuming half sheet of neon

pink paper, encapsulates Tabitha's attempt to begin to shift the cultural houses from what

I described in the opening as a "multicultural affairs" model to a more expansive model

that I would describe as "diversity, inclusion, and engagement." In this model, the

cultural houses would become a more integral piece of the college with which all students

would have the opportunity to engage in a variety of ways. In many ways she is trying to

shift the feeling that the houses are on the fringes of campus life (both physically and

psychologically) and bring them to the center. She is attempting to break the silence

around why the houses exist and instead invite everyone into the conversation.

The student response to this pilot program shares some interesting parallels to the

earlier discussion of student response to the opening up of the pre-orientation program to

white students. In this situation, however, students of color were most upset and

concerned about the change. Tabitha received a lot of negative feedback about these

proposed changes mostly from students of color who were already actively involved in

the cultural houses, but also from alumnae of color. The main critiques that students and

alums put forward was first and foremost that this change would result in the houses

being "overrun by white students" who would "take over" the space and result in the loss

of the one truly safe space for students of color on the campus. The most vocal group

were the students and alumnae of the African and African American cultural house,

which is not surprising since it is the oldest house on campus and has the longest

institutional history. Their concerns clearly indicate a fear that this change would be a

move to take away the things they have fought for within the institution to address racial

inequalities. This is an area where alumnae can frequently become involved in sharing

their own historical perspective and narratives of the institution with current students.

The most frequent narrative that I heard during my time at Dexter College related to a

building takeover in the late 1990s that resulted in the creation of three additional cultural

houses. Alumnae often reference this event as evidence of what they were denied in the

past and as a lesson to current students that sometimes protest is the only way to get the

institution to provide support for students of color.

Current students of color had a variety of responses to the proposed changes. A

senior Latina student commented in the March 2010 article cited above:

> It's going to be harder for certain people who use the cultural houses to feel like they
> have a safe place on campus. The cultural houses were created to provide a safe place for
> students who may find it hard to be in a place like [Dexter College] where the dominant
> culture is imposed. By opening them up to everyone it may make some students feel
> uncomfortable.

Here again we see the theme of comfort presented—in this case the students of color see

the cultural house as a place where they can be safe and comfortable with the implication

that the rest of the campus is not able to provide that safety or comfort. The student also

notes that the cultural house provides an alternative space to the "dominant culture." Her

use of "dominant" appears to be an indirect way of referring to white culture, a strategic

reference to "white" without threatening the white community of Dexter College.

One of the senior students I interviewed, Gloria, had worked for several years in

the cultural houses as a housesitter. When I asked her how she felt about the changes at

the house she responded in this way:

> So I don't know, there seems to be this implicit exclusivity when you name a special
> house or cultural group or something, you know? So I don't know, it confuses me. I don't
> understand how anything is not within my reach. . . . I think when you present it, we're
> gonna open all the houses, and anyone on campus can swipe in and use it, people assume

that someone is gonna come in and just trash everything and do something bad. But if you invite people and you tell them, because you can swipe in, everybody will know who you are, just be responsible.

Gloria is clearly trying to grapple with the sense that the houses are inherently exclusive, but also a desire to have them feel like they are open to the community. As she notes, many students of color who expressed concerns were fearful that not only would this change mean that white students would take over the space, but that they would come in and physically destroy the house. These concerns expressed by students of color make sense when placed in the broader historical context of racism in the United States and the continued acts of violence against people of color that take place today.

But I also want to analyze the deeper implications of the concerns that the students raised in relation to their sense of where they fit within this predominantly white institution. One of the things that I found myself contemplating while this issue evolved over the course of the fall is if the students of color who were upset about these changes were more upset about the idea that this change indicated exactly how tenuous their place and value was within the larger institutional structure. As I discussed in the opening of this section, the houses are often perceived as a sign of institutional commitment to students of color and acknowledgment of their particular struggles within a predominantly white community. So it's not surprising that they would read a change in that structure as perhaps a sign of their diminishing importance within the institution. In addition, as I mentioned there is a well rehearsed narrative relating how generations of students of color who came before had to fight so hard for these spaces, so if opening them up to a broader audience feels like "losing" the space, that is a heavy burden of responsibility for current students who may feel they are letting alumnae down by not

holding to the traditional model of the house and how it is used. This negative student response also needs to be placed in the larger context of other recent changes within the institution. In recent years several different "spaces" which had originally been solely for students of color were opened up to white students: Experience Diversity, Pre-Orientation, et cetera. In this light, their wariness to add cultural houses to this growing list is completely understandable—especially since these programs and the houses can be seen as one of the only places where there is institutional acknowledgement of the challenges that students of color experience attending a predominantly white institution.

In addition to being an institutional symbol of commitment to "diversity," the houses are also a place of community for students of color. It may to some extent be an "imagined community" (Urciuoli 2003a), but it is still a site for students to connect around heritage, culture (in the broad sense), and self-making. This returns me to the dilemma I noted at the beginning of the chapter in the ongoing "trajectory" (Omi and Winant 1994) surrounding the cultural houses: Who should decide what their next "rearticulation" will be?

In asking Tabitha to further reflect on the resistance that she had experienced from students of color and her own vision for the houses she shared the need for students of color to also grapple with their own issues of internalized racism:

> You build at home first, you get yourself clear, and then it is going to extend out into the way that you interact with other people, that if I can start believing in myself and understanding my racism, the internalized racism that I'm experiencing, it's really not about me but it's actually about the systems, and start confronting some of that internalized racism that is psychologically in my head I can then, my interactions with people will be different because I see myself as different. And so I'm translating that to the houses in that, if they can start seeing those spaces as, all right, I'm learning more about myself, I have this really great space that I want to share with all of my friends depending on, no matter what race they are, I want to bring them to the house and show them the exciting programming and books and the literature and the food. And then, when they go out into the residence halls, it's sort of oh, okay, I have that space over

there, but I also have this space. And I don't need anyone to put me at the center of this campus, because I already know that I'm at the center of the campus. And that's a long time coming, it's a dream. Because I don't think that they understand, I don't think some of the students of color understand that there is both the racism that comes at them that makes them uncomfortable, it's my belief that they're carrying around internalized racism that is, even if the campus gave them everything they wanted, there's still an emptiness that gets placed out there.

Tabitha's essential point here is that within the current institutional framework, students of color may feel marginalized and that the cultural house is the only space that is truly their space. What she is proposing is a two-pronged shift that involves students of color simultaneously taking more pride and ownership in the cultural houses and having them be more dynamic interactive spaces, while they also begin to feel more ownership of the campus as a whole and a sense that any space on campus is their space.

Wide scale public discussion amongst white students about the proposed changes to the cultural houses did not occur. In the newspaper article I cited above they did quote a few white students who state that they are, "thrilled with the change and foresee an ultimately positive outcome" and "I do agree that it could make members of the cultural groups feel uncomfortable, but it will also help everyone learn more about those cultures. I think it will be beneficial to all [Dexter College] students." Again, these statements reflect a general perception from white students that their role is to be consumers of "culture." Another underlying theme for white students is that this change resolves some of the long-standing critique of the cultural houses from certain white students. I would argue that much of this former critique was based on what I have noted throughout as a fear of students of color gathering as well as the implied sense that white students should have access to all spaces on campus and a feeling that students of color are the unfair beneficiaries of an additional resource that they did not have access to as white students.

As this case study demonstrates, it is challenging to find a balance in the cultural houses in providing students of color a positive "safe space" and a community space where they can come together without perpetuating a negative sense of isolation, alienation, and being "separate"/"marked" within the larger community. In order for the cultural houses to fulfill their potential, there is also an institutional need to reevaluate what financial and staffing resources have been dedicated to the houses in addition to re-examining their mission and role within the community. The concern about limited resources was a common theme in many of the interviews that I had with administrative staff. Tabitha shared:

> I think I want to say that I believe in cultural houses. . . . The way that we have set them up is just atrocious to me, and that's mostly because the resources were never put in the way they should have been, and so trying to go in and clean them and fix them and set them up with systems that work, that can make them useful for students, I think it's just been hard to go back and do that. I think, I have the vision that they can be these great spaces for the students not only that are from those racial identities can go to, to have comfort and pride in, but they can be places where other students who don't have those identities can go to learn, to be exposed to and to learn how to be in relationship in different ways with people from particular racial identities. And right now, they're none of those things and it's literally just a space. And it frustrates me to no end.

Part of Tabitha's larger visioning for the cultural houses would also include linking the work of the houses much more closely to the academic mission of the college. As I have noted elsewhere the disjuncture between the academic mission and "diverse community" needs to be bridged in order to create a truly diverse, inclusive, and engaged learning environment. Building this type of environment requires institutional and administrative support and infrastructure and it also requires student initiative and involvement. The challenge is shifting the cultural houses from an institutional hegemonic tool where students of color are asked to accept the "common sense" notion that they have been "given" houses (many of which they actually had to fight for) as a

form of support. In exchange the students of color must accept the limitations of what the houses actually provide to them and consent to a construct of "diverse community" that does not directly address institutional racism or social justice.

CHAPTER 5

WHITENESS: THE INVISIBLE PRESENCE

Finding the Whiteness in "Diversity"

Discourses of whiteness play a critical role in reinforcing institutions of higher education as white public space. In this chapter I will specifically examine two themes: whiteness as invisible, normative, and unnamed and responses to when whiteness is made visible or named. In their introduction to a special issue of *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* devoted to whiteness studies, Trechter and Bucholtz (2001) note that language plays a pivotal role in producing and reproducing racial hierarchies and binaries. "Whiteness maintains its hegemony in diverse historical, political, and cultural contexts precisely because of its incoherence as a single *conceptual* category and its ultimate coherence as an *ideological* norm or macroideology" (Trechter and Bucholtz 2001:5). This incoherence was particularly evident when I asked white students to discuss their white racial identity and impressions of whiteness and white culture on campus.

In analyzing the role of whiteness at a predominantly white institution, when race is *not* being discussed is just as significant as when it is (Page and Thomas:1994 and Morrison:1992). Hill (2008) identifies that "a central function of language ideologies in the reproduction of White racism is that they make some kinds of talk and text visible as racist, and others invisible" (10). One of the ways I witnessed this play out at Dexter College is that white students (and by extension faculty and staff) are not expected to be interested in or talk about issues of race, unless they are part of an academic course where issues of race are part of the course material.

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Lindsey, a first year student, when asked about when she has thought about race, explained, "Race, I don't think [about] it generally, I found that it was only . . . I don't think there was ever any, race problem or anything at all. If anything, it just seems like a nonissue with, among us, or in at least the girls on my floor and other people I've been around." Another student I interviewed, Kim (a senior) talked about responding to my request for interview participants, but then wondering if she would make a good participant. "Well, I responded back, and I'm like wait, race isn't one of the big issues that I think about all the time, and so [I thought] 'oh no!'"

As these students' comments reflect, there is often a sense in a predominantly white college setting—and in society in general—that there is no role for white students in conversations about race, that race does not have any relevance for them (Bush 2004, Perry 2002). This discursive construction simultaneously reinforces students of color as "other" and white students as the "norm." It also contributes to a student of color's burden within colleges and universities to be the lone voice educating white students about issues of race and continuing to raise the fact that racism is a legitimate issue on college campuses. Castagno (2008), in her study of teachers and silences around race in a middle school setting, found that many of the white teachers felt that it was a better strategy to not talk about race because it inevitably led to conflict. This was similar to my findings where white community members were invested in upholding an image of "diverse community" that does not include conflict or racism.

As was discussed earlier, many white students think of "diversity" as a favorable college characteristic and as an opportunity to learn about other cultures and meet people from different countries. But their interview responses don't indicate any thinking about

the issues or challenges associated with living with people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Camille, a white senior from San Francisco, described her personal trajectory in grappling with these issues during her first year. Camille decided to register for a first-year seminar course that dealt with issues of race and whiteness because it sounded interesting to her. When she first arrived at Dexter College she thought of it as a perfect example of a "diverse community." She was shocked to hear students in her class talking about racism at the College, "I [thought] 'What are you talking about? There's no racism here.'" For Camille, her initial response was to try and defend the College partially because "[Dexter College] had built itself up to be such a big thing" related to diversity. She was also forced to reassess her understanding of what constitutes racism:

> I think that was before I really learned about racism in other ways other than outwardly blatant remarks or whatever. And so I just couldn't even picture—what do you mean racist? When I'm trying to picture a professor saying something in class. It does happen, but it's not very common, and so I was just trying to come up with these examples in my head of what those students of color might mean. And then slowly, oh, okay, there's other—institutional racism and stuff like that that are going on."

Camille went on to talk about her feelings of frustration when she realized how limited her education on race and racism had been in her high school setting that touted itself as "culturally aware":

> And everything in high school was so—it wasn't about racism—it was about heritage and culture. And there was never the word "racism" and race never came up. It was always, "We're gonna have a Chinese heritage celebration and celebrate Chinese culture." And so that's what we would do, and it wasn't about a system at all. And I remember after learning about all those things, feeling very much like disappointed in my high school experience that they didn't cover those topics.

As we have already seen, many students enter into college carrying a similar view of diversity as heritage and culture or, as it is sometimes referred to, a "food, fabrics, and festivals" model. As Camille's experience shows, there are positive things to be gained

from having students learn about other cultures, but it should not be at the expense of giving students an understanding of institutional racism, power, and privilege. For her, the course on race and whiteness ended up being a catalyst for Camille that shaped much of her college experience. After the class she specifically chose to participate in extracurricular activities like the Intergroup Dialogue Project that would give her a chance to continue to think critically about issues of race and diversity. She also found that she continued to utilize theoretical perspectives from the seminar in other courses. While I did talk with several white students who had similar transformative experiences related to their understandings of race and "diversity," many of them also talked about the extreme reluctance of their white peers to engage in any conversations or activities related to thinking critically about issues of race.

I was struck by the consistency of their depiction of their white peers' primary emotional response being fear: fear of saying the wrong thing, fear of being called a "racist," fear of using the wrong language, and (at the core of it) a fear of feeling uncomfortable. Baugh (1999) highlights that confusion over racial terminology can result in further distancing white people from issues of race and a willingness to talk about race. This fear from white students of giving offense only helps to reinforce white public space and steer them toward what appears to be a "safer" color-blind ideology. In this response you can see evidence of the "neoliberal racial project" that helped create a shift from it being acceptable practice to use racial slurs or making racist comments, to an ideology that promotes not talking about race at all as a safer option (Omi and Winant 1994).

Camille went on to describe what happens when race does become part of the conversation, "It's really funny if I'm sitting with another friend of mine who's white,

and then with students of color, and then race comes up. And I just completely engage in conversation—it's no big deal to me. And I'll look over at my friend, and they're, 'What do I do? Talking about race with people of color, ahhhh!'" As Camille made this final statement she dramatically threw her hands in front of her face to demonstrate her white friend's desire to shield herself from the conversation.

Camille went on to note that: "It's always interesting watching those situations, because you'll have someone who's very confident normally, and then all of a sudden they break down because they just don't know how to—it's their one spot where they have no idea, and so they just kind of hesitate and stop." I think that Camille's analysis points to a piece of white privilege that lends white students confidence and comfort in negotiating the white public space of the college environment where whiteness is typically invisible. Camille also talked about trying to encourage her white friends to participate in intergroup dialogue and their reluctance to do so, "But I think they feel very uncomfortable with it because you have to look at your own stuff that's going on. I don't know, I just think they'd rather not pay attention to it. So it's kind of frustrating." In these instances Camille appears to indicate that her white friends also have a fear of recognizing their own privilege. Her comments also point toward another aspect of white privilege, namely that white students aren't often expected to be engaged with conversations about race. So in those moments where race is made visible or there is an opportunity for them to talk about it, many white students feel ill-equipped to do so. When a white student encounters these situations, it ruptures their sense of comfort and the notion of "safe difference" within what white students understand to be a "diverse community" context as opposed to a predominantly white community context.

Ann, who identifies as a multiracial student, talked about similar experiences in trying to engage with white students about race. She feels that white students' reluctance to talk about race stems from a sense that they don't have a right to talk about it as part of the majority: "The idea is 'how am I supposed to talk about race if people see me as a white girl?' . . . I find that a lot of people—a lot of white students on campus get uncomfortable talking about race on campus because they think if we talk about race, we're gonna talk about privilege." Ann's comment again highlights a desire on the part of many white students to avoid talking about white privilege. The idea that you can't talk about race if you are part of the white majority can also serve as a convenient way for white students to have to avoid reflecting on their own white privilege and the role it plays in perpetuating racial inequalities.

Again, these sentiments are a part of the larger frame that race and "diversity" are inherently linked to students of color, which means that white students see themselves as separate from these conversations or as uncomfortable observers. Devaki, a multiracial junior, finds that when she tries to initiate conversations with white students about race she is most often met with defensiveness.

> "Why is everybody making me feel guilty," and . . . "it's not my fault that I'm white," and "I don't know why, why we have to talk about it like that." Because everybody talks about white privilege and everything, and I feel there's a miscommunication . . . where we're . . . saying, "Okay, there's white privilege," and the other person's saying, "What? This isn't my fault," . . . they're getting really defensive right away, whereas that's not really the conversation that's important.

Nina, a multiracial senior, described an incident where one of her white friends was trying to explain to another white friend what she had been learning about white privilege and the woman's response was, "But I'm from Connecticut." Her remark implies that this conversation about white privilege does not have anything to do with her

because she's from the North and she does not want to hear anything else about it. Nina was very upset by this remark and stated, "she might have meant it in a joking way but at the same time she's kind of, 'oh yeah that may be happening, well what do you want me to do about it' kind of thing." For Nina, the white student's comment in effect dismisses not only the relevance of white privilege to her, but more broadly dismisses the issue of racism as unworthy of her consideration. A central component of white privilege is being able to decide whether or not you want to think about race and racism. White students often do not recognize that this option is not available to students of color like Nina.

Many white students I spoke with in casual conversations and my interviews associated the concept of white privilege with feelings of guilt and anxiety, which in turn lead to an undesirable discomfort. Therefore it's not surprising that so many white students prefer to subscribe to a "colorblind" perspective or a philosophy that "race doesn't matter anymore." Eleanor, a white junior, feels that even some white students who may acknowledge the existence of white privilege do so as another discursive strategy to actually get them out of having to further engage with difficult conversations about race. She describes it in this way:

> Yeah, I think the term [white privilege] gets thrown around, "If I just say it, that's good enough." . . . White folks that I know, if they can just like say "I'm dealing with white privilege issues," that's enough, but they're not deconstructing it, they're not thinking about the complexities of it. . . . And so if white folks just understand they have white privilege, then we'll be there, and the college will stop having this conversation, because I don't want them to have this conversation anymore, because [*whispers*] it makes me uncomfortable.

From Eleanor's perspective part of what white students take away from being a part of a "diverse community" is that you should acknowledge white privilege in order to be a "good liberal white person," but that many times the conversation ends there. This notion

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of being a "good liberal white person" links back to the earlier discussion of the commodification of "diversity." Within a "diverse community" you have the potential to not only gain "diversity skills" that are highly marketable, you can also become a "good white person."

Eleanor also notes that for many white students there is a complete disconnect between their reflection on their racial identity and their academic work, "'Now I understand I have white privilege, and I'm a better person, there we go. Now I'll go get my economics major.' And there's no connection between your economics major and the work that you wanna do in a developing country, and you having white skin privilege. And I think that's where I get frustrated." This separation Eleanor identifies is another theme with larger resonance in the ways that students dissociate thinking critically about their identity from the work that they do in the classroom, rather than looking for ways to integrate these experiences and bring them into dialogue with each other.

Chloe, a white sophomore, talked about some of the challenges that she's faced in trying to talk with her friends about issues of race and racism. Chloe described a common rhetorical strategy that her white friends use when they want to make a racist comment:

> Yeah, I encounter a lot of times when my friends—or I think people in general kind of think that if they state that something is racist before they say it, then it's not racist. So I had someone say the other day, "I know this is racist, but it's always the small Asian girls who never say anything in class. And after class, they say something really smart, and I wish they'd talk in class." And I say, "No, that's a stereotype, you know that." And I'm causing them to confront the fact that it is actually racist in stating that it's racist—doesn't make it not.

Bush in her study of college students documented similar linguistic strategies that white students would use when talking about issues of race such as using a tentative voice quality and phrases such as "a lot of people think" in order to "test the waters" about

whether what they are saying is acceptable or not (2003:68). These linguistic strategies are often linked to an innate fear of being unfairly labeled "a racist" and Bush found that many white students often felt they were victims of having their behavior overly scrutinized and judged by students of color for racist behavior (2003:70-73).

I would argue that what students identify as "fear" connects back to a larger white cultural practice of a desire to control situations and outcomes in part to avoid conflict. I had an opportunity to observe this behavior in myself as a student in a graduate course on multicultural group process several years ago. During one particular class dialogue several people were getting upset and the conversation was (from my perspective) getting quite heated. In that moment I felt I should be assuming the role of facilitator, trying to smooth out the rough edges, and get everyone working together. My fellow classmates quickly called me to task for trying to control the conversation. I was initially shocked by their comments, but after reflection realized that what I was viewing as being a "good facilitator" was actually more about my desire to help contain and control a conversation that was making me feel uncomfortable. I felt my whiteness acutely in this moment—specifically my white privilege that gave me the sense that it was my right and my role to be the conversational gatekeeper. Similar dynamics often play out on a college campus where students of color who are voicing anger or critiquing the institution are viewed as "out of control" or "making too big a deal" out of something. Not surprisingly it is often white students, administrators, and faculty that voice these sentiments and feel that students of color need to be kept happy to avoid any sort of conflict and confrontation. However I would argue that exerting this type of control, and allowing white students to avoid their discomfort, is one of the central white cultural practices that keeps

predominantly white colleges from being truly diverse and inclusive learning environments.

Another aspect of these types of discourses of whiteness is the concept of "colorblindness"; the idea that we, as human beings, are all essentially the same and that in order to defeat racism we must ignore "color." The "colorblindness" viewpoint aids in perpetuating race and racism as taboo topics (Hill 2008, Page and Thomas 1994, and Frankenberg 1993). As Morrison (1992) states, this "is further complicated by the fact that the habit of ignoring race is understood to be a graceful, even generous, liberal gesture. To notice is to recognize an already discredited difference" (10). The ideology of colorblindness is often supported by discourses of "political correctness" and white student fears of saying the wrong thing and being labeled "racist."

This theme of colorblindness was evident in the linguistic strategies that the students of color described white students using to deflect talk about race and attention away from their white privilege when speaking with them. One strategy was for white students to use relationships with students of color to validate that they were not racists but rather "good liberal whites." Amy, a multiracial senior, states, "one of the things that I hear a lot are people who say, 'Well I have black friends or I have Asian friends so therefore obviously I'm not a racist person or like obviously I embrace diversity' or something like that and that's one of the things I absolutely hate most is anytime anyone says that I'm just like I can't listen to you anymore." She went on to describe other experiences where white students look to her for her approval, "certainly in conversations with white students . . . if we talk about race, I'm sometimes looked at in terms of— almost approval, for what they're saying, 'Validate the fact I'm not being racist!' that

kind of thing, and I'm [thinking], 'why do I have to do that—why is that my job?'" In the

setting of a predominantly white college campus, students of color are not only expected

to be well-versed in white culture, they are also expected to serve in the role of helping

white people feel good about themselves while still maintaining their white privilege.

In comparison to Camille, some white students may enter the college more

willing to have conversations about race, but find that this dissipates over the course of

their experience. Jessica (a white senior from Massachusetts) shared, "I definitely think

for myself, my first year, I was more willing to have those conversations and now I'm

less willing." When I asked her why she thought this change had occurred, she described

it in this way:

> I think as a first-year you have a lot of energy and [you think] "we can do things," you're
> at college and you're told you can do things and change the world and we'll talk about
> big things and make a difference and then, by the time you're a senior, you're [more]
> like, I'm taking all these classes and I'm writing a thesis and I'm not sleeping enough and
> I need to think about getting a job next year.

Jessica depicts conversations about race and engagement in social justice as a luxury that

younger students can afford to spend time on, but eventually these things must be put

aside to focus on the "the real world" or academics and finding a job. This is one of

several examples where I saw students making a clear separation between their academic

work and community engagement.

I have also observed that by senior year many white students have become

frustrated with the entire concept of "diversity" and in some cases have come to feel that

the institution puts too much emphasis on students of color at their expense. In the 2009

senior survey students were asked to comment on "what your school could have done to

improve your undergraduate experience." Many of the comments indicated a clear

frustration on the part of white students related to campus diversity. Some comments related to diversity include: "Can we stop some of this diversity junk? I feel like it's shoved down my throat all the time." "I feel like there is a great deal of racial discrimination against white students on this campus. The focus on students of color (special orientation, etc.) really makes me feel like I'm not included in a community on campus." While these individual comments are not necessarily representative of the student body as a whole, they do indicate that at least some students graduate from Dexter College with the idea that "diversity" is something to be actively resisted.

These students' comments illustrate Castagno's (2008) point that whiteness and white privilege are often reinforced through silence and "colorblindness." Some of the white students I interviewed did rupture this silence and tried to role model for other students that white students could play a valuable role in conversations about race. Other students have learned to strategically deploy phrases like "white privilege," in hopes that an acknowledgement of white privilege will release them from having to actually talk about race. This discursive maneuver, along with white students who express anxiety about being accused of being "racist" or "made to feel guilty" about white privilege are all connected to Hill's (2008) "personalist ideology." This ideology keeps concepts like white privilege and racism focused on the individual rather than placed in a larger institutional systemic context.

"White Culture"

Despite the proliferation of discourses at Dexter College related to "culture," there is a profound silence when it comes to the subject of "white culture" or even a white racial identity. When I would ask white students to talk about "white culture" on campus,

I was most often met with quizzical looks or the sense that I was asking them a trick question. One of the key characteristics of white public space is that whiteness is normative and unmarked, while nonwhite is marked (Urciuoli 2003a:155). This duality stems back to colonization and the construction of U.S. cultural identity in the figure of "the American as a new white man" (Morrison 1992: 39). Frankenberg (1993) notes that "one effect of colonial discourse is the production of an unmarked, apparently autonomous white/Western self, in contrast with the marked, Other racial and cultural categories with which the racially and culturally dominant category is co-constructed" (17). Over time the knowledge that the "new white man" was a Eurocentric cultural construction has been erased, rendering this vision of whiteness as durable and timeless (Morrison 1992:7). This erasure and the binary construction of "whiteness" and "non-white" plays a significant role in when and how race is "marked" within higher education.

My interviews revealed the unmarked character of whiteness. At the beginning of each interview I would ask each student to describe their racial and ethnic backgrounds. The majority of white students would respond by either saying they had never really thought about it, or they would say they were "just" white. Some students would spend a little time talking about their ethnic background, but many would just summarize themselves as a "mutt" or a "European mutt." In all of these descriptions the resounding sense is that there really isn't anything interesting for them to share because they are the "norm"—what's expected—and their tone was often apologetic as they delivered these brief descriptions. Perry in her study of white high school students found similarly that for white students in predominately white environments "white" was an "empty cultural

category" (2002:78). Rebecca, one of the white first-year students I interviewed, explained it this way:

> In my geography class . . . we were talking about cultural identity and global cultural identity and I've been thinking for awhile about my cultural identity and how I really feel I don't have one and, in not having a cultural identity, you kind of have every cultural identity . . . I really feel fortunate to be able to live this whole melange of cultures and have all of that be authentic, and, that's really fascinating for me, but I really don't have a cultural identity. People mention the name of a place where I have part of my heritage and I'm, oh yeah, I'm a quarter Sicilian, that's true, but I don't feel a big connection to there and then like in not feeling a connection to any places, there's a connection to everywhere, which is really interesting.

Because Rebecca doesn't feel a deep connection to her own racial or ethnic heritage, she feels able to access all cultural identities. I think this is probably not an unusual perspective, particularly in this global era, but I also want to argue that this sense of freedom to pick and choose and create your own "cultural identity" is also linked to white privilege and the notion of being able to collect "culture" as a consumer. In this example Rebecca exhibits a "common sense" (Omi and Winant 1994, following Gramsci) or "everyday thinking" (Bush 2004) perspective about how white people understand their relationship to the concept of "culture." Specifically, the fact that "culture" is understood as something intrinsically linked to people of color (and that white people don't have a "culture") results in the "rearticulation" of "culture" as a commodity for white people to consume. The silence around "white culture" (as opposed to the proliferation of discourses about "black culture" or "Asian culture") is also further evidence of Castagno's (2008) description of the way that silence legitimates whiteness as normative and the continuation of white privilege.

Some of the white students I interviewed actually felt that their lack of connection to a cultural identity was a deficit and were envious of friends who were more connected

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to their racial or ethnic heritage. When I asked Tricia (a white first-year student) if her

ideas or thinking about issues of race or her own racial identity had changed at all since

she had been at college she responded:

> I feel [I] have a bit of a boring background sometimes, just cause I meet all these cool people with all of these really neat things about their heritage. I mean my friend, who is sort of Indian, but they lived in China and so over [the break] she went home and was in China but also went to a wedding for her cousin in India and dressed up in the whole sari and the whole outfit and told me all these cool things they did and it just all sounds really interesting. . . . So, it does make me feel kind of unconnected to much of anything because the U.S. is such a—I think the new phrase is tossed salad, which I think is more appropriate than the soup or the melting pot. The tossed salad is sort of a more appropriate analogy. Yeah, so I do feel a little unconnected from any one specific thing and a little bit more sort of boring when I meet all these really interesting people.

From Tricia's perspective her friend has an exotic and fascinating "culture," but Tricia's

lack of "culture" makes her "boring." This conceptualization of "culture" is similar to the

ways that in Chapter 3, white students described that the compelling aspect of being in a

"diverse" community was to get away from "boring" all-white communities. Again, what

remains invisible here is the fact that white culture exists and that she is a part of it. Just

like "diversity," "culture" within the predominantly white environment is understood as

being only applicable to the "other" (in this case students of color and international

students). I shared this perspective with Tricia about how culture gets characterized as

only belonging to students of color and international students and white culture gets

equated with "the norm," and she commented why she thought this was the case:

> There's less really specific clear traditions and less clear sort of personal connection to it, partly because it's the norm . . . I mean I know in anthropology last semester I think I read an article about how religions and things sort of like can draw people in and kind of keep them more connected by having them have to do specific things, where they might have to give something up and then they all sort of that in common . . . and that kind of thing sort of brings people closer and maybe makes them feel more connected and . . . so there isn't, I feel like there isn't really anything like that necessarily where you really had to give anything up or where you have to always do something that would kind of give people that automatic connection.

Tricia's point is that part of what brings people together is having to "give something up" and to an extent she's right—adversity and sacrifice do bring people together. Kate (a white first-year student), like Tricia, described feeling disappointed and that she is lacking something because of not having a sense of cultural identity:

> I've always been a little upset that I don't identify with a culture, because that's just such an interesting aspect to so many people I know and so many people I've known in high school . . . I think it's a really interesting thing to have traditions and to just have a really big thing that your family can bond over. We just don't really, in my family, have that.

This theme is interesting in the context of the earlier discussion of how students form friendship groups. Particularly amongst the first-year students I talked with who were still in the process of meeting and making friends, several of the white students expressed this sense of envy toward students of color and international students for having what from their perspective was an automatic, built-in friendship group through the cultural organizations and houses. Samantha (a multiracial student who identifies more as white) commented on her sense of this:

> But I think—I don't know if I'm wrong, but sometimes I think it's easier for them when they have these sort of Chinese associations and the [African organization], and there's the Spanish organization, and they do all the cultural events. Maybe it's easier for them because they sort of recruit the first-years and get them involved, and sort of an automatic social group. But I can't really do that. But I do like that about the school, that they probably make people feel a lot more comfortable coming from different countries.

Samantha's comments made me consider the ongoing critiques from white students about the "self-segregation" of students of color and international students from a different perspective. White students may feel envious of these groups not only because they felt denied access to these groups of "diverse" students, but also because of what looked to them like an unfair advantage in the often tricky terrain of making friends. All of these comments about culture and traditions go back to white students longing to feel

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connected, to feel a part of something. What these white students don't talk about is that part of white privilege is being able to view yourself as an "individual" who is not necessarily judged (for good or ill) as part of a group. They are not able to conceive of the challenges of institutional racism that students of color (and by extension international students) face in the predominantly white context of Dexter College. The student comments also reflect prejudices and generalizations about the social bonds between "othered" students. The contradiction here is that "othering" is the privilege of individualism and freedom, but the white students also exhibit an envy/desire to have the benefits of being part of a homogenized group. This relates back to the "myth of self-segregation" as a tangible outgrowth of this envy/desire and the power of white privilege to name "othered" students as the only students who engage in self-segregation as part of the "everyday thinking" (Bush 2004) that reinforces narratives of whiteness as invisible. White students don't typically conceptualize themselves as "self-segregating" because they only see themselves as "individuals" rather than member of a racial group.

Another common thread in my conversations with students was the sense that white culture was very difficult to define and that it often felt most like an absence or simply the norm that was used as a point of comparison with other cultures. Jessica, a white senior, explained "That's partly because, I mean, you're right, a lot of people think white culture is invisible, but it's just sort of everywhere, so it's sort of hard to pick out." Brianna, a white senior, shared "Honestly, I wouldn't even really know how to define white culture. What would you, I don't know." After talking a little more about some of the other examples students had given me she did start coming up with some examples including thinking about the way that some academic courses think about culture from a

very monolithic perspective. Brianna concluded by sharing, "I've never really thought of just comparing white culture to other things. I've usually just been comparing, other races or religions to Anglo society, but I've never really analyzed Anglo society. It's actually kind of funny." Sandra, a white senior, also spoke to this issue of viewing other cultures as monolithic:

> I've been told by people who aren't white that there is a white culture, but I think that whenever you're in a different group, you see the other group as kind of more monolithic than it really is and so, I just have a really hard time understanding how I could be from the same culture as some of the other white students I know, who we all act very differently and have very different values.

These students are all grappling with the double standard of feeling comfortable thinking of other cultures (i.e. African-American culture, Latino culture, Native American culture, et cetera) as being easily identifiable—something that they are used to analyzing and thinking about—but feeling that white culture is "hard to pick out." The sentiment from many white students that they don't have a culture and by extension that race has nothing to do with them was a point of frustration for many of the students of color with whom I spoke. Nina, a multiracial senior, recollected what happened in her Psychology of Racism class when the idea of white culture was first introduced:

> I remember being in that class and we had this conversation about white culture and a lot of the white students were well white people don't really have a culture and I was ready to strangle somebody, how do you not think you have a culture? I see it every day and I have to live that way every day when you think that everyone else has a culture, but you think that yours is culture-less?

Amy described a similar experience of trying to talk with a white friend about the website, "Stuff White People Like." Amy was very surprised by his response.

I showed this to one of my friends and I said this website's hilarious and he said, "This isn't hilarious. This doesn't apply to me. I'm not like this." He's white, and I said of course, "That's the point, obviously, if this fit you 100% would that be weird" and . . . he ended up getting really legitimately mad at me over this, and I said, "Why are you getting mad at me over this."

In each of these examples white students are so steeped in and invested in the idea of whiteness as normative that when students of color (or even other white peers) confront them with information to the contrary they respond with denial, disbelief, or anger. The white student in the "Stuff White People Like" example also bristles at the notion that he could be subject to stereotyping because of his sense of himself as an individual. Their response echoes Frankenberg's argument that "colorblindness" is a move toward "color evasiveness" and "power evasiveness": this move "asserts that we are all the same under the skin; that, culturally, we are converging; that, materially, we have the same chances in U.S. society; and that—the sting in the tail—any failure to achieve is therefore the fault of people of color themselves" (1993:14).

When I asked Gloria, a black senior first-generation immigrant, for examples of white culture she shared how different aspects of whiteness and white culture had become visible to her over the course of time:

White culture, I mean it's all around us. . . . And then going to boarding school and being like, "Whoa, lots of white people." [*laughter*] "Wow, so many white people." Wow, that was kinda scary. And you really learn some stuff about white people and how they dress and act and carry themselves. And the idea of entitlement, I guess. I think for me, boarding school was more the class thing. . . . And then coming here, it was more different levels of whiteness, being exposed to riding, equestrian stuff, I never knew that was real, so that was really cool. People kept talking about horses . . . The other part of black culture that became very apparent to me was just becoming more comfortable with my sexual orientation, and seeing how it was being a student of color and gay is so much different from being a white student . . . here the queer—the gay atmosphere or whatever identity is so outlined. I don't know.

Gloria's comments illustrate that when students tried to describe white culture, they found it easiest to use examples that pointed to intersections of identity, primarily race/

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class intersections and race/sexuality intersections. Athena (a multiracial first-year student) said, "The most visible white culture to me is the sort of upper-class white culture and that's probably because that's something I'm not as familiar with as the white culture I've sort of been submerged in." Athena has an easier time identifying upper-class white culture because it is foreign to her own class background and thus stands out to her in a way that the middle class culture she's grown up in does not. Dora, a white senior who identifies as working-class, talked about a time when there was a debate on campus about environmental issues and how certain white students expressed that they were entitled to have things like "to go" cups for their convenience. Dora felt that this sense of entitlement is linked not only to class but also whiteness.

> People need their to-go cups because if they're in a rush, she basically was [saying] I don't think we should give up any of our comforts . . . I feel there's a certain sense of entitlement that girls have here and I think . . . it's the white culture. To me, the white culture is the elite, it's the elite class. For me, it's a socioeconomic thing, it's, you don't have to be white in order to be part of that white culture.

Dora's comments relates to Bush's findings about how white students who come from lower-class backgrounds often have difficulty seeing themselves as people who also have white privilege, because they experience their lack of class privilege so acutely.

When I asked students to attempt to describe or give examples of "white culture" on campus, without fail the most common response was "the Equestrian Team." This is a prime example of the way that when many people think about whiteness, they link it to an upperclass elite whiteness. Within the Dexter College community, the Equestrian program represents that type of elite whiteness. Charlotte, a white junior, participated in the Equestrian team during her first year at Dexter College, but then stopped because she did not like the culture:

I never wanted to be part of the culture because it was just so irritating to me, cause I feel when you get to that level it's all about the money and winning and it's so white and monied and privileged and for me, that just kind of kills the fun that I have riding. . . . I can give you an unofficial uniform for them, a lot of them, of course with any stereotype it doesn't apply to all of them, but many of them have a lot of money and they wear it, be it with most of them wear pearl earrings, they'll wear their riding pants and boots or like their socks and like tennis shoes or something around. They'll have really nice polo shirts, just like the brand names. You can see the nice brand names on them.

Maria, a Latina senior, first generation immigrant, gave the Equestrian team as an example of how often felt like she didn't quite fit in at Dexter College.

There were a lot of girls from the equestrian team in my hall, and I was [wondering] why are they dressed like that? [*laughter*] "Dressage," I said, "What is dressage?" I would always hear that word, and I was like what? And then I looked it up on YouTube, and I [thought] this is it. But I encountered things that I didn't really know, and I didn't know existed. I don't know how to explain it. Those little things, I guess that's when I really started to realize that I hadn't been exposed to a lot of things.

When I asked Maria what about the Equestrian team felt white to her she mentioned that first of all there were no (phenotypically visible) students of color on the team. She then went on to comment:

Yeah. And the outrageous fees that you need to have. And also you know that if these girls do equestrian, it's probably because they own a horse, so their family has had the opportunity to put them into like horseback riding classes, and they're pretty expensive, I'm guessing. So that also creates a divide, like the social, and I guess the costumes they wear. I don't know, I found it very strange. For me, that was one of the signs, I think, of white culture.

For Maria the Equestrian team was emblematic of white culture. I thought it was particularly interesting when she referred to what the Equestrian team wears as "costumes." In Maria's worldview, the riding pants and boots look as exotic to her as the outfits that students wear during the fashion shows at the cultural festivals.

It was striking to me how consistently the Equestrian team came up as an example of white culture from a variety of students from different backgrounds, including many white students. One factor in the student's identification of the Equestrian with whiteness

may be a recognition that whiteness is about exclusion and property (Harris 1993). Another possible hypothesis for this is that they are an easy target; as Charlotte mentioned, they have a clearly identifiable "uniform" and there is a clear understanding about the elite nature and expense that goes into participating in the Equestrian team. They are also a group made up overwhelmingly of white students and, perhaps in part due to the riding pants and boots, they become one of the few instances where the "whiteness" of a white group of students is visible within the college community. The Equestrian team are clearly viewed not only as white, but white and privileged in a way that sets them up in opposition to other white students. Similar to the white students who are hoping to attain "good liberal white" status, the general white population can hold up the Equestrian team as a paragon of white eliteness that helps let them off the hook.

The other main area where students saw an overlap was between race and sexuality. Returning to Gloria, she also talked about how she felt like there were clear cultural messages about how to be "gay" at Dexter College and that these images were linked specifically to whiteness, "When I first got here it was like this is how you're gay: you have short hair, you play rugby, you dress like a guy, and you're really cool, a hipster, and you're funny. And you're white—yeah, okay. And I was, okay, that's weird." Eleanor, a white junior, had a similar perspective:

> I think what I notice the most is in terms of race and sexuality intersections, in terms of what people [*chuckle*]—some student used the analogy of big ants and little ants on this campus, and use that analogy to talk about the cool gays and people who identify as queer, but people don't believe them, or for all the stuff that goes along with that. And that has—there's a certain dress code here that's very white, preppy, certain brand names.

As Gloria and Eleanor both point out, within the context of Dexter College there is a particular brand of white culture linked to being gay or lesbian that is expressed through

dress, attitude, and even activities. Rugby was mentioned by several interview participants; the crew team was another group often identified by participants as part of an elite social group on campus that was predominantly white.

Several students also talked about this intersection in reference to parties and the social scene. Kate, a white first-year student, explained her take on the social scene at Dexter College:

> Sexual preference is a lot of it. That's a big factor. [Dexter College] parties are pretty gay. You know, you have a lot of girls, getting with other girls . . . I guess the, the social scene I was talking about earlier. That's always all-white people, so that's a definite trend. That's never like diverse at all. You'll see one or two people who are not white at a party.

Samantha, a multiracial first year who identifies as white, broadened this out to share that from her perspective that white girls are more interested in partying and drinking than students of color, "I find that a lot of the white girls on campus, they like to party and drink, stereotypically, or they'll go to [another campus]. And I don't like doing that either, and that's why I hang out with the international students, because they're very studious. So I don't know, it's kind of eye-opening." I heard comments about the party scene feeling very white from a number of students of color that I interviewed as well. This link between gay culture and white culture was one of the primary ways that the students I interviewed made meaning of "whiteness" within the context of Dexter College. The larger point I want to make is that exploring and highlighting race, class, and gender intersectionality is pivotal to understanding discourses of whiteness and the way that students "perform whiteness" within a predominantly white institution.

This chapter illustrates some of the ways that whiteness maintains hegemony through a lack of coherence (Trechter and Bucholtz 2001). The white students' comments

also highlight their complicated relationship with the concept of "culture." Many of the

white students I talked with have accepted the "common sense" ideology that as members

of the "normative" group that they don't have a "culture," but for many they see this lack

of "culture" as a deficit. By contrast, many of the students I spoke with viewed students

of color with envy as a group that not only had "culture," but that this "culture" made

them interesting, unique, and helped facilitate close relationships with others from their

same culture. Despite this seeming desire to belong to a "culture," these same students

often expressed resistance or hesitancy to accept that they might belong to a "culture" as

a white student. Much like "diversity" most white students seem most comfortable with

the idea that "culture" is inherently attached to "students of color," and would prefer to

remain in the role of "cultural consumers."

CHAPTER 6

RACIAL "INCIDENTS"

In contrast to discourses that reinforce the silence and absence around whiteness, there is another set of discourses that emerge when race actually is discussed and named on a college campus. A classic example is the discourse that takes place after a high profile incident of racism on a college campus. These types of racial incidents and the responses to them reflect discomfort with the way the incidents rupture the sense of what the institution and many students have conceived of and constructed as a "diverse community." As I argued in the chapter on how "diversity" is conceptualized within the Dexter College environment, "diverse community" is interpreted as a space where students from different races/ethnicities live and study together and learn about each other. This depiction does not allow for racial conflict in the community or—in many cases—the continued existence of racism within the context of the "diverse community." In this chapter I will examine three different racial incidents that took place at Dexter College and the ways that the college community responded to and made sense of these incidents. The first example focuses on an editorial in the student newspaper that many students felt was unfairly critical of cultural organizations. The second examines an episode that involved the campus public safety and accusations of racially profiling a black faculty member. The final example looks at the response of students to the selection of student members for an important search committee and concerns about the "diversity" of students on the committee.

Before examining these examples, I will provide some context for responses to racial incidents. One common response to campus racial incidents is for discussions to

focus on definitions of racism and whether or not this particular incident meets the right set of criteria. As linguistic anthropologist David Samuels pointed out to me, focusing on definitions results in not having to actually focus on racism or necessarily doing anything about it[1]. Hill makes a similar point, "arguments about whether or not speakers are racist are not useful, and function largely to reproduce White racism's central ideas" (2008:181). In talking about administrative responses to these types of incidents, one of my white colleagues underscored the inherent power in naming whether or not something should be considered racist. She expressed her frustration with other white colleagues who would confidently declare "that was not a racist incident" (in reference to something that had happened on campus); her response was, "you don't have the right to define it." Regardless of the right to define it, there is a deep-seated desire to define (and by extension control) the narrative and the outcome of any high-profile campus racial conflict, particularly by white community members, often in an attempt to maintain the particular ideal of a "diverse community" as a comfortable and conflict-free space.

This desire to define, name, and categorize a racial incident can extend to a desire to de-emphasize the role race may have played in the conflict. At Dexter College in 2003 a high profile racial conflict between a group of students and a college staff member set the stage for how race would become de-emphasized through non-naming practices; this particular conflict was referred to broadly within the college community as "the incident." Race was clearly implied but not directly named, underscoring community ambivalence about whether or not the "incident" was racist and a general reluctance to make a determination one way or the other. This non-naming caught on and in the years

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[1] Personal communication, December 9, 2008

that followed each subsequent racial conflict adopted this naming convention of "the

incident" (typically with a modifier to help distinguish it)—for example, the "newspaper

incident" referring to a controversial article in the student newspaper or the "public safety

incident" referring to a conflict between two public safety officers and a faculty member.

Hill borrows the term "moral panic" (Cohen 1972) to characterize media and

public responses to when public figures make racist remarks (2008:92) and the "frenetic

energy of such discourse events" (2008:100). When there are high-profile incidents of

racism on a college campus, white community members often subscribe to what Hill

(2008) terms a "personalist ideology" or an ideology that "insists that speaker intention,

not the feelings of the hearer, is always most important in evaluating meaning" (96). This

ideology often leads white community members to focus primarily on the intentionality

of the speaker/actor to make sense of a racist incident rather than considering the

experience and feelings of community members who are people of color. Hill (2008)

underscores the surprising absence of empathy of white people toward the sensitivities of

people of color.[2] I have also found this lack of empathy particularly striking because of

how antithetical it feels to the idealization of a "diverse community."

A related issue to the way that the campus community makes meaning of conflicts

around race and racism is what Bush refers to as a "racialization of resistance," when "the

social stigma against raising questions, being critical, voicing opposition to the status

quo, is viewed 'a Black thing' and something very negative, to be engaged in only by

someone in a subordinate status" (2004:98). Bush argues that this is a "cornerstone in the

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[2] Hill uses Feagin's (2006) concept of "social alexithymia" to refer to the "inattention to the
feelings of people of color" (2008:114) in her discussion of when prominent public figures make racial
"gaffes" and corresponding media and public response to these types of "gaffes."

reproduction of whiteness" (2004:98). I witnessed this dynamic play out at Dexter College particularly when members of the white community would question why students of color were making "such a big deal" out of what they saw as a minor issue. On the one hand these types of events prompted techniques of silencing including non-naming of race and critique of people of color who were felt to be overemphasizing the incident.

On the other hand, high-profile events, when recognized (and the related "moral panic") also tend to reinforce narrow definitions of "racism" that are focused on more overtly racist acts such as racial profiling and racial slurs. While it is critical to address all instances of racism, the emphasis placed on these types of incidents often result in deflecting attention from more subtle and insidious examples of institutional racism and does little to interrogate white privilege. Within the white community there is often a sense that if we can address this solitary instance of racism, that everything will be "fixed"—in many cases once the "moral panic" subsides, the issue is forgotten until the next "incident." Ferguson (2001) found that the elementary school discipline system focused on individualizing "troublesome behavior" rather than looking at larger systemic issues. Ferguson (2001) also notes that some of what motivates the school's approach to discipline is a fear of ongoing "white flight" to private schools and a pressure to keep things under control. This is similar to the dynamics I found in the way that "racial incidents" were framed and responded to within the Dexter College environment—specifically the desire to focus the "problems" on individuals rather than systems and a desire to control the situation to avoid creating discomfort or anxiety, particularly for white students and administrators.

As I will demonstrate through multiple examples, these "incidents" often share a core set of components: student letters, protests, letters from the administration in response, and campus meetings/forums. Usually the end result is frustration on the part of just about everyone (especially people of color), and a sense of relief (especially from white people) when the issue fades away, often as quickly as it emerged. What also gets lost in the hyper-focus on a specific "incident" is that the response to these incidents from students of color is rarely based solely on that particular incident but on a whole host of experiences with racism both at the college and throughout their lives.

One of the most striking things that I found in my interviews with students, particularly seniors, is that when I would ask them to give examples of experiences they had had on campus that had prompted them to think about race or their racial identity, the vast majority of them—particularly white students—cited one or several of the race-related "incidents" that had taken place over their course of time as students. These moments of community conflict clearly loomed large in the students' psyches, especially for white students, and the way that they thought about race.

The Newspaper Incident

In October 2007, a white student published a newspaper editorial critiquing the lack of student activism on campus. She begins her article by listing all the student organizations that she feels are true activist organizations; within this list she includes several environmental organizations, an organization focused on activism and labor issues, and the community service organization. Notably, the student participants in this list of organizations are predominantly white. From there the student presents a lack of student involvement in the "Students for a Free Tibet" campaign and the "Kick the Coke

Habit" campaign as evidence that students are apathetic and self-absorbed. Her attention

then turns to the cultural organizations and houses:

> Our cultural houses also hold a sleepy presence on campus. More focus is given to . . .
> parties, [cultural festivals] and Drag Ball than to the power and movement inherent in
> Latina, Black, African, Asian, Native American or queer groups in the "real world." . . .
> Our own cultural groups clearly have the possibility to become highly political and
> socially active. Yet they seem to be complacent with cultural history months and a good
> party every semester.

The rest of the article describes current students as people who are seeking higher

education as four years, "that allows us to blissfully remove ourselves from the world

beyond our gates" and ends with her wish to see students awaken from their sleepy

complacency and be part of the "next youth movement."

This editorial set off a firestorm of protest and debate, mainly centered around the

author's pointed criticism of cultural organizations. Many students—particularly students

of color—saw the editorial as a personal attack and felt the editorial was racist. Susannah,

an African American senior I interviewed, recalled her reaction to the article when I

asked her about experiences on campus that had prompted her to think about race,

> Oh, [that] article that came out where she was calling out cultural orgs that they weren't
> doing anything, community service-oriented. And I [thought] who are you? Because you
> don't know what we do. And at the same time, who are you? Who are you? You know
> nothing about us, absolutely nothing. Have you come to any of our cultural meetings?
> Have you tried to understand what we're doing? We do have community people, but it's
> very hard to find things that we can identify that we really wanna give back to. Who are
> you?

Susannah's frustration and anger about the article clearly still felt fresh even two years

later. Her critique of the article rightly focuses on how the author could feel justified in

making these types of statements without actually having any firsthand knowledge of the

cultural organizations.

In response to the outrage, the author and the newspaper editorial staff both claimed freedom of speech. Many other students, particularly white students, were confused about the entire issue or wondered why students of color were so upset. Eleanor, a white junior, talked about her initial response to hearing about the conflict, "And I still didn't understand why people were upset about it. I was definitely validating people and listening, because that's just sort of who I am, but I didn't get it." Eleanor, like many students, clearly wants to be a good ally, but is willing to admit that at the time she couldn't see what specifically about the article had sparked the conflict. Eleanor's initial lack of understanding about the incident was not an unusual response. When one of these conflicts was happening on campus, I would frequently hear white students express that they didn't understand what all the fuss was about or they would claim that students of color and/or the administration were over-reacting.

Eleanor further reflected on her response when she finally read the article that had sparked the controversy. This is a common facet of campus racial incidents at Dexter College; oftentimes students are never actually exposed to the source material (a conversation, a newspaper article, an email) that initiated the conflict so they draw their own conclusions based on rumor and hearsay. Ironically, even though in this case the source material was a published piece and readily accessible, I still spoke to many students who had a strong opinion on the matter, but had never seen the article. Eleanor shares:

> And I remember reading the article a little later—and it's interesting because most of what they were talking about was really comparing [the student activist organization], which is a very white organization, to the cultural orgs . . . Anyway, and then I remember reading it and thinking that the issue here was sort of people's definitions of what activism is. And I remember thinking—I even remember putting value on sort of the activism that [the author] was talking about, and cultural events, and not seeing cultural events in terms of dance parties because I don't like dance parties, and things like that.

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> And so placing value on that activism wasn't as important as what [the student activist organization] was doing. Although at the same time, I still wanted to understand why folks were upset about it.

Eleanor talked about how she did eventually come to have a more nuanced sense of what the conflict was about, but unfortunately this was not the experience for all students. This example illuminates another facet of white privilege; white people often feel entitled to weigh in and offer an opinion on a racial conflict without necessarily having all the facts or even talking with affected students of color directly to find out why they are upset.

One of the dynamics in the editorial was the inherent comparison between predominantly white student organizations as "good activists" and cultural organizations who are predominantly students of color as "sleepy" and most interested in hosting parties. This portrait of cultural organizations connotes stereotypes of laziness historically constructed about black people, particularly when held up against the predominantly white student organizations who are socially just and working toward saving the world.[3] The student author exercises her white privilege by defining what "good activism" looks like and by making sweeping generalizations about a very large group of student organizations and presupposing what the mission of the cultural organizations should be. I would argue that many students of color were so infuriated by the criticism of their cultural events and cultural heritage months, partly because many of these students have

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[3] One interesting detail of this incident is that there was relative silence from the LGBT community even though they are specifically named and critiqued in the article. I should also note that students who most identified with the LGBT community at Dexter College were white and (within the context of the college community) held a fairly privileged social position specifically through the organizations of the rugby team and the crew team. A majority of the students I interviewed mentioned the prominent role that the LGBT community—specifically through rugby—played in terms of the college social scene.

expressed to me and many of my colleagues that they feel burdened to organize these events and heritage months in order to "educate the campus" about their culture.

Shortly after the article was published I had a meeting with the head of the Latina student organization and she talked with me about how upset she had been by the article and how she felt guilty that her organization wasn't involved in more "activist" projects, as defined by the article. I remember feeling frustrated by this clear example of racial hegemony and the fact that this student had just added one more thing that she felt responsible for as a Latina student within the predominantly white environment: proving to white students that she was also an "activist."

I also wondered if institutionally we had nudged students of color toward following in these prescribed footsteps as campus cultural educators rather than campus activists. From an administrative perspective "cultural educators" fit much more neatly into the "comfortable diverse community" paradigm than "campus activists" do. It is institutionally beneficial to encourage the cultural education model because it also benefits white students who view "diversity" as learning about other cultures or moving through the institution as cultural tourists.

The author of the editorial ignores the fact that many of these events do in fact have a political or activist thread. Most of the cultural festivals focus on a particular social issue for that culture or community which is often linked to a charity for which they are fundraising. It is unclear from the editorial how many, if any, cultural events the author has actually attended and yet, informed by her white privilege, she feels comfortable making a sweeping generalization.

Unfortunately, in the wake of the incident, most students did not engage in an analysis of white privilege or racial hegemony and most of the discourse surrounding this event was boiled down to three questions: Was the editorial (and by association the author) racist? Should the student newspaper have published the editorial? Were students of color justified in being angry about it?

The fall of 2007 was also the year that the college had two new staff members join the campus whose roles were focused on diversity and inclusion work. As they watched this situation unfold, they proposed that we help students engage in some deeper (and hopefully more productive) conversations about the conflict. Part of the proposal for intervention involved organizing and supporting a series of student-facilitated conversations. The idea was to have two rounds of meetings; the first set would divide students into two caucus groups (students of color and white students) and the second meeting would bring all students together for a large group discussion. What was fascinating to me at the time, although in hindsight not surprising, was that the "caucus groups" ended up being more controversial than the editorial and in particular created tensions around the direct naming of "white students" as a group, in a fashion that bears resemblance to the response to the new pre-orientation program I described in Chapter 3.

One important thing to note is that the idea of students of color meeting together as a group to discuss a racial incident or conflict on campus was not a new phenomenon. When something would happen on campus, the typical response would be for students of color to send out emails to the different organizations to which they belonged as a way to share information and concerns and ultimately gather some type of meeting. One of the things that set this particular response apart was the fact that college administrators

actively assisted and helped facilitate the student meetings. In the past these meetings were wholly organized by students and had an "underground" sense of secrecy to them with maybe a few "trusted" members of the staff being invited to attend, but definitely not something that was generally announced to the entire community. The second distinctive aspect was that white students were specifically named and invited into the process of conversation. In many ways, this broke the pattern of response that students and the community had become used to: a racial conflict erupts, students of color organize and protest/make a list of demands, white students (with a few rare exceptions) are not involved other than as spectators or commentators, the administration meets with students and develops a response, an agreement is brokered and the situation is resolved.

The response from white students was immediate and for the most part negative. White students felt this idea was simply outrageous and would only promote "segregation." Charlotte describes her initial response to the idea, "I remember at that time, thinking it was completely ridiculous to have a caucus of white students and a caucus of students of colors or basically the nonwhite students. I found that was a complete total waste of time if the issue was the relation between the two and then the two were separate to deal with it. I was thinking that this is completely ineffective." Camille, one of the students who facilitated the white student caucus, talked about her efforts in trying to get other white students to understand the purpose of the caucuses:

> And I remember that whole time feeling—having to explain to so many white students about the difference between segregation and separation. And they [would say], "This is segregation." And [I would say] segregation is not when—students of color asking for their own space is not segregation. That was not forced on them—it's something they're asking for—[it's] completely different. They're separating from the white students, that is correct, but they're not segregated—it's completely different. So I remember having to explain that over and over again.

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As Charlotte's and Camille's comments both underscore, many white students opposed the racially distinct caucuses, viewing them as "segregation." Camille in particular highlights the way that the "segregation" has been "rearticulated" over the course of time with its meaning shifting from people of color being forced into separate spaces versus choosing to have their own space. This discursive maneuver is akin to Omi and Winant's (1994) discussion of how the concept of "reverse discrimination" became part of a larger project to rearticulate the meaning of racial equality by placing the focus on individual prejudice over systemic. What is not spoken about, but implied, is anger by some white students that they have lost their ability to control how and when students of color will gather or spend time together.

What appears as a motivation to have everyone come together across racial lines to work on these issues is tempered by two other constructs of white privilege and white culture as discussed in the earlier chapters: (1) I shouldn't have to talk about race if I don't want to. (2) A fear of students of color gathering together and the assumption that students of color will be talking about or plotting against white people (Hill 2008). But as I mentioned earlier, these types of meetings had been happening amongst students of color for years and had been open to white allies; however, the number of white students who had chosen to participate in those conversations were minimal, limited to those who were already connected to students of color, often through student activist organizations. This is not entirely surprising since, as I have demonstrated, the overarching discourse about race and diversity on the campus continues to equate those issues directly with students of color. This is another facet of the way that white students don't see themselves as having a role to play in conversations about issues of race.

Another issue with convincing white students of the positive potential contained in the caucus group model is the negative stereotype associated with white people gathering together as a group. Charlotte shared:

> I think [the wariness of caucus groups] it comes mostly from the fact that it's just not done as white people in the world. You just, I mean, there just aren't many purposeful white groups that have any good intentions . . . it's just kind of shifting the [paradigm to], "Okay, so we are a group of white people, but we're trying to accomplish great things."

Charlotte comments reveal is that for many white students there is a lack of knowledge and sense of history that there have been and continue to be white groups of people that gather to oppose racism. The end result is that when most people think about white people coming together to talk about race in the United States, they are more likely to conjure up a negative image rather than a positive one. This also points to another "white cultural practice," specifically denying the need for white people to organize around anti-racist struggle.

Despite the vocal concerns of white students and unease on the part of some faculty and administrators, the caucus groups did take place. Perhaps due to the level of controversy, there were record attendances at these meetings with a combined number of over 300 students at the different caucus groups—much more than what I had ever experienced at one of the previous student-of-color-organized meetings responding to a similar campus racial conflict. Those meetings would typically involve a core group of 20-30 students gathering in a cultural house. Camille had a particularly unique perspective as one of the student facilitators for the white caucus—she had been tapped for this dubious honor because of her involvement with Intergroup Dialogue. I remember talking to her on the day of the event and how anxious she was, already exhausted from

having spent a week trying to explain why this was a good idea. It was fascinating to hear

her reflect on this event during our interview, two years later:

> And then just seeing so many people completely—being at the white caucus was just
> absolutely crazy. Because half of the students were so angry about what had happened,
> which obviously they should be, and then half of them were just—I don't even know—
> they just didn't get it and didn't understand what was happening anyways. They'd say
> something and then say something else that completely contradicted that, and just I don't
> know. And I remember it just being very loaded—it wasn't a very productive thing
> because it was just so many people came in there with so much—I don't know, whatever,
> anger and such strong emotions. . . . But it's kinda hard to lead that when you have 160-
> something people in the room. I think for me, it wasn't being all-white people in the
> room, and actually putting a name on it was not a big deal for me. But I know that it was
> for a lot of people in the room . . . all these other students were, "Oh my god, we're all
> white students." 90 percent of your labs, you're with all white people and it's not a big
> freak-out thing for you. But then as soon as you put a name on it and say you're having a
> white caucus, it's a huge deal.

The two things that most struck me from Camille's depiction of the white caucus

group were, first of all, the intensity of the emotions in the room—primarily anger—and

second, the fact that for many white students this was the first time their own whiteness

and the whiteness of the campus had ever been made visible to them. This was another

instance that created discomfort for white students in the way it undermined the "diverse

community" ideal, specifically the ideology that in a "diverse community" all racial

groups are always mingling together and live in harmony. Another reason that the white

caucus group created such discomfort for white students was that it called into question

the common perspective of white students that they are individuals who will be judged on

their own merits. The idea that white students could be "categorized" or placed into a

racial grouping was very foreign and disorienting to the vast majority of white students.

Eleanor, a white junior, talks about her impression of the white student caucus:

> I think I was just amazed at how self-centered how many white students were when they
> were talking, and just this idea of not validating that someone is upset. If someone is
> upset, we need to do something about it—it doesn't matter if you agree with it or not. But
> it doesn't sound right for someone to have to feel that way at Dexter College. So I think

combining those two things, and then going through dialogue and facilitating dialogue on race and class—that shifted to understanding that issue more in terms of students of color and different cultural orgs feeling obligated to—or feeling a responsibility to teach the college about their ethnicity or their culture. And so I looked at it very differently than I had the first time.

Eleanor references here one of the common issues to emerge during this type of racial conflict: a surprising lack of empathy from white people for the feelings of students of color. For Eleanor, an important piece of how she made sense of this conflict was that she had a structured place to discuss and think critically about this issue through a racial lens via intergroup dialogue. In the absence of this type of experience, many students do not move beyond Eleanor's initial response of confusion about why students of color are upset or endless debates about whether claims of racism are valid or not.

So what did white students actually take away from this experience? A range of responses were reported to me during my interviews; for some it was transformative and for others simply a moment in time. Kim, a white senior, described her emotions of uncertainty about how she should think about this event. When I asked her how she sorted through her confusion about the event she explained, "I didn't really talk to other people, because then people get heated up, and I don't want to deal with that." So, as other white students have described, the fear of having to deal with anger led her to not want to engage with other students to talk about the issue. Kim articulated her internal process of thinking about whether or not the caucus groups were a good idea:

> "This session is for colored students, and this session is for white students, and this is for faculty and staff." And just really wondering like—yet not being able to go to every session, or whether that was some sort of racism that this was just for these people, and this was just for these people, and whether or not it was beneficial to actually do the breakdown like that, and whether that gained more benefit than perhaps having everyone mixed together.

When I asked Kim if she came to any final conclusions about the issue as a whole, she told me that in the end she couldn't attend any of the campus organized discussions because of "rehearsals and stuff."

Despite her lack of involvement in the actual conversations, she still had come away with a more nuanced role of how caucus groups can contribute to creating inclusion, even if that seems counter-intuitive:

> And thinking that yeah . . . before inclusion can be reached, you might have to break things down and focus on individual issues separating. Because if I'm in a room, and maybe I'm concerned about insulting the student who's maybe Pakistanian [sic]—If I'm so concerned about that in an environment, then I won't be able to ask my questions and get over that and realize that no, this isn't going to insult her—maybe I should word it this way. And separating in order to address like particular issues, and then that can help more inclusion to be reached.

As Kim's comments illustrate, students' initial response to caucus groups or race-based conversations can be negative because they have been taught to affiliate any race-based groupings with "segregation" or "racism." Such criticisms have been lodged against cultural organizations and groups for years, but they have not been as vocal or as fervent as what I witnessed in relation to the caucus group. However, the responses to the caucuses and the new pre-orientation program show that this critique seems to become heightened any time that white students are specifically invited and encouraged to participate in race-based conversations.

Camille discussed her frustration with how many students did not follow through on the conversations that began at the white caucus group:

> The whole situation was just—and I think a lot of my friends ended up going because they, you know, the whole . . . "Well I guess I should go." But then not wanting or not engaging in conversation afterwards, it's kind of frustrating. And it's also very frustrating seeing how much—how many like strong emotions went into that, and then they just die. You know, a week later, everybody is just back to whatever. . . . And it's hard—I think if something comes up that people haven't thought about before, sometimes it's hard for people to latch on to it for a while, and really kind of like claim it as something they

wanna care about. And so I don't know—maybe it kind of piques their interest and so then they show up and do it—it's a one-day, done, and you don't have to deal with that issue anymore. So I don't know if that's part of being a white person and then just having feeling that, you know, this issue about race came up, and white people are meeting—I must go to the meeting as well. And now I can back off and go back to my life where racism doesn't exist anymore.

Camille's concerns are justified when you consider the difference in attendance levels between the caucus groups and the follow-up large group meeting that was designed as an opportunity to have cross-racial dialogue and continue to move the conversation forward. The attendance at that meeting was less than half of the students who attended the caucus groups and the most vocal white students who were in attendance at that meeting were members of the newspaper staff who were still more concerned about the freedom of the press than campus race relations. This was particularly frustrating to the meeting organizers because of the large number of white students who argued that there should be a full conversation with all racial groups together. As Camille also identifies, one of the issues with having high profile racial conflicts being one of the only opportunities for white students to think about issues of race is that they tend to be seen as singular, intense experiences that you engage in and then go back to your "normal" campus existence, rather than seeing, thinking and talking about race as part of your overall college experience. This is yet another facet of white privilege—white students have a choice about when they can stop thinking about race, as opposed to students of color (Bush 2004).

Sandra, a white senior, also brought up the newspaper incident or as she referred to it, "the whole craziness that happened sophomore year," when I asked about times she had thought about race as a student. Interestingly, Sandra had a much more distant

involvement with the actual incident and told me that she didn't even know what had

started it. She explains:

> Yeah, and I was taking 24 credits and stage managing a play and I was the editor of the
> yearbook and a couple of other things in there, so I was kind of oblivious to the world,
> but my roommate, who is my friend who I mentioned before who's Indian went to one of
> the forums and came back and wouldn't talk to me for about a week and it was really
> awkward and I didn't know what was going on and . . . when she was really
> uncomfortable and not talking to me, I started asking questions about it, like what's
> happening guys, what's going on here and kind of getting, hearing little bits about it and
> thinking like okay this is strange, what happened that I became the target of all of her
> frustration about race on campus and so I talked to her a little bit and she was not ready to
> talk about it yet.

At the same time Sandra was invited to a small informal group discussion about white

privilege that a staff member in student affairs had organized:

> That was a really interesting discussion and kind of what made me really start thinking
> about things and so, cause as I said before, I had never really felt like I had a strong
> identity that was determined by any kind of ethnic factors and I realized that was kind of
> a luxury and that I didn't have to be defined [by anyone] and then that winter I went on a
> birthright trip to Israel and when I came back and the discussions that we had there were
> also really fascinating about that, like what it means to be Jewish and so coming back
> from that . . . and ever since then . . . in the day to day discussions that we have on
> campus and in the classrooms . . . it has totally made me see things in different ways.

When I asked Sandra what had ended up happening between her and her

roommate, she shared that she had given her roommate the space she needed and that

eventually they did talk about what had happened and reflected together on their racial

and ethnic identities. In the end these conversations brought them only closer together as

friends. When Sandra reflected on what she had taken away from that first small group

discussion on white privilege she explained:

> I think I used to kind of hide behind the idea of, I'm not someone who is perpetuating
> racial injustice or I'm not guilty in any way because my people [Jewish people] have
> always been persecuted too, so we're with you in that victim boat and I think getting over
> that idea was really important because I don't know, I just think that it shut me out of
> engaging in these discussions in a constructive way that I was kind of not questioning
> myself as well when I was talking about it and I think everyone needs to question
> [themselves].

I think Sandra's story is important in thinking about what types of interventions can be most effective in improving the climate at predominantly white institutions. In many ways she and her roommate engaged in a small scale version of the larger institutional response. They had their own caucus group experiences and then were able to come back together with the information and knowledge they had gained from those conversations to help them have a richer, deeper understanding of each other and their individual perspectives. The difference for Sandra is that her experience, while inspired by the "newspaper incident," was really more about connecting to a small group facilitated by a white staff member that she trusted.

The Public Safety Incident

Fieldnote, September 8, 2009:
New Student Orientation Session on Safety Issues

I am sitting in the back of the auditorium trying not to doze off as my colleagues give their assorted spiels about alcohol, drugs, sexual assault and general safety. Despite our best efforts to encourage the speakers to be brief so as not to put over-programmed students into a coma, some still seem unwilling to surrender the spotlight in a timely way.

Sue is one of these folks, delivering a rather exhaustive overview of Public Safety services, when suddenly she says something that grabs my attention. Sue is discussing the issue of "suspicious persons" and announces firmly and clearly to the packed auditorium, "Being black or Latino is not a crime" (this statement generates a round of spontaneous and enthusiastic applause from the audience). She goes on to explain that if a student wants to report a "suspicious person" they will need to be ready to name specific *suspicious behaviors*. She follows this up by noting that "Racism is alive and well in our country."

Sue is a short stocky older white woman with blondish-grayish close-cropped spiky hair and glasses. When I hear that she's a black belt in karate and runs the Karate Club on campus, I always register the same level of surprise and awe as the students.

Public Safety as a department is still stinging from last fall's "incident" involving an older African male professor being stopped on campus and asked to show ID after they received a "suspicious persons" call. The event had sparked outrage, debate, and widespread conversation with Public Safety at the center of it and growing complaints about racial profiling.

In their defense, I've often heard from the Public Safety administration that they become "the tools of students racial prejudices"—because most often they are responding to complaints of 'suspicious persons' generated by students who call in to Public Safety rather than being initiated by Public Safety personnel—Sue notes to the students that, "Public Safety will always respond to any complaint, but we will be asking for more

specific information about *what* the *behaviors* are."

This is the first time I've heard anyone in Public Safety address this issue so directly and clearly to a large student audience. I wonder what the students make of this—if they are taking it in at all or if it's just washing over them with the tide of information they are receiving in the hot, stuffy, cramped auditorium, sitting pressed together, clutching their slippery blue plastic 'goody bags' crammed full of pamphlets on drugs, alcohol, sexual assault, and campus resources, with candy and condoms thrown in for good measure. There are many students with phones out not even trying to be subtle about their texting. Others have already given up and have left, trying to walk out quickly and quietly, many casting glances in my direction as if I'm going to bar them from leaving.

But to me it feels significant—another taboo subject said out loud—regardless of how many them are really listening—that hearty student cheer means that some of them were.

During my time at Dexter College, Public Safety has often been a site for racial tensions to emerge, particularly around the issue of racial profiling or, as it is often coded on campus, "suspicious persons." Students will also often register complaints about "noise" from other students and/or their guests that often appear to have racial undertones. As Sue noted in her remarks to students it is most often students (and in my experience they are white students) who call in "suspicious persons" complaints to Public Safety, which then has the responsibility to look into that complaint. While it is not always the case, frequently the suspicious persons will be male and of color. Some of this dynamic is undoubtedly due to the culture of a women's college environment and the heightened concerns about personal safety that women have been socialized into carrying from an early age. But there is also a clear racial undercurrent to who is considered "suspicious" and a likely threat to their safety—in other words, who looks like they *belong* on a predominantly white campus.

For example last year a white student called in a complaint that there were 10-15 African American males yelling profanities outside her residence hall. Public Safety responded to the scene and found two men and two women who were phenotypically

black walking to a dance party. They admitted that they might have been talking loudly and agreed to quiet down. The next day the student's parents called to complain to Public Safety because they felt that their daughter's concern had not been taken seriously enough and that her safety had been compromised. Public Safety contacted the student to follow up with her directly and she apologized for her parents' call. Over the course of her conversation with Public Safety, she acknowledged that she wouldn't have been scared if the men had been white. When I had this episode reported to me by Public Safety, two things struck me. One was the extent of the white student's fear of these men despite the fact that they were outside and she was inside a locked room contained within a locked residence hall. Second was her willingness to acknowledge that her fear was racially motivated. When this situation was discussed at an administrative meeting we struggled with how and what we should do in terms of an educational conversation with this student. It made me consider the irony that we have an advisor to students of color and an advisor for international students, but we don't have an "advisor" or staff member trained to talk with white students grappling with their own prejudices or racial identity. This is another administrative example of how we conceive of issues of race as something for which only students of color or potentially international students would need support. The question becomes: who is available within the predominantly white institution to support white students in these types of instances?

Tricia, a first year white student, reported to me during her interview her response to getting an email about a report that had been made about a black man standing outside her residence hall:

> I think this was just in an e-mail, it wasn't a personal thing, but I just heard that someone had called Pub Safe just because there was a black man standing outside a dorm and that just really kind of frustrated me. That just really didn't seem right. But, I mean I

generally feel that most, I mean people . . . it's a very accepting college. I feel when you come here, you kind of come here knowing that or you want to come here hoping for that, it's generally very accepting of a lot of things and a lot of people coming here wanting to meet all kinds of different people. I know whenever I go back home, I brag to all my friends about how big our percentage of international students is and I have a friend from Bangladesh and like this is something that I definitely brag about and I think it's really cool.

Tricia's initial response is one of surprise and frustration because another student racially profiling someone does not mesh with her vision of our "diverse community." Her comments about international students reinforces my earlier point about the way that many students conceptualize "diversity" as international diversity and that this feels more comfortable. The way that that Tricia spoke about these issues to indicated that she was not sure how to incorporate notions of racism or racial profiling into her conception of diversity as a type of "United Nations" where students from different countries live in harmony.

When I prompted Tricia to talk in more detail on this issue she responded:

On the side of people being nervous about just a man standing around outside the campus with no clear purpose, I think I know a lot of very shy nervous people here who may have come here just cause it makes them feel really safe and, on that side of things, I'm not surprised that someone will call Public Safety just because there's sort of any man just sort of standing around without a clear reason. I think it was obviously just the fact that he was black that just kind of, made something kind of turn on in my head and it was just a little frustrating, but I feel like that could have happened with almost anyone. It's just sad that it happened in that specific case.

As Tricia thought through the factors that went into the situation, she sees the role that gender—and a woman's fear for her safety—might also play, but she also is clear that race played a role in making the male appear "dangerous." It's interesting to note how her description of her emotional response shifts from a "little frustrating" to "sad," but it is not clear that Tricia will take any further action or give this issue more consideration. As the trajectory of her comments illustrate, many white people may shift quite quickly from

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concerns about issues of racism like racial profiling to a mode of rationalization about why this specific event took place.

This pattern of racially targeted "suspicious person" and "noise" complaints to Public Safety also have the effect of reinforcing the predominantly white campus as white public space. Implicit in these complaints is that people of color, particularly black people, do not "belong" in the space. When Public Safety investigates these complaints the resulting effect can be one of a panoptic surveillance of people of color moving within the institution (Foster 2003, following Foucault). The overall impact of this type of surveillance is that it constantly calls into question a student of color's sense of belonging within the predominantly white environment, implicitly warning them about how tenuous their place is and how quickly they could move from insider to outsider.

As I referenced at the beginning of this section, in the fall of 2008 one of these "suspicious persons" incidents rose to the level of a high-profile campus racial conflict. This particular incident became so inflamed due to the fact that it involved Public Safety and a black tenured faculty member. Public Safety received a report of a "suspicious person" and sent the officers to the scene. At the scene they found a man who they questioned and asked to show his ID. The person they interrogated turned out to be a long-time black tenured faculty member, whom the Public Safety officers did not recognize as a community member. The faculty member was deeply shaken by the event and the way he was treated by the Public Safety officers. This episode sparked an immediate response by the faculty, particularly faculty of color, who began reporting that they had had other similar experiences on campus.

There were a series of administrative communications sent out to the community regarding this incident, including a letter from the President of the College. This letter discussed the event in vague terms as a "disturbing incident" and described what the institutional response and follow up would be. The letter made no mention of "racism," although it announced a special meeting for "faculty and staff of color" later in the week, clearly indicating that there was some connection between race and the incident. The letter simultaneously contributes to the idea that racism is a taboo topic to be avoided, while still highlighting race by specifically mentioning "faculty and staff of color." This example also highlights a general concern about directly naming "racism." There were several follow-up emails regarding this specific incident, with a similar combination of both drawing attention to and also obscuring what was at the heart of conflict—racial profiling. As is often the case on a college campus, there was widespread criticism of these administrative communications, primarily from white people for saying too much and making too big a deal of the incident and from people of color for not saying enough and downplaying what had happened.

Other elements of the institutional response included a campus-wide meeting. This meeting was fairly well attended and was scheduled at 4:00 pm to encourage faculty and staff participation. There was a good mixture of faculty, staff, and students present at the meeting. After a few introductory comments the meeting opened with a statement and apology from the Director of Public Safety. A group of faculty and staff of color then presented a powerpoint presentation, entitled, "Why it Matters to You," focused primarily on experiences of racial profiling by faculty and staff of color, but also including a few white ally perspectives and more general issues. The presenters used a "theatrical"

approach, with individual faculty and staff of color reciting different statements while others formed a "chorus" seated on bleachers.

During the course of the meeting college community members in the audience had the opportunity to share anonymous "climate concerns" on index cards. Several common themes emerged from their comments including calls for more education and training related to diversity issues: the need to get to know each other as a community; and expressions of hurt, surprise, and disappointment. The written responses indicated that it is not only students, but also faculty and staff, who have developed an interpretation of Dexter College as a "diverse community" free from racism and conflict. The tenor of the comments reflected an overarching attitude of "how can this be happening *here*?" and a sense that Dexter College was somehow both better than and immune to these types of community issues. But this perspective was challenged by many people of color present who expressed a deep-seated frustration and anger that had accumulated over time due to their knowledge of multiple experiences like this one.

Throughout the discussions related to this conflict the college community swung back and forth between a desire to consider this as an isolated incident of racism that could be resolved and the sense that this was just one example of a pervasive, deep-rooted issue. While there was still some debate over whether or not what transpired between the officers and the faculty member was racial profiling, there was generally more agreement that race did play a role. In some ways I would also argue that this incident was easier to respond to because it fell more cleanly into an area that many people understand and recognize as overtly racist—racial profiling. For students in particular, the role of class and rank was also a factor in the amount of attention that this

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incident received, as I heard them express their sense that the response would have

looked quite different if the victim had been a student or a staff member. This is another

important facet of understanding the college campus response to racial conflict and I

agree with the student perspective that the response is often influenced by which

combination of campus constituencies are involved.

One of the white seniors that I interviewed mentioned this incident as a time that

she had thought about race. Even though she was away from campus the semester that

this was going on, she still had felt engaged in it due to the series of related emails and

campus correspondence. Kim shares:

> There was another—I don't know what to call it—with the public safety, particularly
> targeting a professor or something of color. And I wasn't on campus for that, and so I
> come back, and there's all these emails that I'm getting about—well, 'public safety will
> look into this' and other emails trying to smooth things over. And just thinking about that
> and being —well, what's the whole story? . . . was race really an issue or what was
> actually going on?

Kim's comments illuminate a number of common responses to these types of racial

conflicts on campus. One is her unease with even referring to this as an incident, let alone

mentioning race. As she says, "I don't know what to call it." This issue of naming or

inability to name becomes an additional barrier to the community being able to openly

discuss and dialogue about campus racial conflicts.

It's also interesting that what she considered the emails is that they are an attempt

to "smooth things over" rather than open up conversation and understanding. Again, what

I heard from Kim and other white students was the discomfort with talking about race or

directly addressing racial conflict (that may also undercut the sense of being a successful

"diverse community"). This discomfort can also lead to a desire from white people to try

and control the situation and put a lid on any tensions as quickly as possible. The general

desire is to defuse rather than to dig deeper and understand what other issues and tensions lie beneath the surface. As both a white woman and a college administrator, I have experienced this desire first-hand. It is difficult to be in the middle of one of these moments of community conflict and not hope that it will just go away as quickly as possible. One of the other tension points here is that when these types of conflicts inevitably come up on a college campus they are often seen as a distraction from the educational mission of the college and student's academic work. I find myself wondering how things would be different if we chose to see these moments as educational opportunities that should be linked to the curriculum. I know that some faculty do already use incidents like these as case studies in their classes or create classroom projects where students are asked to analyze aspects of the college community and culture. For example Eleanor talked about how in her critical race theory course, her African-American faculty member initiated a discussion about the conflict and some of the nuances of the situation including the role of class issues. Eleanor describes her recollection of the professor's comments and her response to them:

> And [he was] just saying that there was a lack of understanding about some of the complexities of it, and what happens that it's a professor and not someone who works in dining services. And I remember that all complicating it because, as a white student, I wanted to know what the right thing was to do. But there were just class issues and race issues. And I also saw students versus staff and faculty issues, so I think that complicated everything in a very healthy way.

For Eleanor, having the opportunity to engage in a thoughtful structured conversation about the conflict allowed her to think more deeply about the complexities that informed this conflict. This type of analysis—highlighting the way that factors like race and class intersect with one another—is often lost in the heat of the conflict and from a desire to get a handle on the conflict and contain it by reducing it to its simplest form. This type of

linking between community life and the curriculum, if implemented on an even broader scale, could positively impact both the response and discourse that circulates around these types of campus racial conflicts.

Lastly, going back to Kim's experience, even though she received multiple emails regarding this campus conflict, she came away from it feeling like important details had been left out, "What's the whole story?" She was also unsure whether or not race actually had anything to do with the conflict, "Was race really an issue or what was actually going on?" This example reinforces the earlier discussion about how oftentimes when campus racial conflicts are discussed the majority of the focus gets placed on whether or not something was "racist" (Hill 2008) and the ensuing "moral panic" puts the emphasis squarely on individual versus systemic issues of racism.

The Search Committee Incident

Racial conflicts on campus often provide an opportunity to lift a variety of concerns and issues that may be hovering just below the surface. In the spring of 2009, the college began forming a search committee for a high-profile administrative position. The Committee would include trustees, faculty, staff, and two students. The Chair of the Board of Trustees asked the Student Government Association to conduct a selection process to yield a slate of possible students to serve on the committee. The SGA was given a relatively short time frame to complete this task and quickly put together a process that involved written applications that they reviewed and voted on (with names removed) and then interviews with a group of finalists. Then SGA submitted a slate of potential students to the Chair of the trustees who made the final selection of the two students. After the two students were selected, many students of color expressed concern

and outrage both about the process and the students who had been selected to sit on the committee, because an assumption was made that they were both white students. However it turned out that one of the students selected identified as multiracial, but was not active in the "student of color" community.

During my interview with Ruth, a white senior, she provided her sense of what had happened:

> I can't recount the chronology of exactly what happened . . . I mean it just seemed like the process in which students were chosen to be on the . . . search committee—I don't blame the students who were involved in choosing it—But the fact that what happened was that two students were chosen who didn't identify as students of color—or one of them I think did, but didn't—sort of could pass, I guess, as white, and that was sort of an issue for people, I think. Or it felt she didn't have the same kind of consciousness that a number of students of color here felt was needed. And I think the activism that came out of that, that really wanting to make domestic students of color—and I guess it was students of color generally—it wasn't just domestic students of color—really visible on campus. And that people [needed to hear] their concerns.

As Ruth points out, this particular campus racial conflict was more complex and multifaceted in terms of the scope of concerns raised. In this section, I want to focus on four different facets of this particular conflict: the role of "students of color" as an activist or organizing group on campus, questions of racial authenticity and performance, the experience of simultaneous visibility/invisibility for students of color, and finally, the role of white students in this particular conflict.

As I have previously discussed, it is not unusual to have students who identify as students of color gather collectively and work together during a time of racial conflict at Dexter College. What was distinct about this particular incident was the collective mobilization of students of color, partly due to a strong group of seniors who provided leadership to the coalition that formed in response to the incident. This group of seniors

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(the class of 2009) experienced the two other racial incidents mentioned earlier; these experiences had shaped both their sense of the school and the administration.

Because of their particular set of experiences they saw this incident as a breaking point that only underscored and highlighted their past frustrations. Ann, now a sophomore, shared her sense of this during our interview:

> The . . . search committee stuff ended up I think, whether or not it's completely clear, being about all these past grudges. There was a lot of talk about the institution's failing us again, a lot of talk like we need this representation so that things in the past don't happen again. A lot of it was about fighting for recognition on campus, having the cultural houses feeling legitimate, and having the cultural organizations respected. I don't know—people are throwing around such large like really nasty terms like *institutionalized racism*. And I felt that me and a lot of the first-years that year were really confused by what that was.

As Ann points out, the energy of the activism of the group was less focused on a specific group or department and more about a global concern of where and how they, as students of color, were supported within the institution.

Another student, now a senior, Gloria, who strongly identifies as a student of color and first-generation immigrant, shared her concerns about the way that other students of color approached the conflict. Here's her description of a meeting of students of color and allies to discuss their concerns about the search committee selection process and other more general concerns:

> I like to form my own opinion basically. This is one of my biggest pet peeves—I don't like crowd mentality—I don't like everybody thinking in this mob mentality. . . . And so whenever anything like that happens, I don't feel like I have to choose a side or whatever, so I'm always like I just want to observe. And I think it's also part of the whole like being an immigrant thing, where it's like how I learned how people got along in society was by observing them, and just always being on the outside and just looking at people interact with each other. So I always do that a lot.

Gloria credits in part her identity as a first-generation immigrant for giving her the ability to step back and observe a situation. This was a sentiment shared by many of the first- and second-generation immigrants with whom I spoke.

Gloria also felt like this was another example of the way that students are often more reactive than proactive which feeds into a cycle of students getting very upset and then just as quickly moving on to the next thing, "If we're going to ask for a dialogue, we need to also put our opinions out there a lot more than just reacting to a crisis . . . I hate that—that happens a lot [on campus]—the whole reacting to crisis thing, you know. . . Because people get all riled up about one thing, and then once that's over, people go and do their homework, and they don't really care."

Gloria's point reinforces this overarching theme of the cyclical nature of campus racial conflicts. Her comments also echo what I heard from several students during the interview process about the clear separation in student's minds between campus activism and their academic work. From their vantage point, students might be willing to get swept up in a campus activism moment, but were less interested in having a sustained dialogue regarding the issues. Another facet that Gloria and Ann are missing is that because of the lack of ongoing dialogue and validation that racism is still an issue on campus, many students of color feel that they have to strategically use these "incidents" as opportunities to highlight other concerns about broader institutional racism that go well beyond the specific "incident." Over my years at Dexter College many students of color would talk to me about their frustration that from their vantage point that the only time the institution paid attention to issues of racism was when we had one of these high profile campus conflicts.

Ann also raised one of the central issues of the students' concerns which was "representation," in this case specifically on the search committee, but this could also be referring more broadly to how their voices were reflected in institutional decision making as a whole. The question of "representation" in the context of this conflict also led to discussions about racial authenticity and who actually "counts" as a student of color. As Ruth mentioned in her summary of the conflict, one of the students who was selected for the search committee actually did identify as a multiracial student. However, her legitimacy as a "student of color" and someone who could represent the concerns of other students of color was called into question because she had not chosen to participate in a cultural house or a cultural organization. She also was not a student who had *visibly* identified herself as a "student of color" prior to the start of this conflict. In some ways the student was forced to make a public announcement about her racial background because when the student names were announced, the general assumption was that both students were white (based on their phenotype and campus involvements).

So by calling into question the multiracial student's ability to represent students of color on the committee, the self-identified "students of color community" revealed their criteria for what they felt constitutes an "authentic" student of color. While it was never stated quite this explicitly, from the perspective of this student of color activist group, in order to be able to represent students of color you should be easily identifiable as a student of color based on phenotype and how you are "known" on campus (through major, extracurricular involvements, et cetera). It is difficult to tease out how this formulation for an "authentic" student of color racial performance is set (Bettie 2003). Ann described the tenor of conversation surrounding the multiracial student who was

selected for the search committee, "I know it was weird too—one of the things that they had complained about was that she hadn't been involved in cultural orgs and stuff like that. So is that what defines student of color if you're like on the line? . . . It felt like lines were being drawn." As this example shows, there is policing around racial categorization that is generated both by institutional structures and categorization and by the students themselves. The difficulty lies, in part, in the institution's reinforcement of the larger societal notions about racial categorization. However, as more multiracial students join the general college population, I would argue that constructions like "students of color" will need to evolve or become more nuanced. It is also important to add that as long as students from non-white backgrounds continue to be socialized and categorized as "students of color," it makes good sense for them to utilize this "strategic essentialism" (Spivak 1995) for their own organizing purposes and to promote their own agenda for improving the campus climate for students who have been placed under the student of color umbrella.

Related to the issue of representation, this particular conflict foregrounded the sense from many students of color that they are used to promote an image and ideal of the college's "diverse community," but then they are not at the table when decisions important to them and their success at the institution are being made. To illustrate their point, many students of color chose to wear white sashes, which looked like an ironic take on the traditional beauty pageant sash. Written on the sashes were different statements including, "I am a student of color." The sashes were a way for students of color to reclaim their visibility and take what had been implicit institutional messages about their role as the embodiment of diversity (through their photographs on the website,

viewbook, et cetera) and make this an explicit statement. I vividly remember the students

who were participating in this project attending our annual community spring picnic

proudly sporting their sashes. At one point during the picnic they formed a line face the

crowds lolling on the grass enjoying their food and the bright sunshine. The students

stood together proudly with their arms linked; amongst their group were white students

who proudly wore sashes that stated "ally." They did not chant, they did not sing; they

merely stood and asserted their presence and their right to be there.

Part of the students' campaign also focused on critiquing the oft-quoted "1 in 3"

statistic that was discussed in relation to the admissions process. As Eleanor pointed out

once she thought more deeply about it she realized that:

> And then I also recognize that the one-in-three statistic means that seven out of ten are
> white students, and that's a lot of white people. . . . I remember sitting with a couple of
> students of color after the meeting that we had for the . . . search committee. And we
> were talking about something, and we were trying to make a flyer, and we just went on
> this long tangent about the seven-in-ten. I think that was an important reminder for me
> about sort of what diversity looks like. And what does it mean when even one student
> doesn't feel safe on the campus? I think that—I was so emotionally hurt when I would
> hear any student, whether they're students of color or other people who identified as gay
> or lesbian, and saying that they didn't feel safe. And I was, "I don't like that. I want you
> to feel what I'm feeling."

Eleanor demonstrates another possible approach to racial conflicts on campus. Through

her experiences on campus she looked at this as an opportunity to be a white ally; rather

than questioning the validity of the concerns of students of color she sought to understand

what was underneath those concerns. She was motivated by a desire to have all students

experience the sense of comfort that she benefits from as a majority student on campus.

This focus on the simultaneous sense of visibility/invisibility of students of color

is not surprising considering the conflicting messages that students of color receive from

the institution. On the one hand they are told that race does matter, because it's a part of

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the positive institutional attribute of "diversity." They are invited to participate in programs, events, and organizations that highlight and celebrate their racial backgrounds and position as "students of color." Despite this recognition, they also feel that their position within the institution is somewhat tenuous—that to some extent they will always be a guest in this particular house. The fall semester after this conflict I had a meeting with a student of color about an unrelated issue. At the end of the meeting she asked about the search committee—specifically why weren't we hearing more from them. I reiterated what the committee had already stated about the need for confidentiality at this stage of the process. She replied in a somewhat ominous tone that there was still an "underground movement." I had to chuckle a little bit at the use of "underground" since she was sharing this information with the Dean of Students. She told me that there was a coalition of students of color who were ready to act and that the students on the search committee had made them promises last spring that they hadn't kept so there might need to be more action; "I just thought you should know," she stated. The student's comments and her stressed and disillusioned demeanor were disheartening, but not unusual. Students of color are often seeking tangible examples of institutional commitment or lack of commitment to them. For me this only underscores their experience of uncertainty about their place and value within the institution and a lingering distrust of "the administration" and their motives.

Eleanor further reflected on how one of the unique aspects of this particular conflict was the way that white students came together in a formal alliance with students of color. White students were present and active in both the meetings and discussions and many white students even made their own sashes that proclaimed "ally." For Ruth,

another white ally, one of the things that stood out to her was the reaction of her white

peers:

> I think one of the things that strikes me most about that was just how much I think that was—made a lot of white students who hadn't thought about race before pretty uncomfortable. I mean I remember hearing comments about people talking about, "I'm on a sports team, and I wanna be represented on the presidential search committee." And all these sort of comparisons that people just don't really understand the significance of race. So that's certainly something that made me think about our campus and how much awareness there is.

As Ruth's example shows, white students often lack a larger knowledge and historical

context about race and race relations which in turn shapes their response to these types of

racial conflicts. It is somewhat ironic that many of the white students would also say that

one of the reasons that they selected Dexter College was the "diversity" of the student

body, but like much of the larger U.S. population they simultaneously embrace a color

blind ideology and sense that race no longer matters. The comparison of race to "playing

sports" also indicates an ideology that race is still present, but erases all of its distinct

features and experiences, specifically racism and persistent racial inequalities.

Eleanor, Ruth, and a few other white students were inspired by these events to

begin a new initiative of peer led anti-oppression workshops. As Ruth describes it:

> And that actually sparked these anti-oppression training groups that we started . . . to try to reach people who weren't necessarily doing intergroup dialogue or other—getting those kinds of information in other ways. . . . I think basically what we wanna do is to try to [*chuckle*] reach into the dusty corners of people who haven't thought about this, aren't thinking about this, and just give them a taste and sort of see what happens. I mean they're just gonna be hour-and-a-half long workshops. We're realizing how little you can cover in an hour-and-a-half.

These peer-led anti-oppression workshops are one example of some of the positive results

that came out of this conflict that have the potential to have a more long-term impact on

the institutional culture. Another byproduct of this activism is that it captured the

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attention of the chair of the board of trustees. After hearing about the concerns of students of color, she requested that members of the senior staff put together a plenary session on contemporary diversity issues for the entire board. So while this conflict did have the standard crescendo point leading into a fading away of the original intensity, there was some evidence of a lingering impact and potential for carrying the conversation forward. It also underscores that effectively utilizing the "student of color" category for organizing purposes can yield positive results for students looking to promote institutional change and awareness of climate issues at predominantly white institutions. In this particular incident the actions of the students helped to challenge some of the dynamics of the white public space, specifically who is racially categorized within the institution and to what end.

I can still remember when I first moved into the Dean's office and began the process of going through my predecessor's file cabinet. She had been at the institution for a long time and the cabinet was crammed full of papers; it was a daunting task to begin the process of sifting and sorting. I discovered lots of things about the recent history of the institution during this process, but one of the most poignant was uncovering this clear cycle of community racial conflicts, each with its corresponding flurry of papers: lists of student demands, newspaper articles, administrative memos, scrawled handwritten notes from forums all typically covering a two-week span and then nothing, silence, until the next "incident." It was like opening up a time capsule and getting a message from the past telling me that there needed to be a different approach, because this one clearly was not working. Each "incident" was its own distinct moment in time, decontextualized from all of the others. Here in this administrative file cabinet these voices could gather across

space and time and talk to each other and to me, amplifying one another into a loud chorus: "This is not new; we have been here before."

As these examples show when students—in particular white students—think about race they often equate it with racial conflict or incidents of racism. I think these types of incidents are so memorable for students for a couple of reasons that relate to two larger themes. The first is that for many white students talking or thinking about race is often linked to a fear of being identified as racist (Bush 2004; Hill 2008); secondly, for many white students students and administrators these types of incidents also create a "moral panic" about the loss of control to manage issues of "race" on campus. This also explains why so much of the discourse surrounding these types of racial incidents focuses on trying to determine whether or not the incident was indeed racist and if so who specifically was being racist. As a point of comparison, in my discussions with students of color, they had many more personal experiences with racism that were more covert and subtle; when they talked about these specific "incidents" the focus was on mobilization and working towards having their concerns about institutionalized racism recognized and addressed.

These episodes are also memorable because of their high-profile nature; they bring a heightened visibility to issues of race and racism and push against the overarching claims within higher education and the United States that racism is no longer an issue. This is particularly poignant on a campus that is claiming to be a "diverse community" since that label often implies that everyone gets along and there will never be any race-related conflicts. These campus conflicts are also part of the cyclical pattern of "disruption and restoration of the racial order" that Omi and Winant refer to as

"trajectory" (1994:85). These "incidents" share a similar set of dynamics that continue to be debated in cycles of protest and restoration at Dexter College. At the crux is the tension between "individualism" and the "institutional" or "categorical." One example of this is continuing conflicts over "What is racist?" or "What is racism?" The institutional hegemony promotes and encourages an "individual" or what Hill (2008) calls a "personalist ideology," while student activists argue for an examination of "institutional racism." In a similar vein the question of "Who is a student of color?" often surfaces tensions between "common sense" institutional understandings that "race" is attached to an individual and is just another personality characteristic such as being good at sports and the student's understanding of the "student of color" category as a space for "strategic essentialism" and organizing to fight for a more racially just campus. In attempts to "restore the racial order," the response to these campus conflicts is often focused on sugarcoating what race means and to be able to continue to commodify "diversity," denying the existence of racism, and attempting to quash the conflict without any real institutional (or cultural) change.

For students of color these high-profile incidents can be another moment where they feel marked within the predominantly white institution and can feel like a testing ground for their racial authenticity. An example is when Ann spoke about feeling that if she chose not to be involved in the "student of color coalition" during the search committee incident, it would negatively impact her standing as a "student of color." This can be another place, similar to campus cultural events, where they feel responsible for educating others on campus, but in this case educating them about racism, power, and privilege. Not surprisingly, white community members are often much less receptive to

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these types of lessons than they are about being introduced to new cuisine, dances, and dress. These incidents can create internal conflict for students of color who may not agree with their student of color peers about the issue at hand, but feel an obligation to present a unified front as "students of color." Gloria discussed this phenomenon earlier in her observations of one of the organizing meetings. This desire for solidarity does not allow students of color to have the same opportunities as white students to grapple with the complexities and subtleties of race-related conflicts. These incidents can also become a rallying points for students of color, who may feel they can be used to validate other issues of racism they have experienced on campus. Unfortunately, this does not always happen since much of the discourse gets focused on whether or not a claim of racism is valid and then on a desire to quiet the situation down and return to business as usual as soon as possible.

The amount of attention that these types of incidents receive on a college campus can also serve to solidify a particular conception of racism as overt, such as racial profiling, racial slurs, and blatant discrimination. What gets lost in these characterizations are the more subtle examples of racism that happen on a college campus every day— issues such as white students complaining about the smell of ethnic food being cooked in a kitchenette or a faculty member assuming that a student of color will need tutoring in a science class. And it is these more covert examples that play a significant role in shaping the day-to-day lived experiences for students of color. When predominantly white institutions only focus on these high-profile incidents, they miss an opportunity to look deeper and validate other concerns that students of color have. Ultimately for white students these types of racial incidents can promote growth, change, and opportunity for

reflection, but for many the incidents can also create fear, denial, and a deeper level of

resistance to contemplating the role that race plays on a predominantly white campus.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

<u>Reframing the "Diverse Community" and Strategic Interventions</u>

Based on both my research and my experience as a student affairs administrator, there are several "reframings" I would like to propose in this final chapter. While my research is grounded in a particular institutional context, I am going to address my comments to the larger higher education community, because I think many of my recommendations have direct applicability to any predominantly white college and university setting. I strongly believe that these institutional interventions could result in a significant step forward in moving higher education toward a model of "diverse, inclusive, and engaged learning environments."

My first set of recommendations relates to the framework of "diverse community." We need to create more opportunities for students to become comfortable with discomfort. Higher education needs to stop adding to a narrative that equates "diverse community" with perpetual harmony and rather lift up the necessity of (and opportunity that comes from) working through conflicts and disagreements. Several years ago during a period of unrest on campus sparked by a racial conflict, I expressed to one of my African American colleagues my feeling that we must be doing something really wrong institutionally if students were this upset. My colleague quickly turned my assumption on its head, encouraging me to see that the fact that students of color felt empowered to speak up and voice their concerns loudly and publicly meant that we were doing something right. As shown in the case of Dexter, the complexity of identity in constructing a "diverse community" gave rise to tensions and disagreements. Rather than

administratively trying to smooth things over, we should look to those moments as educational opportunities and a chance to move the College forward. As I described in Chapter 6, Dexter College did utilize some more educationally based responses that could have an even greater impact if these types of interventions were regularized and institutionalized.

While I have shown that high-profile incidents of racism or racial tension can be a catalyst for individual and community growth, these moments should not be the only times that race gets openly and widely discussed on campus. Encouraging silence (implied or explicitly) around the topics of race and racism or maintaining a "color-blind" ideology is detrimental to the creation of a diverse, inclusive, and engaged learning environment. There should be an institutional commitment to providing more academic courses, programs, and workshops that emphasize cross-racial communication and dialogue skills. Many of the students I interviewed—as well as multiple comments on the student surveys I reviewed—described how these types of opportunities had been a critical part of their overall educational experience. I will discuss some specific examples in the next section, but I think it is important to emphasize here that these types of courses and programs should be proactive, ongoing, and purposefully created.

Another key area that must be reframed pertains to false assumptions about the role of white people in campus discourses about race and racism. Specifically, we need to debunk these ideas: that white people have no role in conversations about race; that white people don't have a culture or racial identity; that inviting white people into conversations about race isn't automatically about telling them that they are racist. Colleges and universities should offer white students a variety of opportunities to think

critically about race both as a cultural construct and as a system of domination. White students should also be invited and actively encouraged to explore their own individual racial identity, including a recognition of white privilege and (often unintended) complicity with the continuance of racial inequity. If white students were expected to take responsibility for their own education around issues of race this would help shift current campus dynamics where students of color within predominantly white institutions are cast as "cultural educators" for white students.

A related intervention is shifting to a model of "diversity" that truly embraces analyzing the intersectionality of social identities. The current structures of higher education mark "students of color" in such a way that assumes that race will be the most salient part of their identity, and the corresponding assumption is that race will not be salient at all for white students. Tabitha (an African-American student affairs administrator) mentioned this dynamic during our interview, "And I hear students so often say, I came to Dexter College and all of a sudden I'm now just this student of color. Which I think is important because it is so visual and people are going to treat you a certain way based on that, but you get to be that and all of these other things." As Tabitha (and my research) underscores, race does still matter, but anyone who falls under the "student of color" category should be actively encouraged (and given the opportunity) to examine their multiple identities and learn about the ways they connect and inform one another. It became clear to me how much *all* students crave this opportunity to explore and share the complexity of their social identities while watching them participate in an activity called "Strands of Identity" during an orientation leader training.

In this activity, there are signs posted around the room; each sign has a different social identity written on it (e.g., class, gender, race, religion, et cetera). During the activity the facilitator reads out a statement such as "this is the identity that is most salient for me today" or "this is an identity that I would like to learn more about." Students go to the piece of paper with the relevant identity and then engage in conversation with the other students standing there about why they chose that identity. Simply put, the students loved this activity. Several days after the training, students were still talking to me about it and reflecting on the conversations that they had had; it clearly struck a chord. Gloria, an African American senior who is a first-generation immigrant, reflected again on doing this activity during our interview, "And so [it was] me seeing that and being exposed to that and realizing that there's all these characteristics and identities within me, and how all of them are connected . . . and that it's okay, you don't have to go around carrying one identity." Listening to Gloria describe what she had taken away from the activity brought home for me the fact that so much of education—and society in general—places students into categories of one type or another and then often expects them to be some sort of "representative" for that category. Giving students the opportunity to see themselves as whole and multifaceted is not only better for their overall development, but also creates enhanced possibilities for connections across lines of difference by accenting the similarities that students share as well as their differences. Finally, when we don't help students to think critically about both individual social identities and how they intersect, students will often conflate issues like race and class (Bettie 2003). I frequently saw this play out when white students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds would have a difficult time grasping a sense of their own white privilege since they already felt so

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disadvantaged by their class background. Using an "intersectionality" approach would allow that same student to hold these things together in tension and conversation with one another.

Lastly, working toward racial equality and social justice on campus should not be seen solely as an extra-curricular activity or an "add-on." One African American staff member with whom I spoke explained it this way, "As much as we talk about pulling diversity and inclusion to the center, it's still separate. And so I think institutionally it's still an add-on I think because of . . . what gets credited and what doesn't get credited." The institutional goals for diversity and inclusion should always be connected to and reinforced by the academic mission. Many white students described to me that they were too overwhelmed by their academics and other commitments to consider participating in a program or a workshop; in stark contrast, many students of color talked about how their academics had suffered because of the responsibility they felt to support cultural programming and events. I would argue that there needs to be more of a synthesis between the "diverse community" and the "learning environment," or the out-of-classroom and in-classroom experiences of students. This change would have significant impact in shifting the current dynamics that can end up negatively impacting both students of color and white students.

Another essential component of creating a diverse, inclusive and engaged learning environment is having a well thought out, campus-wide plan that lays out key goals, the necessary steps that need to be taken, and addresses issues of evaluation and institutional responsibility. Damon et al. note that most college campuses have a multitude of initiatives focused on creating more inclusive environments,

Yet how does a campus coordinate these multiple efforts so they have a greater impact on all students, and on the institution as a whole? One frequently can identify educational innovations, but rarely can one detect structures that link them. Accordingly, the impact of these innovations is isolated rather than pervasive. And with so many individual diversity initiatives springing up like daffodils in springtime, people long for coherence, cohesion, and collaboration. [2005:vii]

A white faculty member described a similar type of dynamic at Dexter College:

So I think that the institution has moved in some places, but I don't know that there is a feeling that there's a truly integrated vision top-down, bottom-up. I think there are—it's more like kind of explosions of wonderful activity that kind of spread over the institution. But I don't see it as being necessarily part of a really coherent push, because all it takes is some pushback from faculty for the powers that be to kind of reshape things so that people won't get bugged or offended, and I see that as problematic—I say bug and offend a little, and move things forward.

Colleges and universities also need to assign appropriate resources and staffing in order to fulfill the goals that they set. This was a common theme from my interviews—a sense of frustration at what many saw as a disconnect between a rhetoric of commitment toward "diversity and inclusion" and a lack of commitment of monetary resources and staffing resources that could actually make the goals a reality. I should also be clear that when I talk about an institutional "plan" for creating a diverse, inclusive, and engaged learning environment, I am not just talking about the type of plan that is written and then sits on a shelf gathering dust. Colleges should think of this type of planning as more fluid and dynamic with the ability to redirect and reevaluate as needed. As one white staff member pointed to me, even if you feel that the institution is headed in the right direction, you should always keep revisiting what you are doing and why:

Yeah, I have thought some about whether I'm impatient enough because there have been turning points where I've thought that this campus won't shift fast enough and there's been other times that I've thought growth and change is happening and that's a good thing and this is a pretty good petri dish community for that and you know stepping back from it and thinking, well there's other places that would move even slower on this . . . [but] I feel like a real need to revisit, refocus, and move forward again. . . . I think we need to be doing work harder, more intentionally again.

For this type of reframing to take place requires leadership at all levels within the institution, beginning with college and university presidents and their staff. Institutions also need to examine what structures are in place to reward and recognize contributions to creating a diverse, inclusive, and engaged learning environment. This process of recognition can also serve to highlight positive role models within the community.

Promising Practices or 'Cracks in the Walls of Whiteness'

Throughout my research I tried to keep a watchful eye out for programs or different factors that helped create a "crack" in the walls of the predominantly white institution (following Bush 2004). The overarching theme that I want to highlight here is that casual contact between students of different racial backgrounds is not enough to initiate transformation. Many studies have shown the educational benefits of racially diverse learning environments (Gurin 2001; Hurtado et al. 1999; Orfield 2001). However they have also noted that simply having demographic racial diversity is not enough to ensure positive outcomes. One of Bush's (2004) findings was that white students often presumed to have knowledge of student of color experiences based on casual contact. This finding underscores that creating opportunities for racial groups to have "contact" with one another is not sufficient in terms of generating true understanding and a critical analysis of racial patterns. In fact this type of casual contact can serve to reinforce white students' generalized (and often inaccurate) perspective on other racial groups.

Many students at Dexter College talked about the residence hall as a site for developing greater racial awareness and cross-racial friendships either through roommate relationships or by having a racially diverse group of peers living on their hall. While this is not always the case, sharing living quarters with another student can create a level of

intimacy that goes beyond "casual contact." Nancy, a white senior, provides an interesting case study of the influence that living with a roommate of a different background can have in terms of a student's overall college experience. Nancy was initially drawn to attend Dexter College because she wanted to break out of the all-white environment of her high school and hometown. However, once Nancy arrived on campus she was confronted with the reality of the challenges that go along with living in with people from different racial backgrounds, including her own discomfort, "The reality of it, I think, I didn't realize the impact it was gonna have on me. . . I just didn't really have a clear picture of the specifics of what it was gonna be like being in a dorm with so many different people, or meeting students from other countries, so many, and being in situations that were uncomfortable, that I wasn't used to." I asked her for an example of when she really noticed her discomfort and she told me about eating dinner one night at a table where all the other students were from Jamaica and she was the only white student. In that moment she realized that for the first time in her life, she was in the minority.

Interestingly, Nancy ended up living with a student from Jamaica during her sophomore year; the two were randomly assigned by the housing office to live together and didn't know each other prior to this experience. When I asked Nancy if there were particular moments or experiences that led her to become more engaged in thinking about issues of race and diversity, she was quick to cite her Jamaican roommate as an important influence. "I had a Jamaican roommate, really good friend of mine, and it wasn't until I really started living with her that I really was proactive in my choices to seek out more diverse opportunities." Nancy talked about what happened over the course of their rooming experience:

But once I was with her, really got to know her on a personal level, someone who's very different from me . . . it really pushed me to go to lunch with her and meet her friends and join organizations that she was in and then, meeting her, because she's an international student, she knows other international students and when they would come to our room and she would introduce me to them and that would just kind of network me across [Dexter College] into meeting other people and, after awhile, at first it was very deliberate, cause "I need this experience, I want this" and then after awhile, it became more automatic. It wasn't because, I wasn't going to a lecture because I needed this diversity, I was going because it was interesting and a friend of mine who happened to be [from] a foreign country was sponsoring it . . . it became more of a natural process.

Nancy's experience of living with someone from a different racial and ethnic background and getting to know her as an individual clearly had a profound effect on her college experience. This connection then paved the way for her to interact with other international students and to eventually end up in a place where she shifted from "cultural tourism" to incorporating these types of events into her own interests and a genuine desire to be participating with her friends rather than feeling obligated to be there.

Rebecca (a white first-year student) shared with me her desire to develop more friendships with students who had different racial and ethnic backgrounds from her own. When I asked Rebecca if she thought there was anything that the college could do to help students develop cross-racial friendships, she said "No, because it's a personal choice who you will be friends with," but then in the next instance she shared with me that one of her friends had a roommate from India who had become one of her best friends. I found this statement somewhat ironic since roommate matching is something that the college does actually have control over. Of course the college can't control whether or not those roommates become close friends, but as we have seen in other examples it does provide an opportunity for contact and connection. This leads back to the broader question I posed earlier regarding how much social engineering an institution should do to create opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds to interact and engage with

one another. Is the institution already engaging in some level of social engineering through the out-of-classroom opportunities it provides in terms of cultural organizations, athletics, et cetera? I'm not sure what the right answer is here, but I think these are the types of questions we need to be asking.

I do believe it's worth considering what the potential benefits of increased institutional efforts are of bringing students from diverse backgrounds into contact with one another in thoughtful and intentional ways that go beyond simply having them share the same physical space of the campus. Many students affirmed this through their favorable descriptions of college programs and courses that had give them the opportunity to thoughtfully reflect on their own racial identity and larger societal dynamics of race and racism. Two specific examples that came up repeatedly were the Intergroup Dialogue Project and a first year seminar course on whiteness that was offered in the Psychology and Education department.

Dexter College's program follows the traditional intergroup dialogue model of "a face-to-face meeting between students from two or more social identity groups that have a history of conflict or potential conflict. These groups are broadly defined by ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, mental and/or physical ability, socio-economic class, religion and other social characteristics" (Zúñiga and Sevig 1997:23). While there are many different ways to organize an intergroup dialogue program, at Dexter College the program consist of an academic course that prepares students to be facilitators and peer-led dialogue groups (typically 3-5 run each semester) made up of ideally 8-12 student participants that meet weekly for 6-8 weeks. Through their research Zúñiga and Sevig found that participating in the intergroup dialogue program at their university supported

the following learning outcomes: challenging misconceptions, biases, and stereotypes; personal awareness of self as a member of social identity groups; developing more complex ways of thinking; developing a more positive approach to conflict and difficult dialogues; and identifying ways of taking actions which address social injustices (1997:24-26). These findings are congruent with the comments that I heard from my students. Charlotte, a white student, shared:

> I think one of the most powerful experiences I've had was intergroup dialogue . . . where we were really purposeful and this is a really safe space and you can just say what you feel like . . . let's sit down and if it gets rough, we'll hash it out and on we go, [this has] really inevitably made me more comfortable in every aspect [and] not just jumping to be defensive and getting mad and shutting down . . . instead of checking out and going back to your respective corners, staying in it and saying okay, here's the perfect moment to learn. Here's the perfect moment to just take one more step towards changing something.

Camille (another white student) shared similar sentiments about intergroup dialogue and expressed a wish that more students were given incentives to participate because, "I haven't heard of one person that has done dialogue and said they didn't like it. It's just really getting people to just take that first step of doing it. And then everyone always ends up loving it and connecting with students on a whole new level, and with students you would never meet otherwise." The intergroup dialogue program contributes to a "crack" by emphasizing that all students have a role to play in conversations about social identities. It places groups that have had historical conflicts on an equal discursive playing field where everyone is expected to contribute something to the discussion rather than one group being responsible for "educating" another. Because the groups meet over a series of several weeks there is sustained contact, which provides the opportunity for relationships to blossom and develop. The program also helps students build confidence and skill in being able to discuss difficult topics and to deeply listen to another person's

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perspective. Despite all of these positive outcomes and the fact that the program has

expanded substantially over the last three years, the Intergroup Dialogue Project

continues to face challenges in getting participants due to the extended time commitment.

The academic course that is offered is always filled to capacity, but the voluntary extra-

curricular dialogue groups are often challenging to fill or suffer from students who drop

out after a week or two due to other commitments. This dilemma relates back to my

earlier statement about the necessity for institutions to consider what skills and

experiences they want their students to have versus what types of activities are rewarded

and recognized by the institution.

Several students I interviewed also reflected on taking a first-year seminar in

Psychology and Education that focused on whiteness and white racial identity

development. Jessica, a white senior, explained how the course helped orient her towards

feeling more comfortable thinking and talking about race:

> It was sort of nice to be, learning took place where what you think you gets questioned or
> where you end up questioning what you think you know and that definitely helped a lot.
> . . . I think it definitely made me more willing to talk about race. . . . Less afraid to talk
> about race, less afraid to offend people if we were talking about race . . . because race
> was not something we really talked about before I came here and it's hard to talk about
> something that you've never really talked about before with people who might be
> sensitive about it and might take what you're saying the wrong way and sort of getting
> past that was really helpful.

As Jessica points out, many students—particularly white students—may come to college

having had limited exposure to talking about or thinking about race. Giving all new

students early exposure—through orientation or a first-year seminar—to dialogue skills

and critical thinking about race, racial identity, and racism helps signal to students the

value the institution places on this type of knowledge and skills. These experiences also

help build confidence and can lead to students then taking advantage of other similar

opportunities. The other powerful aspect of this course is that it specifically names whiteness and makes it visible, something that rarely happens in the college curriculum. This also serves to normalize the idea that whiteness is something worth thinking critically about.

Two other specific examples of "cracks" that I talked about in Chapters 3 and 6 respectively were the new Pre-Orientation program and the peer to peer workshops on race that were initiated by Eleanor, Ruth, and other white students. Both of these disrupt the ideology that white people should not be involved in conversations about race and that race is only something that should be discussed in relation to "racist incidents" on campus. As Eleanor stated, "I think that was one of the reasons why the [peer-to-peer anti-oppression workshops] started, was because [we] wanted a group of students who'd be able to sort of think about these issues all the time in terms of what to do about them." What was compelling about their strategy is that it attempts to de-couple "talking about race" from high-profile campus conflicts and to regularize it in a way that would both normalize it and ideally put it in a more positive light for white students. I agree that this approach is important to promote especially since, for many of the white students I interviewed, these incidents appeared to be the only time they had specifically and intentionally thought about race. These types of programs create "cracks in the walls of whiteness" by promoting opportunities for students to talk, learn, and connect with one another.

These are just some of the examples of where I saw evidence of some "cracks." One other suggestion that I think can make a significant difference in further opening these cracks is more institutional transparency around the challenges of addressing racial

inequalities on both a broad and small scale. When we presented the new pre-orientation program to students, we talked with them openly and honestly about what our struggles had been and we invited them to be our partners in the process and to give us their honest feedback. Our goal was to help set a tone that there isn't one right way to approach the conversation about race on campus; it is a conversation that everyone is already participating in whether they realize it or not.

Suggestions for Future Research

There are many potential avenues for future research related to this topic. Due to this dissertation's narrow focus on one small women's college, it would be worthwhile to conduct similar research at other small colleges (and also large universities) in order to do more comparative studies. In a similar vein, my study focused primarily on out-of-classroom experiences, so there would be value in analyzing in-classroom experiences and the curriculum.

In addition, this study focused on domestic students; a similar study focused on international student perspectives would be illuminating, particularly to gain their perspective as students who are new to the racial dynamics of the United States. There is also a need to focus more research on both multiracial students and first- and second-generation immigrants—these two student populations will only continue to grow in the coming years. All of these students offer unique perspectives on issues of race and they are challenging the boundaries of the overly simplistic and monolithic racial categorizations on which we have relied for so long.

A Final Autoethnographic Note

Conducting this research and writing this dissertation has been both an intellectual and a personal journey. Like many ethnographers, I entered into this research project thinking it was going to be one thing and then watched it turn like a kaleidoscope where the pieces are the same, but they rearrange themselves to form a different pattern. I imagined this project would be primarily a continuation of my pilot studies, which focused on "students of color" and their experiences within one predominantly white institution. Further, I wanted to explore the way that the College structured their experiences and subjectivity within this habitus.

While that is still very much a central focus of this work, the project also evolved to become much more about white students. During one of my interviews I was talking with Naomi, a white senior, about what I saw as the invisibility of whiteness on campus. She thought about this for a minute and then said, "I don't think it's invisible; I think it's blinding." What I realized through the course of conducting this research was my own blind spot when it came to the role of white students in contributing to the discourse on "diversity." As I have shown, white students—much like "students of color"—are far from a monolithic group when it comes to their perspectives on race and racial diversity. Their voices and visibility in this project is illustrative of my own ideological shift in seeing the pivotal role that white community members can and must play in the creation of a diverse, inclusive, and engaged learning environment.

This project is also a reflection of my own personal process of racial identity development over the last 11 years. I have shifted from seeing race as something completely outside of myself to knowing that I have a very personal stake in ending

racism and grappling with the complexities of race. Since I gave up my racial blinders, I have experienced many of the emotions that the white students describe: fear, anxiety, and guilt. I am able to recognize that I am a work in progress and that I am often "raggedy" (as one of my Dexter College colleagues calls it). I have learned to be more comfortable with my discomfort. What I have gained through this process is infinitely better than comfort—a deeper sense of self-knowledge; most importantly, this change in my perspective has opened up the possibility for me to have relationships and connections that feel authentic and powerful with people of all races.

As I mentioned in my introduction I struggled with writing a dissertation that might seem overly critical of Dexter College—a community that I do love and cherish. But I hope that this research helps give voice to both the challenges and successes of Dexter College, that other educators will recognize their own challenges and successes in these pages, and that together we will all continue to strive toward creating diverse, inclusive, and engaged learning environments beneficial to all. I continue to believe that this is possible because of the ways I directly benefited from being a part of the community at Dexter College. The support and guidance that I received from my students and colleagues are what made my personal growth and transformation possible and for this I will always remain eternally grateful.

LETTER OF INVITATION TO
POTENTIAL INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

My name is Liz Braun and I am a doctoral student in the Anthropology Department at University of Massachusetts Amherst. I am conducting a qualitative research study focusing on the culture of a predominantly white college related to issues of race and whiteness.

As part of the study, I am hoping that those who identify as U.S. students currently attending [Dexter College], will complete the attached potential participant consent form and questionnaire and return it to me at braun@anthro.umass.edu.

Also attached to this email (and pasted below). I have included an information sheet about the complete study outlining the aims of the dissertation and what would be expected of participants. Hopefully, this will answer any questions you have, but if not please contact me at braun@anthro.umass.edu. Thank you for your consideration.

Best,
Liz Braun

Information Sheet
Draft Title of Study: Understanding Race, Whiteness, and the Creation of "Diverse Inclusive Learning Environments" at a Predominantly White College

What is the purpose of this study?
I want to examine how domestic students of color, multiracial students, and white students think about issues of race and whiteness related to their experience attending a predominantly white college. I will also analyze how the college approaches the creation of a "diverse inclusive learning environment." I want to look at the relation between these institutional efforts and the lived experiences of students on the campus. My ultimate goal is to be able to propose policy changes that would improve the overall campus climate for students, and particularly domestic students of color and multiracial students on predominantly white campuses and help institutions of higher education improve their ability to create successful diverse learning environments.

I am conducting this research in my role as a doctoral student in Anthropology at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. My interest in this topic has been motivated by my years of working in student affairs, currently as a Dean of Students at [Dexter College].

What will happen to the information that I give in the questionnaire?
The data participants provide through the email questionnaires and consent forms will remain confidential, will be stored securely and all respondents will be given a pseudonym for the study. The data will only be read by the researcher, Liz Braun, to select participants for the interview portions of the dissertation study.

What will happen if I am selected as a participant for the study?
You will participate in a one-hour individual interview with the researcher. The interview will be scheduled at a mutually agreeable time for the participant and the researcher and will be held in a private location.

I may request that some students do a follow up individual interview, based on the student's availability and interest. I will also request permission to audiotape the interviews and take written notes.

What do I have to do?
Interested participants are asked to complete the attached email questionnaire consent form and questionnaire and return it to me at braun@anthro.umass.edu.

Once you have submitted the questionnaire, you will be contacted by the researcher with further information on how you can continue to take part in the study.

Contact Information

If participants wish to contact the researcher or researcher's supervisor about any matter the contact details are as follows:

Researcher:
Liz Braun
Doctoral Student, Anthropology
University of Massachusetts
braun@anthro.umass.edu

Supervisor:
Dr. Enoch Page
Professor of Anthropology
University of Massachusetts, Amherst
hepage@anthro.umass.edu

APPENDIX B

POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Name and Class Year:

2. Age:

3. Phone Number (including area code):
___cell phone
___ home phone
___ office phone

4. Email Address and Campus Address:

5. Gender:

6. Sexual Orientation:

7. How do you identify yourself racially/ethnically?
(If you've check more than one, please explain your choices in the space below)
__Asian/Asian American/Pacific Islander
__Black/African American
__Hispanic or Latino/Latina/Chicana/Puerto Rican/Dominican
__Native American/American Indian/ Indigenous
__Multi-racial / Multi - Ethnic
__White/Caucasian

8. Do you define yourself ethnically in a category that was not included above?
___yes
___no
___If yes, please specify:

9. Socioeconomic Class Background:

10. Current Socioeconomic Class:

12. Where were you born (city, state, country)?

13. Where do you reside now (city, state country)?

14. Which of the following most accurately describes your generation and citizenship status (mark one):
___At least one of my grandparents, my parents, and I are U.S. born
___At least one of my parents and I are U.S. born
___I am U.S. born, my parents are not
___I am foreign born – naturalized citizen
___I am foreign born – resident alien or permanent resident
___I have a student visa

15. What is your major (if you've declared one) or academic interests?

16. What are your current extracurricular activities and/or employment (on or off campus)?

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM (WRITTEN):
STUDENT VERSION**

INFORMED CONSENT FORM (WRITTEN)

Title of Study: Understanding Race, Whiteness, and the Creation of "Diverse Inclusive Learning Environments" at a Predominantly White College

Investigator(s): Liz Braun, braun@anthro.umass.edu

Brief description of project and procedures to be followed: This study will focus on the culture of a predominantly white college related to issues of race and whiteness. I want to examine how both domestic students of color and white students think about issues of race and whiteness related to their experience attending a predominantly white college. I will also analyze how the college approaches the creation of a "diverse inclusive learning environment." I want to look at the relation between these institutional efforts and the lived experiences of students on the campus. My ultimate goal is to be able to propose policy changes that would improve the overall campus climate for students, and particularly domestic students of color on predominantly white campuses and help institutions of higher education improve their ability to create successful diverse learning environments. This project is a pilot study based on two smaller pilot studies I conducted at [Dexter College] in April 2003 and May 2008.

I am a doctoral student in Anthropology at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. My interest in this topic has also been motivated by my years of working in student affairs, currently as a Dean of Students at [Dexter College].

Procedures: You will participate in a (circle appropriate category) 60 minute individual interview/90 minute focus group. [The size of the focus groups will depend on participant availability, but likely range 4-8 students per group.] I may request that some students do a follow up individual interview, but this will based on your availability and interest. During the focus group I will be asking you to reflect on your experience as a student at a predominantly white college/university.

This project has been approved by the Institutional Review Board of [Dexter College]. The following informed consent is required by [Dexter College] for all participants in human subjects research:

 A. Your participation is voluntary.

 B. You may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation in this study at any time. You will not be penalized in any way if you decide not to participate.

 C. The procedures to be followed in the project will be explained to you, and any questions you may have about the aims or methods of the project will be answered.

 D. All of the information from this study will be treated as strictly confidential. No names will be associated with the data in any way. If you provide your address in order to receive a report of this research upon its completion, that information will not be used to

identify you in the data. The data will be stored and secured at the residence of the primary investigator and the data will be accessible only to the investigator.

E.   The results of this study will be made part of a final research report and may be used in papers submitted for publication or presented at professional conferences, but under no circumstances will your name or other identifying characteristics be included.

If you understand the above, and consent to participate in the project, please sign here:

_____ (Participant sign here)

_____(Participant print name here)

_____ (Date)

If you have any questions about this research, contact Liz Braun (the investigator) at braun@anthro.umass.edu or 413-533-5871 or the [Dexter College] Institutional Review Board.

Would you like a report on the group results of this research project upon its completion?

YES   NO

Address to which the report should be sent: _____
_____
_____

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM (WRITTEN):
FACULTY/STAFF VERSION**

INFORMED CONSENT FORM (WRITTEN)

Title of Study: Understanding Race, Whiteness, and the Creation of "Diverse Inclusive Learning Environments" at a Predominantly White College

Investigator(s): Liz Braun, braun@anthro.umass.edu

Brief description of project and procedures to be followed: This study will focus on the culture of a predominantly white college related to issues of race and whiteness. I want to examine how both domestic students of color and white students think about issues of race and whiteness related to their experience attending a predominantly white college. I will also analyze how the college approaches the creation of a "diverse inclusive learning environment." I want to look at the relation between these institutional efforts and the lived experiences of students on the campus. My ultimate goal is to be able to propose policy changes that would improve the overall campus climate for students, and particularly domestic students of color on predominantly white campuses and help institutions of higher education improve their ability to create successful diverse learning environments. This project is a pilot study based on two smaller pilot studies I conducted at [Dexter College] in April 2003 and May 2008.

I am a doctoral student in Anthropology at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. My interest in this topic has also been motivated by my years of working in student affairs, currently as a Dean of Students.

Procedures: You will participate in a 60 minute individual interview. I will also be engaged in participant observation in institutional settings that you may be participating in such as administrative meetings and institutional programs and events. During the interview and in some settings I may request to tape record the proceedings.

This project has been approved by the Institutional Review Board of [Dexter College]. The following informed consent is required by [Dexter College] for all participants in human subjects research:

A.   Your participation is voluntary.

B.   You may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation in this study at any time. You will not be penalized in any way if you decide not to participate.

C.   The procedures to be followed in the project will be explained to you, and any questions you may have about the aims or methods of the project will be answered.

D.   All of the information from this study will be treated as strictly confidential. No names will be associated with the data in any way. If you provide your address in order to receive a report of this research upon its completion, that information will not be used to identify you in the data. The data will be stored and secured at the residence of the primary investigator and the data will be accessible only to the investigator.

E. The results of this study will be made part of a final research report and may be used in papers submitted for publication or presented at professional conferences, but under no circumstances will your name or other identifying characteristics be included.

If you understand the above, and consent to participate in the project, please sign here:

_____ (Participant sign here)

_____(Participant print name here)

_____ (Date)

If you have any questions about this research, contact Liz Braun (the investigator) at braun@anthro.umass.edu or 413-533-5871 or the [Dexter College] Institutional Review Board.

Would you like a report on the group results of this research project upon its completion?

YES   NO

Address to which the report should be sent: _____

_____

_____

ORAL CONSENT FORM SCRIPT

I am currently a graduate student in the Anthropology department at UMASS Amherst. This purpose of this study is to examine the culture of a predominantly white college related to issues of race and whiteness and the creation of a "diverse inclusive learning environment." The data from this study will be the focus of my dissertation. My ultimate goal is to be able to propose policy changes that would improve the overall campus climate for students, and particularly domestic students of color on predominantly white campuses and help institutions of higher education improve their ability to create successful diverse learning environments.

The following informed consent is required for any person involved in research study. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at [Dexter College].

As a participant in this study you need to understand that:

1. Your participation is voluntary.

2. You can withdraw your consent and discontinue participation in this study (or any portion thereof) at any time without bearing any negative consequences.

3. I have given you an explanation of the procedures to be followed in the project, and answered any inquiries that you may have.

4. All of the information from this study will be strictly confidential. No names will be associated with the data in any way. You understand that the data will be stored in locked offices and will be accessible only to members of the researching group.

5. The results of this study will be made part of a final research report and may be used in papers submitted for publication or presented at professional conferences, but under no circumstances will my name or other identifying characteristics be included.

You have understood the procedures to be followed and hereby give you consent to participate in this research. You also agree not to discuss the purposes and procedures of this study with anyone in order that the integrity of this research is not compromised.

If you have any further questions regarding this study, here is a copy of my contact information. [Hand debriefing statement to participant.]

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED
INTERVIEWS WITH DOMESTIC STUDENTS OF COLOR

1. In your own words, how would you describe your racial and ethnic background?

2. I want you to think back to when you were in the college admissions process. What types of qualities and characteristics were you looking for in a college/university? How did you decide you wanted to attend this college?

3. What were your main impressions about the college before arriving on campus? How did you form these impressions?

4. Now remember what it felt like to be here during orientation and the first few weeks of campus. Did your impression of the college change at all during that time and how does that compare with your impressions of the college now? What effect do these impressions have on your life on campus?

5. What is your major (or what are you considering majoring in)? What were the key factors for you in selecting this major?

6. What current out of classroom activities are you involved in? (prompts: Clubs, sports, on or off campus jobs) How long have you been involved with these activities and how did you first get involved?

7. Tell me about your close friends here on campus. How and where did you meet them? What types of activities do you like to do together? Where do you hang out the most on campus?

8. How do you generally spend your time on campus? Can you estimate what percentage of your time you spend in various places/various activities?

9. What has been your greatest challenge while at college and what is your proudest accomplishment in the time that you've been here?

10. What, if anything, have you felt that's been missing from your college experience? Or what areas would you like to see the college improve on?

11. What have been some of your favorite things about your college experience?

12. Have you had experiences on campus, positive or negative, that prompted you to think about race or your racial identity? If so, can you describe the situation to me? (prompts: When and where were these experiences? Who was present? How did you feel?)

13. How have your ideas about race and your racial identity changed since your first year on campus? Who/what has been influential in shifting the way you think about these things? Are there any moments that particularly stand out?

14. What has provided the greatest sources of support for you (academically, socially, etc.) within the college environment? (specific people, programs, etc.)

15. Have you noticed examples of "white culture" on your campus? What does this look like or mean to you?

16. Some literature says that students of color have "act white" to succeed in school, is this relevant to you or your friends? (prompts: What does this mean to you? If so where and when has this happened? How did you respond? Who was present? How did you feel? Have you found it strategic to change your behavior? Have you observed this type of behavior in other students of color?)

17. Would you recommend your college to another student of color? Why or why not?

18. When you return home how do you relate to friends and family there? (Prompts: How do they relate to you? Has this changed since you started college? If so, in what ways? Do you still have the same friends at home that you had when you started college? Do you think changes in these relationships are related to class issues?)

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED
INTERVIEWS WITH DOMESTIC WHITE STUDENTS

1. In your own words, how would you describe your racial and ethnic background?

2. I want you to think back to when you were in the college admissions process. What types of qualities and characteristics were you looking for in a college/university? How did you decide you wanted to attend this college?

3. What were your main impressions about the college before arriving on campus? How did you form these impressions?

4. Now remember what it felt like to be here during orientation and the first few weeks of campus. Did your impression of the college change at all during that time and how does that compare with your impressions of the college now? What effect do these impressions have on your life on campus?

5. What is your major (or what are you considering majoring in)? What were the key factors for you in selecting this major?

6. What current out of classroom activities are you involved in? (prompts: Clubs, sports, on or off campus jobs) How long have you been involved with these activities and how did you first get involved?

7. Tell me about your close friends here on campus. How and where did you meet them? What types of activities do you like to do together? Where do you hang out the most on campus?

8. How do you generally spend your time on campus? Can you estimate what percentage of your time you spend in various places/various activities?

9. What has been your greatest challenge while at college and what is your proudest accomplishment in the time that you've been here?

10. What, if anything, have you felt that's been missing from your college experience? Or what areas would you like to see the college improve on?

11. What have been some of your favorite things about your college experience?

12. Have you had experiences on campus, positive or negative, that prompted you to think about race or your racial identity? If so, can you describe the situation to me? (prompts: When and where were these experiences? Who was present? How did you feel?)

13. How have your ideas about race and your racial identity changed since your first year on campus? Who/what has been influential in shifting the way you think about these things? Are there any moments that particularly stand out?

14. What has provided the greatest sources of support for you (academically, socially, etc.) within the college environment? (specific people, programs, etc.)

15. Have you noticed examples of "white culture" on your campus? What does this look like or mean to you?

APPENDIX H

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH FACULTY AND STAFF

1. In your own words, how would you describe your racial and ethnic background?

2. I want you to think back to when you were applying for a position at [Dexter College]. What were your main impressions about the college before arriving on campus? How did you form these impressions?

3. Now remember what it felt like to be here during the first few months on campus. Did your impression of the college change at all during that time and how does that compare with your impressions of the college now? What effect do these impressions have on your work on the campus?

4. Describe your role at the college and your primary responsibilities. Have these changed over time? How do you see your role related to promoting a "diverse learning environment" or "diversity" more generally.

5. From your perspective what do you think the college's strengths are and what areas would you like to see the college improve on?

6. What have been some of your favorite things about working at [Dexter College] and what has been some of the challenges?

7. How would you assess the college's commitment to diversity? What specific things do you think the college is doing to create a diverse learning environment? How would you describe the campus culture related to issues of diversity? How do you think the college defines "diversity"— is this similar or different to your own definition?

8. Have you had experiences on campus, positive or negative, that prompted you to think about race or your racial identity? If so, can you describe the situation to me? (prompts: When and where were these experiences? Who was present? How did you feel?)

9. How have your ideas about race and your racial identity changed since your first year on campus? Who/what has been influential in shifting the way you think about these things? Are there any moments that particularly stand out?

10. Have you noticed examples of "white culture" on your campus? What does this look like or mean to you?

APPENDIX I

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

If this interview/focus group has brought up issues for you that you would like to discuss further or if you feel the need for additional support, please consider utilizing one of the following resources: the Office of Multicultural Affairs, the Ombudsperson or Counseling Services.[1] You should also feel free to contact me, Liz Braun, braun@anthro.umass.edu or 413-533-5871 or my supervising faculty member, Dr. Enoch Page, hepage@anthro.umass.edu at any point. Thank you again for your participation. It is greatly appreciated!

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[1]The original debriefing statement included specific individuals names and phone numbers which have been redacted here to protect anonymity.

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