

5-13-2011

The Forgotten Voices Behind Designated Diversity Initiatives: Perspectives from Students of Color Living in a Multicultural Residential Community

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**THE FORGOTTEN VOICES BEHIND DESIGNATED DIVERSITY
INITIATIVES: PERSPECTIVES FROM STUDENTS OF COLOR LIVING IN A
MULTICULTURAL RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITY**

A Dissertation Presented

by

KATHY SISNEROS

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

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

May 2011

Education

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DEDICATION

To my mom for paving the way through strength and resilience.

To my life partner Laura, who I love more every day, promise, promise. Thank you for standing by my side and believing in me.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I think about the number of people that I need to thank for successfully completing my dissertation, I am overwhelmed by the generosity, love and support that has been directed my way. I want to start by thanking my mom, Rebecca Mares, it is her unconditional love that allowed me to travel the academic journey. In addition to the strength I found standing on my mom's broad shoulders, both of my sisters have also given so much to me. They have provided love, support and inspiration in ways that only sisters can. Penelope, thank you for being such a strong and unyielding role model and big sister...you took barriers out of my way even when I couldn't see them. Amanda, I have always and continue to admire the inner strength you find to carve out your own path, and seeing your resilience provides me with encouragement and support.

There is little question that I would have gotten through the past six years without my best friend and biggest cheerleader by my side, my wife and life partner, Laura Giles. She gave me what I needed more than anybody else along the way, steadfast love and strength that carried me through all the ups and downs of this process. I am grateful to have her by my side. My other faithful companions were my canine friends, Tucker and Dexter, who provided the necessary daily walks and hikes to decompress and reflect on my writing.

My academic peers were invaluable to getting through what felt like an academic gauntlet at times. Having classmates that served as "critical friends", others I could commiserate with, and receive feedback in ways that only they could provide. My friend, Irene Rodriguez-Martin, especially provided feedback, insight, humor and sarcasm that was so valuable to my process. I have also had a wonderful community of friends that

offered encouragement and pushes along the way that made a difference, you all know who you are and thank you.

The folks that literally afforded for my research and study to happen were clearly the students who graciously shared their stories. Also, I need to thank many former colleagues at the University of Wisconsin-Madison; Paul Evans, Kay Reuter-Krohn, and Larry Davis for providing me access to the students and trusting that I would respect the institution. I also cannot thank Dr. Aaron Brower enough for jumping in to serve as my faculty sponsor at UW-Madison, he removed logistical hurdles and also trusted that I would pursue my research with integrity. Two additional colleagues/friends that I need to thank are Jasmine Clay and Jackie Scola-Bernstein. Both of them went above and beyond to help me connect to the participants to make sure that my on-site visits went smoothly. Their willingness assist so much was immeasurable. And, Jackie, thanks for opening your home and family to me during my visits.

Lastly, I need to thank my faculty for their guidance and support. I would like to give a special thanks to Dr. Kerry-Ann O'Meara who served as my initial advisor and the instructor for our pro-seminar class. Kerry-Ann provided a foundation that literally paved the way for the rest of my doctoral experience. I would also like to thank my dissertation committee. First, Dr. Melissa Wooten for her willingness to step in with little knowledge of me or my study and for the broader framework that she offered. I would also like to thank Dr. Sharon Rallis, who not only served on my committee but was very influential in terms of the theoretical approach to my study. Lastly, I would like to thank Dr. Joseph B. Berger who served as my chairperson and was consistently reaffirming of my research and the overall process. Final thanks to Fran Campana for her formatting magic.

ABSTRACT

THE FORGOTTEN VOICES BEHIND DESIGNATED DIVERSITY INITIATIVES: PERSPECTIVES FROM STUDENTS OF COLOR LIVING IN A MULTICULTURAL RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITY

MAY 2011

KATHY SISNEROS, B.S., EASTERN NEW MEXICO UNIVERSITY

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Colleges and universities have become increasingly diverse since *Brown .v Board of Education* requiring that institutions figure out how to manage a more racially diverse student body. Unfortunately, many predominantly White institutions (PWI) continue to fall short in attending to the specific needs for students of color to feel included and supported. The primary purpose of this study is to learn more about how students of color experience and make meaning of cross-racial relationships in designated multicultural program. I intend to specifically focus on the experiences of students of color who have self-selected to live in a designated multicultural community.

To capture individual student stories and realities that illuminate the complexities of how students of color make meaning at a PWI, group and individual interviews will be facilitated during the academic year. Observation/field notes of the community and the use of a group interview will be used to triangulate the data. Qualitative research will provide the greatest opportunity for an in-depth understanding of individual student experiences.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Colleges and universities have become increasingly diverse since *Brown .v Board of Education* requiring that institutions figure out how to manage a more racially diverse student body. Unfortunately, many predominantly White institutions (PWIs)¹ continue to fall short in attending to the specific needs for students of color² to feel included and supported. Although many institutions have invested in programs and services geared toward creating a more inclusive campus climate (Chesler, Lewis, & Crowfoot, 2005) research continues to demonstrate that students of color are struggling to feel supported at PWIs (González, 2002; Jones, Castellanos & Cole, 2002; Turner, 2001). Furthermore, the focus of diversity initiatives has shifted away from concentrating on supporting students of color, and has been usurped by an emphasis on educating White students about the value of diversity. Research in this area most recently, has focused on the overall benefits of diversity efforts for all students (Chang, 2001a; Gurin, 1999; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, Gurin, 2002; Milem & Umbach, 2003; Umbach & Kuh, 2006; Zúñiga, Williams & Berger, 2005). This study is intended to shift the spotlight back onto the actual experiences of students of color who participate in intentionally created diversity initiatives. I explore the extent to which diversity efforts originally intended and currently

¹ Predominantly White Institutions and Traditionally White Institutions will be used interchangeably. TWIs are those institutions that were historically structured for White students only. PWIs are those institutions that today, have a predominantly White student body regardless of historic background.

² Students of Color will be used throughout the study as an umbrella term reflecting students of racial and ethnic backgrounds that are Latino/Hispanic, African American, Asian American/Pacific Islander, Native American, and students who identify as multiracial. Identifying specific racial/ethnic groups/students will be used when discussing details of the research study.

defined as supporting students of color are actually successful from the perspective of students of color.

I begin with an overview of background information regarding the broad evolution of diversity efforts within higher education in the United States, and the proposed interest area for this study. Chapter two consists of a literature review of key research studies that offer insight on campus climate, the educational benefits of diversity, the ways in which students interact across racial backgrounds, and how students of color experience a sense of belonging on campus. In the third chapter, details regarding methods and analysis for the proposed study are presented. Chapter four presents the findings from the study. The final chapter discusses how this study adds to the existing research, and possible implication for policy, practice and future research to consider.

Background of Racial Diversity on College Campuses

The ways in which institutions of higher education have grappled with increasingly racially diverse student populations has taken various forms over the years. During the early 1970s, there was an increased focus in higher education on access for students of color that was built on the foundational cornerstones of the Civil Rights Movement, Affirmative Action legislation, and the initial authorization of the Higher Education Act (Altbach, Lomotey, & Rivers, 2002). The 1980s, in turn, shifted toward efforts to increase the retention rate of students of color at PWIs. For example, Black Student Unions became more commonplace on campuses across the country (Jones,

Castellanos, & Cole, 2002); various bridge programs³ meant to assist students of color transition and acclimate, such as the federally funded TRIO programs (Cahalan & Curtin, 2004) were implemented; and independent support programs, such as the Puente Project in California and the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program at the University of Michigan, were established on many campuses (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004). In the 1990s, new diversity initiatives cropped up on colleges campuses with the growth of multicultural student centers, student organizations dedicated to students of color, curriculum and academic support efforts, and residence hall communities dedicated to multiculturalism (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt & associates, 2005; Smith & associate, 1997; Tripp & Cheatham, 1989; Whitla, Howard, Tuitt, Reddick, & Flanagan, 2005).

The 1990s also brought a vigorous backlash against efforts that were viewed as race-based (Bowman & Smith, 2002; Chesler, Lewis, & Crowfoot, 2005). Some of the most prominent challenges to the value of diversity initiatives on college campuses was the opposition of the use of affirmative action in admissions (*Hopwood v. Texas*, 1996; *Gratz et al. v. Bollinger*, 2003), designated student fees for race-based organizations (*Southworth v. Grebe*, 1996), diversity required courses, and an affront on the overall value of diversity in the institution (Altbach, Lomotey, & Rivers, 2002; D'Souza, 1995).

Currently the purpose of many diversity efforts has shifted away from assisting students of color in their transition and acclimation on college campuses, to reframing how all students can engage and benefit from diversity efforts that enhance their overall

³ Bridge program is a broad term encompassing federally, state and local initiatives that typically support low-income, 1st generational students transitioning from high school into college. Some programs are designed to support students during their entire time in college. Additionally, based on demographics of who is low-income and first generation, many programs are intentionally geared toward supporting students of color.

educational experience and help to develop a sense of civic responsibility across racial groups. Shifting institutional priorities, coupled with legal and philosophical challenges, has led in part to studies focusing on the multiple ways that diversity impacts the lives of all students at colleges and universities (Chang, 2000, Chang, 2001a; Gurin, 1999; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998). In the face of the counter-attacks devaluing diversity related efforts on college campuses across the country, these studies have become increasingly crucial to demonstrate the importance to students overall experience in college. Many proponents of diversity have responded to these assaults by investing in valuable research defining the benefits of diversity for all students. However, one of the unintended outcomes has been the decrease in studies examining the experiences of students of color who attend predominantly White institutions (PWIs), and assessing if the originally intended efforts to support their success are having the desired positive effects.

Unfortunately, racial tensions continue to persist on college campuses across the country. Yet, more attention and energy has been dedicated to engaging all students in the value of diversity leaving many students of color still struggling to feel comfortable on campus. Students of color continue to experience acts of “everyday racism” (Swim, Hyers, Cohen, Fitzgerald, & Bylsma, 2003, p. 40) that manifest in covert ways and can be difficult to confront. Recent headlines across college campus newspapers continue to reflect this very phenomenon that captures the many seemingly innocuous actions and planned parties with race-based themes at the expense of students of color (Hunt, 2007; Rodriguez, 2006; Smith, 2007; Tong, 2007). And as long as Whites refuse to engage in conversations of racial domination, various forms of racial duplicity will continue to exist

as a means to “evade confronting white supremacy” (Leonardo, 2004, p.150) the mere act of hosting and participating in such events reflects racially duplicitous behaviors that inherently mask intentional and unintentional racist deeds. Leading Whites to unwittingly use their experiences from a racially dominant framework to discredit or contradict the narrative and experiences of students of color that they do not necessarily agree with and are unwilling to hear a different lived reality (Hyttén & Warren, 2003). These covert actions manifest in more subtle insults and racial microaggressions (Sue, 2010; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000), “subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously” (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000, p. 60) continue to impact the lives of students of color. There is a subtle resistance that plays out when Whites demand more legitimacy maintaining that they have some understanding or support for the nonwhite experience (Thompson, 2003). Resistant actions and behaviors by Whites often leads to students of color identifying and experiencing a pattern of hostile or unwelcoming behaviors throughout their daily routine on campus that over time can impact their overall college going experience (Swim, et al., 2003; Villalpando, 2003). As mentioned above, many college campuses have made some effort to create spaces that are deemed as “multicultural” and/or specifically created as a refuge for students of color. However, little empirical evidence exists indicating the success or failure of these spaces from the perspective of students of color. What we do know is that there is a wide range of variables that have been studied regarding diversity on college campuses (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Chang, 2001a; Gurin, 1999; Hu & Kuh, 2003; Milem, 2003).

Existing studies have been primarily quantitative, using longitudinal data that mostly focused on campus climate, examining the overall impact of various diversity initiatives based on how all students view these efforts (Ancis, et al., 2000; Antonio, 2001; Chang, 2001a; Chang, 2003; Hurtado, Milem, et al., 1998; Umbach & Kuh, 2006). Additionally, educational benefits (Gurin, 1999; Milem, Chang & Antonio, 2005), cross-racial interactions (Antonio 2001a, Antonio, 2001b; Hurtado, Ngai, & Saenz, 2007; Nagda, 2006) and a sense of belonging for students of color (Johnson, et al., 2007; Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993) have all been well researched. Very few of these studies, however, have taken an in-depth, focused look within a very specific context of the impact intentionally created spaces have had for the overall experience of students of color. More attention needs to be given to how students of color interpret their experiences, and how they make meaning of their own experience, and of cross-racial relationships developed across races within a designated multicultural environment.

Little essential data exists on how individual students of color make meaning of their interactions that lead to an appreciation for others based on differences. According to Allport (1979), one of the most effective ways to reduce prejudice and enhance understanding for someone of a different background is to bring individuals together in a positive environment that encourages and facilitates intentional cross-cultural interactions. In addition to Allport's assertion, Pettigrew (1998) added "friendship" as another element that needs to be established in order to reduce prejudice. Understanding how students self-define what type of interaction(s) are most meaningful in cultivating a change in attitude and behavior based on Allport and Pettigrew's work can improve how we provide resources and services to students. Given the reality that many students of

color frequently have different starting points than do White students based on past experiences of being treated differently because of their racial identity greater understanding of how these relationship develop is particularly important. Students of color perceptions and expectations of what it means to have and experience a meaningful racially diverse campus community (Hurtado, Carter, & Kardia, 1998) can have distinctly different origins than those of White students. Because of these multiple realities, the degree of contact a student is willing or simply considers having with students who are from racially different backgrounds can vary.

One way of fostering greater cross-racial interaction is through structured opportunities. Opportunities focused on creating meaningful cross-group interactions often have two inter-related goals; the first is to create a living environment where under-represented students of color may feel more comfortable and supported, with a second goal of creating a spaces where cross-cultural learning occurs in a formal setting (Chang, 2001a; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998; Umbach and Kuh, 2006). Research findings support cross-cultural interactions positive impact on students' educational outcomes (Chang, 2001a), for both students of color and White students.

Purpose of The Study

Given that current research has largely focused on the overall benefits of diversity efforts, the primary purpose of this study is to learn more specifically about how students of color experience and make meaning of cross-racial relationships in a designated multicultural program. Moreover, because many of the structured diversity college efforts purport to support students of color, I plan to learn to what extent this is actualized for

individual students of color. To provide further focus to my study, I intend to specifically focus on students of color who live in a designated multicultural community.

Research Questions

The main research question for this study is:

How do students of color who live in a designated multicultural community make meaning of inter/cross-racial relationships?

Sub Questions include:

1. How does living in a designated multicultural community relate to students overall experience on campus?
2. What perceived benefits and/or challenges do students of color identify based upon their experiences with living in a designated multicultural community?
3. What are unexpected and/or unintended outcomes students of color report from living in a designated multicultural community?

Significance of Study

Through an in-depth phenomenological case study, I explore the lived experiences of students of color who have self-selected to live in a designated multicultural learning community. As students of color are often the originally intended benefactors of such specific campus diversity efforts, it will be valuable to identify and reflect how they make meaning of their lived experience. As stated above, the bulk of the research in this area has been outcome-oriented, providing valuable data that can be generalized on many campuses examining the value of diversity. The strength of the quantitative research emphasizes the benefits to the institution as a whole, and the greater net gains for White students. Yet, very little research has directly examined the role of intentionally created communities and how students of color make meaning for themselves.

If campus climate regarding racial and ethnic inclusiveness remains a focal point and a priority for colleges and universities, it is in the best interest of practitioners and

policy makers in institutions to conduct ongoing research and assessment to better understand the experiences of students of color. The findings from such research could better inform the institutional policy makers on their approach for creating and maintaining an inclusive campus and decisions related to policy and practice. It is equally probable that challenges to diversity initiatives are likely to remain and possibly become even more aggressive in the forthcoming years.

Student affairs practitioners who work with similar programs can benefit from the findings in this study by recognizing the value of taking the time to do research and ongoing evaluation of their programs. Frontline staff and decision-makers committed to providing stronger and more comprehensive programs that support students of color can adapt their efforts through ongoing evaluation. A lot of time and resources are often committed to such programs, therefore it would behoove key staff members to hear the stories and understand the needs of their students. The findings from this study can contribute by providing institutional insight on what matters most to students of color in a specifically tailored diversity initiative.

Personal Background

I enter into this study with over eighteen years of experience in student affairs at large public institutions. For the majority of this time I worked directly with and for programs designated for students of color. My experience working with students of color is that they enter into the university expecting to succeed across racial lines in and out of the classroom. For some students this is obviously easier than for others. Anecdotally, I know many students of color who have entered into college and are taken aback by how White the campus feels, and some who have persisted on pure resilience to prove that as

a student of color they too deserve to be and succeed in college. Additionally, I have worked closely with students who have self-selected to participate in programs framed as an intentionally designed diversity program to actively engage in awareness across racial differences. As a result of this experience, I strongly believe that students of color and White students enter into designated multicultural programs for different reasons and with different expectations.

My experience working with intentionally created multicultural programs that include White students has often resulted in the needs of the White students hijacking the overall experience placing their needs for understanding ahead of creating a place of comfort and support for students of color. More energy and time is ultimately funneled toward the White student experience and making sure White students feel welcome and validated. Although such initiatives have multiple purposes and constituents, if it were not for the need to improve the campus climate for students of color, such programs and services would not even exist on college campuses. Therefore, it is crucial that more research be done examining to what extent intentionally created diversity initiatives are benefiting and authentically serving students of color, and recognizing that they are not a monolithic group. Many students of different racial/ethnic backgrounds are also learning how to engage with other diverse students, beyond engaging more successfully with White students.

The studies below have informed much of the rationale for my research study, and will illuminate some of the gaps in the current research that my study will address.

Following will be an analysis of key research findings, implications and

recommendations based upon the findings, and examples of how this study will complement the existing research by address some of the gaps noted in the studies.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

As outlined in chapter one, historically diversity initiatives were put in place to support and acclimate students of color in their transition to college, particularly at PWIs irregardless of the value added for White students. However, over the past four decades more attention has been given to the benefit for White students and during the past decade there have been many studies citing the overall benefits of diversity for all students. To better understand what these benefits are, it is necessary to consider how the different dimensions, strategies and effects of racial diversity have been framed in the literature. Institutions of higher education have been cognizant of the shifting racial demographics in earnest for the past four decades. Many colleges and universities have taken circuitous paths figuring out the best strategy to meet the multiple needs of an increasingly racially diverse student population. Further, institutional priorities have shifted over the years, partly due to a changing political climate and increased expectations by historically underserved student populations.

Therefore, thinking of colleges as organizations as outlined by Selznick (1992) serves as a useful backdrop when reviewing how racial diversity on campuses has been framed. According to Selznick (1992), organizations are divided into smaller subunits focused on smaller agendas that are intended to serve the larger goals of the organization. However, individuals tend to prioritize goals of their subunit before that of the larger organization creating competing and conflicting commitments. Diversity on college campuses illustrates this very dilemma at multiple levels; what forces are influencing

how diversity efforts have been shaped and reshaped on college campuses and how are students of color being served?

These questions drive the focus of my interest, which is to assess how students of color interpret their experiences in the midst of competing agendas. To frame my study of how students of color make meaning of their experiences in a designated multicultural residence hall community, I will provide an overview of the literature that has focused on four key aspects regarding racial diversity on college campuses: campus climate, educational benefits, cross-racial interactions, and sense of belonging for students of color. Each area is an essential element to understanding the broader landscape on how students participating in a designated diversity program experience the broader college environment.

Campus Climate

Campus climate is derived from a combination of the numerical representation of a racially diverse student body, the ways in which students interact across racial groups, student's feelings, and perceptions of how welcoming the campus environment is in relation to institutional policies and practices (Hurtado, Milem, et al., 1998; Milem, et al. 2005). Campus climate has an important impact on students overall experience regarding cross-racial relationships, and plays an important role in determining how welcoming and supported students of color feel attending institutions with a historical legacy that did not include them. For example, students of color perceive campus as more hostile and/or unwelcoming campus environment that can impact other aspects in which they are willing to engage with the institution (Ancis, et al., 2000; Smedley, et al., 1993).

Identifying the multiple facets that contribute to the campus climate has been the primary focus of this area of research. Below I provide highlights from this body of work.

Hurtado, Milem, et al., (1998) offer an analysis of a broad cross-section of research literature on the sources and outcomes of campus racial climate. The overall goal of the paper was to provide a broader understanding of campus climate in relation to racial/ethnic diversity that could improve institutional policies and practices. The authors considered four dimensions that they viewed as creating the overall institutional climate: institution's historical legacy on inclusion or exclusion, structural diversity, the psychological climate, and the behavioral climate. Although each dimension is addressed individually, the authors emphasize that integrating all the dimensions is necessary to holistically tackle all aspects of campus climate.

Historical legacy focuses on an institution's capacity and willingness to recognize and change historical vestiges that have institutionally benefited White students (Hurtado, Milem, et al., 1998). In other words, the formal and informal policies embedded in institutional functions need to be reevaluated so as to not unintentionally continue to advantage White students over students of color. For instance, how institutions respond to desegregation from the moment students of color enter college can have a long-standing impact in creating a welcoming campus climate. Milem, Chang and Antonio (2005) echo the sentiments of Hurtado et al. (1998) and stress that campus leaders must be willing to be transparent about the institution's exclusionary history and be vigilant in their efforts to redress past transgressions.

Structural/compositional diversity is the representation of racial diversity in terms of the population make-up of the campus, students, faculty and staff. As the authors in

both of the studies point out, numbers are important to minimize the feeling of tokenism of students of color who are largely underrepresented. This can lead to a heightened sense of minority stress status (Smedley, et al., 1993), and serves as an indicator to the institution to increase their commitment in creating a campus community that is more welcoming and supportive to racially marginalized students. One challenge raised by Smith (1989) and reinforced by Milem (2000), is to recognize that with an increasingly racially diverse student body there is the potential for greater conflict between White students and students of color. “While increased numbers [of student of color] may be more comfortable to a member of a minority group, they may be more threatening to a member of the majority” (Smith, p. 60). Campus leaders need to examine the implications of a more racially diverse campus beyond policies primarily focused on the numerical make-up of campus diversity, which narrowly focuses on access in admissions and financial aid, and in hiring practices. Milem et al. (2005) emphasize this same point, encouraging campus leaders to think more creatively about the multiple ways in which the institutional community can benefit fully from the increased diversity, and to provide structured opportunities to learn from the natural conflicts that are inherent in a more heterogeneous environment.

The psychological dimension framed by Hurtado et al. (1998) refers to the individual perceptions of the various facets of racial/ethnic support and commitment by the campus community. For example, students’ perceptions of the campus climate are influenced by how an institution responds to diversity, racial conflicts, acts of discrimination, and the views and attitudes of those from different racial backgrounds. An important caveat is that further empirical studies (Ancis, et al., 2000; González, 2002;

Solórzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000) have determined that students, faculty and staff from racially diverse backgrounds tend to have different views on the overall campus climate; position and power also impact this perception. Knowing that perception shapes an individual's reality and lived experiences, it is essential that campus communities take the time to understand the unique perceptions of the various racial/ethnic backgrounds of their students. For example, Hurtado, Dey, Gurin, and Gurin (2003) note that student perceptions of visual representations and artifacts throughout the campus community impact how students interpret the campus climate.

Lastly, the behavioral dimension reflects actual interactions across racial/ethnic groups, social and intergroup relations, and interactions on campus. As the structural diversity of college campuses increase, greater opportunities exist for institutions to capitalize on fostering intentional and meaningful avenues for students to positively interact with one another across racial/ethnic groups. A key distinction noted by both Hurtado et al. (1998) and Milem et al. (2005) is that White students largely view clustering by racial groups as self-segregation, whereas students of color view this form of clustering as a source of cultural support.

Building upon the work of Hurtado et al. (1998) work, Milem (2005) added a fifth dimension, organizational/structural, which they identified as an important element to create a more inclusive campus climate. The organizational and structural aspects that have been embedded in an institution's culture tend to inherently benefit some groups, but not all. This fifth element complements and provides a greater context for understanding the historical legacy dimension. The organizational/structural dimension penetrates the core decision-making and policy elements that ultimately define the

institution: hiring practices, admission policies, curriculum, and tenure decisions that all are reflected in budget allocations.

A recent study by Pike and Kuh (2006) examined the relationship between two of the key dimensions mentioned above--structural and behavioral. The goal was to assess the extent to which structural and behavioral diversity impacts student experiences and perceptions of the campus environment. Pike and Kuh specifically focused on classroom diversity and informal interactional diversity to frame the behavioral dimension. The study relied on multi-institutional data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) for the 2000-01 academic year. The overall findings strongly supported earlier findings that increased structural diversity provided increased opportunities for students to interact across racial groups. Further, this study found that “informal interactional diversity was more strongly related to structural diversity than any other institutional characteristic” (Pike & Kuh, p. 443). Although this study further supports the importance of integrating diversity from multiple dimensions, there are other elements to consider when examining how welcoming the overall campus environment is for students of color.

Chang (2000) provides another interesting perspective on the institutional dilemmas that challenge campus leaders ability to authentically develop a more inclusive campus climate. Chang engaged in an ongoing dialogue with leading scholars focused on racial dynamics within higher education. Through these dialogues Chang identified potential areas of responsibility for improving the campus racial climate. Although this is not an empirically grounded qualitative study, Chang identified through these conversations that most colleges and universities are genuinely committed to improving the racial campus climate. However, too often the institutions get caught up in what he

framed as “competing interest”. Essentially, this means that the ways in which many institutions approach issues of diversity and inclusivity have been largely framed as trade-offs.

Chang (2000) describes five sets of competing interests that are narrowly framed as oppositional rather than complementary values. First, excellence versus equal access, the notion that increasing access comes at the expense of excellence in quality of student. In short, the greater the compositional diversity becomes, the lower the standards will become. However, it is essential to note that this assertion has been empirically refuted (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Witt, Chang, & Hakuta, 2003). For example, according to Bowen and Bok “the more selective the college or university that African American students attended, the more they achieved, holding constant their initial test scores and grades” (cited in Witt, et al., 2003, p. 9). The issue then becomes more reflective of the need for institutions “to reexamine notions of merit, elitism, and fairness for all constituents at all levels of the organization” (Chang, 2000, p. 163) and challenge the preconceived notions regarding affirmative action as admitting “unqualified” students of color.

Chang’s (2000) second oppositional values are free speech versus civility. In the face of greater racial diversity campuses have seen an increase in resistance to speech that is viewed as hostile and/or demeaning toward racial groups that supposedly fosters a greater degree of civility. Further, more individuals have been inclined to “voice” opinions that might be deemed offensive. There is the need to balance freedom of speech, while maintaining and encouraging a campus community that is not only viewed as civil, but as safe and welcoming for all students.

According to Chang (2000) autonomy versus normative leverage is the third dilemma presented. The underlying conflict for campuses is to determine to what extent should the institution intentionally and purposefully foster cross-racial interactions? Chang captures this dilemma as the historical role for institutions of higher education is to encourage autonomy that allows students to develop greater levels of independence in thought and action versus overly prescribing uniform ways of learning and engaging. Chang states this as a competing tension with the perception of campuses reluctance to create a normative structure. However, I would suggest that as reflected by Milem et al. (2005), organizational/structural dimension in colleges and universities function from deeply embedded policies and practices that do define an unspoken normative structure, that has long perpetuated the success of the individual, meaning historically benefiting the majority, White students.

The fourth set of competing interests position the notion of stability versus the ability to change (Chang, 2000), which addresses one of the key dimensions noted earlier (Hurtado et al., 1998; Milem et al., 2005), historical legacy. How does an institution built on traditions that do not reflect and honor all, maintain its “identity” while acknowledging the historic blemishes? Does the campus do more than offer rhetoric to the idea of diversity, or is the institution willing to change some of the fabric of what is presented and valued to reflect the changing constituencies?

The final dilemma, self-interest versus public good, is not uniquely attributed based on racial diversity, as it can also be debated from an economic standpoint. Is increasing racial diversity and improving racial relations in the institution’s self-interest or more of a public good that is viewed as too costly for an institution to fully embrace?

If an institution is struggling with the notion of excellence versus equal access, it is highly likely that part of the struggle links directly to how campus leaders view their role in preserving the institution's self-interest. Unfortunately, too often issues of diversity are treated as an either/or proposition versus a both/and opportunity. The overarching point that Chang (2000) makes is how campus leaders handle these competing interests tends to set the overall tenor for the campus environment. The preceding list is not exhaustive, and the dilemmas presented are meant to encourage future inquiry, hence what might be viewed as an oversimplification of deeper issues serves as an entry point for valuable dialogue and future research.

Educational Benefits

The second section addresses the educational benefits of diversity on campus. Although existing literature has not framed educational benefits as a competing interest, much of the research has moved in this direction over the past decade, and lends itself to a similar framing. Up until the mid 1990s, diversity research was primarily focused on the transition issues facing students of color entering into PWIs, and with the shift in political landscape, the research has moved toward identifying the benefits of diversity for all students. The educational benefits that accrue for all students have served as one of the primary arguments supporting diversity measures at colleges and universities (Gurin, 1999; Milem, et al., 2005). The value of students increasing their capacity to learn, strengthen critical thinking skills, to work in groups, and personal identity development has been supported by sound scholarly research. Most of these studies (Chang, 2001a; Gurin, 1999; Gurin et al., 2002; Milem & Umbach, 2003; Umbach & Kuh, 2006; Zúñiga, et al., 2005) have been outcome driven, based on longitudinal survey data that has been

valuable in illustrating the educational benefits of diversity on a broad range of variables and at different types of institutions. I will provide a brief summary of a few key studies below.

Gurin et al. (2002) focused on curricular and co-curricular cross-racial experiences as a way to measure the impact of classroom diversity and the value of informal interactions. National longitudinal data was combined with longitudinal data collected from the University of Michigan on students participating in a designated multicultural academic program. The use of national data allowed for the study to provide some analysis comparing institutional data in relation to a national database. Although not directly parallel in datasets, the national data, which came from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) of the Higher Educational Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA, were comparable. The study was careful to include certain control measures of student background and relevant institutional characteristics to avoid an overestimation of the effects related to a student's experience around diversity. The authors measured the impact of both informal and formal experiences on learning outcomes. The most significant finding was that, "informal interactional diversity was especially influential in accounting for higher levels of intellectual engagement and self-assessed academic skills" (Gurin et al., p. 351) for Whites, African Americans, Asian American and Latino/a students. Classroom diversity was only significantly positive for White and Latino students. For African American students, classroom diversity had a negative result for self-assessed academic skills. However, it is difficult to fully know all the variables that contributed to this finding. The key variables that factored into this finding relied on whether or not students enrolled in an ethnic studies course by their

fourth year in college; and for the Michigan data set to what extent had students been exposed to understanding/engaging in cross-racial relationships. Although the authors controlled for the likelihood of racially diverse classrooms, how that was defined and interpreted for African American students may have played a more significant role in their self-assessment. Treating students of color as a monolithic group does not allow for more detailed and nuanced analysis for this particular finding.

Milem and Umbach (2003) added to our knowledge in this area with their study on interactional diversity by using Holland's (1966, 1985) Theory on personality types to consider how students' choice in major impacted their openness to diversity. Incoming first-year students were surveyed during summer orientation sessions to assess their predisposition to different aspects of diversity. The authors performed a descriptive analysis and found that White students are least prepared to engage in diversity in college. The amount of exposure to diversity before entering college had little significance for African American students regarding their intentions to become involved in diversity during college. However, for White and Asian American students, this was a weak positive indicator. As for the influence of the Holland's Theory, students in social sciences majors tended to be more open to diversity than those in scientific or realistic majors, such as engineering and the natural sciences. This finding is not surprising, but does provide empirical data for institutions to consider ways of more intentionally integrating diversity into these areas of the curriculum.

Recognizing the benefits of interactional diversity is important, but it is also helpful to understand how and why students are motivated to participate in various aspects of diversity on campus. Zúñiga et al., (2005) conducted a study on students'

motivation to engage in reducing prejudice on a personal and social level. The impact of involvement in various forms of campus diversity was assessed using survey data over two semesters from a predominantly White institution. In addition to demographic data, students responded to questions about their involvement in co-curricular activities and courses on diversity. An important overall finding indicated that students who are more highly motivated to reduce their individual prejudice were also more motivated to “promote inclusion and social justice” (Zúñiga et al., p. 673). The motivational attributes were also correlated with students who were most likely to be involved in intentional co-curricular and curricular diversity initiatives. Similar to Gurin et al. (2002), this study supports the value of structured diversity-oriented opportunities in and out of the classroom. There was a notable limitation identified by the authors: as compared to White students, students of color collectively showed no significant difference in terms of reducing their own prejudice, or in working toward social justice and inclusion. Since all students of color were treated monolithically, it is impossible to discern motivation based on racial differences, which could be valuable to know to better understand distinct experiences based on race/ethnicity.

A complimentary study by Umbach and Kuh (2006) focused on student experiences at liberal arts colleges and provides similar empirical results. Again, students who engage in diversity related activities demonstrated a higher level of academic success, academic challenge, opportunities for learning in small groups, and viewed the campus as supportive. However, Umbach and Kuh fail to isolate their data based on racial background and focused more on students by year in school. Although this is important information to consider, the study does not get to the heart of who engaged in

diversity opportunities. The authors relied on a generic “diversity density index” formula, which took into account the structural diversity of a campus to determine the rate of probability that students would likely interact across racial groups, to project possible racial demographics of their dataset, which seems to provide a higher than average percentage. Lastly, given that data is self-reported, and considering that college is the most racially diverse setting many White students have experienced (Milem, 2003), the perceptions of these students can easily be skewed especially when compared to students of color.

Increased racial diversity on campus provides educational benefits for all students. As highlighted by Witt, et al. (2003), “higher-order thinking skills, [and] increased motivation” (p.20) is enhanced through greater interaction with a more racially diverse campus community. Further evidence of the educational benefits of racial diversity comes from a study (Orfield & Whitley, 1999) citing law students’ enhanced educational experiences in a more racially diverse academic setting. And, according to Milem, (2003) “students reported that being in a racially diverse environment enabled them to engage in discussions with others that enhanced their learning” (p.139). Specifically, students mentioned stronger class discussions, increased capacity to work with others, and a more holistic and complex understanding of civil right and the U.S. criminal justice system. However, it is important to note that based on the reality that it is primarily White students who have in large part “previously lacked significant direct exposure to minorities [they] frequently have the most to gain from the interaction with individuals of other races” (Milem, p.132). Based on this point and upon closer scrutiny of the majority of these studies, two key questions regarding the experience for students

of color remain: Are the diversity measures in place more successful for enhancing White students ability to interact with racially different students, than for students of color to interact across races? How do students of color embrace and interpret the diversity efforts on campus?

The underlying assumption supporting the educational benefits of diversity is recognizing that student-learning outcomes are most likely to be positive when facilitated in intentional ways. Based on the aforementioned studies (Gurin et al., 2002; Zúñiga et al., 2005), providing structured opportunities are about maximizing the compositional diversity in meaningful ways for students to have purposeful interactions. As ascribed by Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), these findings support the value for racial diversity and reinforce students' predisposed affinity to understand differences, which in turn, carry over into their interest in college. The Gurin et al. (2002) findings reinforce that as valuable as classroom diversity is to developing students understanding of differences, the informal interactions students have with one another is "consistently influential on all educational outcomes" (p. 359) across racial backgrounds, particularly outside of the classroom. For example, the greater the opportunity students have to interact in a more racially diverse environment, the greater the discontinuity in the atmosphere which is ripe for students to enhance their cognitive and identity development (Milem et al., 2005). In other words, "the presence of diversity in groups also enhances complex thinking" (p. 8) in formal and informal settings. Furthermore, Chang's (2001b) study supports that the more student's experience a reduction in racial prejudice, the greater the increase in educational outcomes. The findings of the Chang study leads to examining more closely the impact of a student's ability to successfully interact across racial groups.

Cross-Racial Relationships

The third focus regarding racial diversity on college campuses are aspects of cross-racial relationships. There is an extensive body of knowledge regarding interactional diversity (Chang, Astin, & Kim, 2004; Hu & Kuh, 2003; Hurtado et al., 2007; Milem, & Umbach, 2003), diversity within friendship groups (Antonio, 2004a, 2004b, 2001a, 2001b; Martínez Alemán, 2000), and an increasing amount of research recognizing the benefits of intergroup dialogue (Nagda, 2006; Nagda, Kim, & Truelove, 2004; Nagda, & Zúñiga, 2003). One overarching limitation to the majority of these studies is that most of them are longitudinal quantitative research that focuses solely on outcome measures. The value to these studies is the broad nature and the ability to make some generalized analysis. However, the overall body of research can be enriched with studies that are able to go into more depth of how students articulate their experiences being a part of a racially diverse campus community. Later I will provide a synopsis of some key studies that have offered greater insight to the value of these forms of interpersonal diversity development.

Interactional Diversity

The benefits of cross-racial interactions serve as one of the emphasis supporting the continued needs for diversity on college and university campuses (Antonio, 2001a; Gurin, 1999; Hu & Kuh, 2003;). This body of literature highlights the individual value of cross-racial interactions and it can be broken out into three sub-categories: interactional diversity, influence among friendship groups, and the impact of intergroup dialogues.

Interactional diversity, “the opportunity to interact with students from diverse backgrounds” (Gurin, 1999, p.41) throughout the campus community has shown positive

impacts (Chang et al., 2004; Hu & Kuh, 2003; Hurtado et al., 2007; Milem, & Umbach, 2003) for students through structured venues (i.e. curriculum) and through informal settings (i.e. dining, studying). Hu and Kuh's (2003) findings empirically support that students of all racial backgrounds experienced positive effects of interactional diversity on an informal level. The finding makes a case for institutions to promote opportunities and encourage students to interact across races in more casual settings. One of the key attributes to this study is that the authors accounted for student background and institutional variables and were able to demonstrate that cross-racial interactions had a positive impact on personal development regardless of background variables, further making the case for the value of diversity efforts.

Hurtado (2007) built upon Hu and Kuh's (2003) findings by focusing their study on the ways in which institutions engaged in endeavors that foster cross-racial interactions. The authors specifically assessed the experiences of African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and White students taking into account pre-college characteristics, opportunities to interact (enlightenment), the environment and type of interactions. Similar to the findings from the Hu and Kuh study, students were generally found to value social interactions across races; African American students showed the most positive experience interacting across racial groups, and White students were lowest in this regard. African American students also relied on faculty relationships as an important source for "support and validation in college" (Hurtado et al., 2007, p. 20). The structural diversity on campus was most significant for White student development. For Latino students, pre-college support was important, as was co-curricular involvement.

Empirical quantitative research conducted by Chang et al. (2004) again supported that White students were more likely to engage across racial groups as the structural diversity on campus increased. However, more complex findings for students of color were also identified. Greater levels of on-campus structural diversity had little impact on the amount or the type of interaction in which students of color engaged. One explanation offered by the authors for these findings was that students of color on more racially diverse campuses have greater opportunities to interact across different racial groups. For example, African American students may engage more with Latino students rather than with White students. However, an alternative hypothesis may be worth considering. Is it possible that students of color are willing to interact with White students on more racially diverse campuses because they also have a built in support network to retreat to when necessary; whereas, on a less racially diverse campus, there is a greater need for self-preservation? In addition to the studies on interactional diversity, studies on the impact of cross-racial interactions through participation in intergroup dialogues are adding more depth to our understanding of the student's experiences.

The use of intergroup dialogue to engage students across differences is a relatively new strategy geared toward increasing meaningful cross-racial interactions among college students. Much of the research in this area tends to be narrow in focus, with much of the data coming from very small and isolated studies (Nagda 2006; Nagda, Kim & Truelove, 2004; Nagda, & Zúñiga, 2003). Nagda et al. (2004), for example, conducted a narrowly tailored quantitative study, consisting of 175 students, examining the extent to which involvement in a designated multicultural course reduced prejudice amongst students and increased motivation for intergroup learning. Findings indicated

that participants had increased enthusiasm for intergroup learning, reduced prejudice and greater recognition of the importance of promoting diversity. A few student narratives from the survey were included in the author's results, which added texture and understanding to the overall findings.

Nagda (2006) conducted a similar study at one institution and the focus of this study was to examine what particular communication processes constitute engagement during intergroup dialogue and the role these processes have toward bridging difference. Nagda's research identified specific characteristics important to the communication processes across races: appreciation for difference, willingness to engage in self-reflection, self-engagement, and openness to build alliances. As this study investigated the process of cross-racial interactions, a more complex and deeper understanding is revealed through the use of intergroup dialogues. Providing a dialogic learning experience, students have the opportunity to connect in a more intimate and potentially more meaningful intergroup engagement. This is particularly significant for students of color, as participating in an intergroup dialogue may be one of the few classroom settings where they do not feel like a token. Nagda asserts that the essential element of "criticality-in self-reflection and intergroup collaboration toward greater social justice" (p. 569) creates a greater shared investment toward understanding and addressing inequalities. For students of color, engaging in deeper and a more authentic dialogic experience across racial backgrounds helps to build alliances, trust and breakdown feelings of isolation.

Intergroup dialogues facilitate an opportunity for all students to benefit from the increased diversity on campus by engaging in a structured forum to critically examine

topics across differences. This particular pedagogy is important in combating the assaults on the institutions commitment to diversity efforts, as it intentionally fosters an educational benefit for students of all racial backgrounds, including White students (Umbach & Kuh, 2006; Zúñiga et al., 2005). However, intergroup dialogues are potentially a step away from placing the needs of students of color at the center. Further studies are needed to determine what students of color value in their participation in such structured efforts.

Influence of Friendship Groups

Antonio (2001a, 2001b, 2004b) has conducted multiple quantitative studies regarding the influence and racial make-up of friendship groups. A common thread in each of these studies findings is that interracial interactions have a positive impact on student's cultural knowledge, willingness to interact more frequently outside their own racial and/or ethnic group, and an expanded commitment to racial understanding. It is important to juxtapose these findings against students' broader perceptions of the campus racial climate. Antonio's (2001b) findings show that although students in large part self-identified as open and willing to interact across races on a personal level, their overall perception was that their broader campus community functions in isolated racial groups. Students' behavior does not align with their overall perceptions, and this particular finding should be of keen interest to college staff and administrators who are diligently working on issues of campus climate.

Another study by Antonio (2004b) identifies that students of color self-confidence and degree aspirations is correlated with having a more racially diverse friendship group. Considering that the findings from Antonio's (2004a) qualitative study reflected that

some friendship groups were formed intentionally while others were less intentional about developing racially diverse groups, adds complexity to his early quantitative work (2001b); finding that students behavioral tendencies do not mirror their perceptions of other students interacting across racial groups within the broader campus community. In other words, students perceive the broader student culture to interact less across races, than what they themselves do, intentionally or unintentionally. In his study (2004a) of males and their friendship groups, the participants demonstrated different tendencies in establishing their circle of friends in relation to race/ethnicity. Some students of color intentionally sought out other students of color for support and survival. Others were intentional about seeking racially diverse circles of friends couched in shared values. Lastly, some students of color and White students either ended up with a fairly diverse circle of friends or a very homogeneous group by chance. Regardless of the composition of the friendship group, a common thread amongst the participants was the perception that the campus community was separated into distinct ethnic enclaves. More research that teases out the nuances of this finding could be significant when considering the findings mentioned earlier regarding campus climate; that White students and students of color view this form of clustering differently (Hurtado et al., 1998; Milem et al., 2005).

A study by Martínez Alemán (2000) provided in-depth empirical research on the nature of the student of color experience at a PWI. Martínez Alemán conducted an in-depth qualitative study of undergraduate women of color and the influence of their friendships. Participating students completed an initial questionnaire, and participated in three interviews - a short follow-up, a more in-depth one, and a focus group. Martínez Alemán developed three emergent themes as a result: developing a positive ethnic and/or

racial self-image, “race talk”, and boosting academic self-worth. A common thread for the women developing their self-image was seeking out friends who could relate to their experience based upon racial identity, and being able to forgo the stress and extra energy of “explaining their ethnic or racial self to Whites” (p. 139). Negotiating the “racial and/or ethnic developmental terrain” (p. 138) at a PWI with friends who can relate provides the women the outlet to discuss loaded topics in a safe environment that attends to their own growth and self-esteem.

However, the women of color also ultimately take some time to “educate” their White counterparts, although their greater desire is to be amongst other women of color with whom they can relate to on a more intimate level and share personal experiences. Much of the women’s broader experiences on the campus often put them in the position of engaging in combative conversations around race. Being able to retreat to their culturally diverse circle of friends provides the space to decompress and process the various “racist and ethnocentric moments” (p. 142) experienced in and out of the classroom. Essentially, the women of color participated in two forms of “race talk”, those conversations amongst their White peers and faculty, and then the conversations amongst their peer group that allow the women to raise questions, critically analyze and contextualize their own experiences in a meaningful way. Lastly, women of color in the study served as a source of academic morale for one another. There is a sense of validation of experience and gaining a stronger sense of academic confidence through the support and validation by their friends.

The findings from this study determined that women of color in college rely on their female friendships as a means to foster their own racial identity, as a retreat from a

barrage of cultural stress and fatigue on campus, and to nurture each other academically. These findings support the results found in Antonio's (2004a) study, in which women of color were found to have a desire to be around other women who shared common cultural experiences as the most important factor in developing a friendship group.

Sense of Belonging for Students of Color

In addition to students relying on their circle of friends to feel a greater connection to the institution and persist, there are other important aspects that contribute or hinder a true sense of belonging for many students of color attending PWIs. The final aspect I will address regarding understanding campus racial diversity is sense of belonging for students of color. A concentrated body of research has focused on the disparities for students of color in their college going experience. As the number of students of color attending traditionally White institutions (TWI) has increased, scholars have been interested in measuring their transition and overall experience in relation to White students. Substantial empirical studies have been conducted to the broader interest of understanding students of color sense of belonging. There are smaller branches of research that hone in on adjustment issues, the stress of being a racial/ethnic minority, increased stereotyping, or parsing out students' experiences inside and outside of the classroom. Below I review a few key studies that address different facets of student's of color sense of belonging at traditionally/predominantly White institutions.

Turner's (1994) *Guest in Someone Else's House: Students of Color*, is one of the more vivid studies that captures the feeling of being marginalized on a college campus. Students of color who were at least in their second year and had participated in a minority student support program at the University of Minnesota were invited to share their

experiences and perceptions of the campus climate. Although intentionally created programs and spaces were available on campus, overall, students of color found the university inhospitable and lonely. Similarly, other empirically supported studies (Fries-Britt, & Turner, 2002; Fries-Britt, & Turner, 2001; González, 2002; Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999) found comparable accounts of feelings of isolation, lacking support, and under-representation for students of color at PWIs. In one study, Solórzano and Yosso (2000) reported that African American students with the support of Black faculty and staff created “counter-spaces [to] serve as sites where deficit notions of people of color can be challenged and where a positive collegiate racial climate can be established and maintained” (p. 70). The question at hand is whether or not students’ of color view these intentionally created multicultural efforts any differently today than they did ten to fifteen years ago. Are multicultural programs and “counter-spaces” still viewed as supportive safe havens that primarily provide a temporary shelter from a less than welcoming campus community?

More recent studies indicate that many students of color still face unnecessary hurdles toward graduation through different facets of the college experience. As González (2002) points out, although there has been an increase in racial diversity on college campuses, this has not resulted in a more inclusive campus community. In González’s study, Chicano students articulated feelings of marginalization and alienation in their social, academic, and the physical environment of the campus. From a social standpoint, the interviewed students felt that there was a lack of Chicano representation on campus. One student shared his experience going to the campus student center and feeling ignored by a sea of White faces, and he never returned (González, p.203). From

an academic perspective, the Chicano students' resented the fact that their curriculum lacked any substantial material relating to the Chicano history or influences. Lastly, the physical environment lacked material and symbolic representation throughout the campus that reflected Chicano culture. As captured in González's study, a sense of belonging for students' of color encompasses all aspects of the college experience.

Findings from the González (2002) study does not differ greatly from the perspectives captured in the two studies by Fries-Britt and Turner (2002, 2001) that focused on African American students. The qualitative research focused on how African American students experienced their campus environment. The Fries-Britt and Turner (2002) study interviewed students attending TWIs and a group of students attending a historically Black college or university (HBCU). The related study addressed the different feelings of the student's sense of community and support from faculty and peers. Students attending the HBCU had a stronger sense of family and communal support, whereas at the TWI, African American students articulated limited support and the lack of a critical mass of Black faculty and students.

The second finding focused on how students expended their mental energy at the HBCU versus at the TWI. Black students attending the HBCU tended to be energized and were able to cultivate a network of academic and social support. At the TWI, the Black students often felt like tokens in the classroom expected to represent the voice of all Black people. Further, Black students felt like the TWI was socially set up for White students and had very limited opportunities tailored toward African American students. There was an under current of surviving at a TWI, whereas students were in fact thriving at the HBCU's. In an earlier study, Fries-Britt and Turners (2001) punctuated the

negative experience for African American students, and the unfortunate need for them to expend energy in ways that were counterproductive to their academic well being. Data were gathered through focus groups, and three themes were derived from the transcribed sessions: combating general stereotypes from others on campus (faculty and students); the need to continually prove their academic intellect; and dealing with affronts to their physical characteristics. The underlying impact of these various forms of stereotyping interferes with the student's ability to fully integrate into the campus community.

Unfortunately similar themes of isolation, stressors based on race, and an unwelcoming campus climate are pervasive in the other studies as well. Jones, Castellanos, and Cole (2002) interviewed students of color at a PWI who volunteered to participate in a focus group session. The participants were actively involved on campus and were regulars at the cultural center on campus. In addition to the broader themes mentioned above, the authors also focused in on the following categories: cross-cultural centers, specific departmental units, and other student involvement. The cross-cultural centers were viewed the most positively by the participants and were viewed as a respite from the rest of campus where they could reenergize, relax and connect culturally. The main critique was the remote location and lack of resources for the cultural center. Students' of color viewed the departmental units both positively and negatively, which is not surprising. Academic units represented a mix of supportive faculty, and some faculty members were perceived as insensitive on multicultural issues. The administrators in key leadership roles were viewed as trying to minimize their direct encounters with the students. The other burden mentioned by this group of students was the pressure they felt for representing "the" student of color voice within the campus community and to

challenge racial stereotypes. There was also a sense of ethnic segregation and a need for alliance building across racial groups. This study reflects complex realities for students of color attending a PWI, which includes the need to further understand how meaningful multicultural efforts are and to assist in their success while in college.

A more recent study by Johnson et al. (2007) examined the impact of student's racial/ethnic background on their overall sense of belonging during their college experience. Included in the research was involvement with faculty, in co-curricular activities, general perceptions of campus climate, and experience living in the residence halls. A key finding in this study was that overall students of color continue to have a slightly weaker sense of belonging on campus as compared to White students. One speculation for this finding may be attributed to students' assumptions and expectations prior to attending college, and/or their overall preconceived perceptions of campus climate. A more complex finding, based on different racial/ethnic backgrounds, was that interactions across racial backgrounds overall seemed to have little impact on a student's sense of belonging, which is somewhat conflicting when placed into a particular context. For example, participating in co-curricular activities was meaningful for Asian American and White students only; interacting with diverse peers was only significant for Latino/Hispanic students. Yet, students across all racial/ethnic groups, except multiracial students, indicated that they experienced a greater sense of belonging in a residence hall community that was socially supportive and inclusive based on various social identity differences, including race/ethnicity. Because of these mixed-findings, an in-depth analysis with students of color in a multicultural residence hall community could provide

greater insight to the value and impact how an intentionally created diverse community supports this finding.

Finally, Johnson (2003) conducted a quantitative study specifically examining the students' perceptions of the racial climate in residence halls by ethnic group. Overall, findings showed that Asian Americans felt least comfortable and welcome in their residence hall community, followed by African Americans, Latinos, and then Whites. This supports the empirical research by Berger (1997) indicating that students of color identify less with their residence hall community. A distinction that needs to be teased out from both of these studies is that the data gathered does not indicate whether students lived in a residence hall with an intentional multicultural emphasis. Further, students of color were less likely to be actively involved in the hall government, and perceived race to be a factor in whether or not a peer was willing to share a room (Johnson et al., 2007). Would these dynamics be different in a community with a stated purpose of engaging in multicultural issues and cross-racial interactions? Reflecting back on Turner (1994) how will we know when students of color no longer feel like a guest in someone else's house?

Conclusion

There is increasing evidence that all students benefit from a more racially diverse campus. It is also true that studies continue to show the challenges for students of color to fully acclimate and feel supported at college. Added to these realities is the complexity that educating "all" (White) students and supporting students of color have increasingly been framed as competing agendas. As Selznick (1992) notes, organizations are manipulated by individuals as a social structure and continually react and/or adapt to external forces as an economy that is "a system of relationships which define the

availability of scarce resources *and* which may be manipulated in terms of efficiency and effectiveness” (115). More simply put, by Perrow (1986), “organizations are tangled webs of relationships that [can] prevent it from fulfilling its real goals” (p. 160).

Therefore, more studies from a range of perspectives will be prudent, considering that institutions of higher education are likely to continue becoming more racially diverse, and that institutional efforts will continue to be pursued in order to address issues of diversity. To that end, my intention is to focus specifically on the experiences of students of color who have self-selected to live in an intentionally created multicultural community explicitly. The purpose is to add more in-depth knowledge about the students of color lived experiences from their own perspective. In the following section I will outline the how I intend to achieve this goal.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The primary goal of this phenomenological case study is to capture student voices and experiences that have been largely under-represented. More importantly, the student voices will illuminate the complex realities of being a student of color attending a PWI, framed within a particular context. I interviewed self-identified students of color who live in a designated multicultural residence hall community. In this chapter I will discuss how I approached the research and how the goals of this study were achieved. First, I will provide background information on the institution and particular residence hall to frame the context. Next, I will give an overview of my conceptual framework and how this study fits into a larger academic discourse. The third section will cover the overall design and provide a rationale for how this study is relevant. Fourth, I will address how I recruited participants for the study. The next two sections are dedicated to outlining in detail my data collection methods and data analysis, respectively. I will then discuss strategies used to ensure “trustworthiness” and ethical considerations within the study. I end by identifying limitations to the overall study.

Institutional and Program Background

As I have noted throughout, racial diversity initiatives have developed on many college campuses since the late 1960's. The institution at which I interviewed students also has a longstanding history of engaging in racial diversity initiatives within the campus community. With the consent and knowledge of my host institution and participants, I have elected to identify the specific institution where this study occurred. The rationale for not keeping the institution anonymous are based on practical and

philosophical reasons. First, the reality is that based on documentations that are referenced throughout the study, it is virtually impossible to mask the identity of the institution. Secondly, and more importantly, there can be greater value in identifying the place as a means of providing greater context for understanding. As Nespor (2000) points out, “naming places and tracing their constitutive processes allows researchers to emphasize connections among people, places, and events and to highlight the systems of relations and processes of articulation that produce boundaries and entities” (p. 556). And, as outlined below in my conceptual framework, having the ability to be transparent of space and time complements the individual student stories and experiences. Furthermore, if the reader seeks to consider transferable application, providing a specific context for meaning making allows for a more legitimate analysis for learning.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW-Madison), is a research extensive institution, and has had multiple “diversity plans” that date back to the mid 1980’s (Appendix E). The University’s diversity plan connected to the larger statewide system that provided a mandate to address racial diversity amongst the multiple state institutions. One of the first recommendations to be fulfilled based upon the Holley Report (Appendix E) was to develop a multicultural student center (MSC) that according to the current MSC webpage (Appendix E), specifically “focuses on the needs of five designated American ethnic groups: African American, American Indian, Asian American, Chicano/a and Puerto Rican”. Some of the goals for the MSC were to assist in students’ academic achievement, sense of belonging and cross-racial relationships. Following the Holley Report came three subsequent diversity plans: the 1988 Madison Plan; the Madison Commitment of 1993; and most recently, Plan 2008, was formalized in 1999

with the intention to build upon the former two (Appendix E). Plan 2008 is comprehensive in its goals, and cuts across all aspects of the University community. The idea of a multicultural living/learning community is listed as one of the potential initiatives to be more formally conceptualized by 2000. However, it was not until fall 2003 that the Multicultural Learning Community (MLC) was officially offered as a residential living option to students, this is according to documentation from the MLC Steering Committee notes (Appendix E). The MLC consists of 54 living spaces, and occupies a floor within a residence hall of over 1000 residents.

It is important to acknowledge that racially themed residence hall communities are not unique to UW-Madison. Two long-standing examples include Ujamaa at Stanford (Ujamaa, 2011, para. 1) and Chocolate City at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) (Chocolate City @ MIT, 2011, para.1) date back as early as 1970's, both of which are still in existence. What is unknown is how students of color value and make meaning of living in this type of community within their broader college experience. It is often true that once a program is put in place it simply becomes a part of the broader landscape with little to no ongoing evaluation of effectiveness and continued relevance to the targeted population.

Conceptual Framework

This study situated itself within the ongoing conversation regarding the benefits of racial diversity within institutions of higher education, specifically at predominately White institutions. The past decade in particular has provided substantial research that identifies and assesses the value of diversity within the college community (Chang, 2000; Chang, 2001a; Gurin, 1999; Hurtado, Milem et al., 1998). My intention is to refocus the

attention on how students of color benefit, and make meaning of their experience at a predominantly White institution. I plan to share students lived experiences using Van Maanen's (1990) existential themes based on "*lived space* (spatiality), *lived body* (corporeality), *lived time* (temporality), and *lived human relation* (relationality or communality)" (p. 101). Using this framework provided a natural relationship to capture the personal narratives and enhance our understanding of how the students made meaning of their experience.

Figure 1 illustrates my understanding of how the evolution of racial diversity has largely been attended to within higher education. Using Van Maanen's concepts will provide a means to better contextualize the student's experiences based on themes that emerge from their own narratives. Some of the emergent themes could likely fit within the frameworks noted in Figure 1, however, the goal of this study is to re-center the conversation based on the nuanced perspectives of students of color. The litmus test for how diversity initiatives have been valued has shifted over time; beginning with the priority focusing on understanding the transition for students of color, to justifying their existence from a dominant framework and how the present efforts benefit White students. As this shift in discourse has taken hold on many campuses and throughout much of the research, all too often students of color voices are captured in a monolithic manner that negates the nuanced experiences found within specific racial and ethnic identities, not to mention their own personal journey.

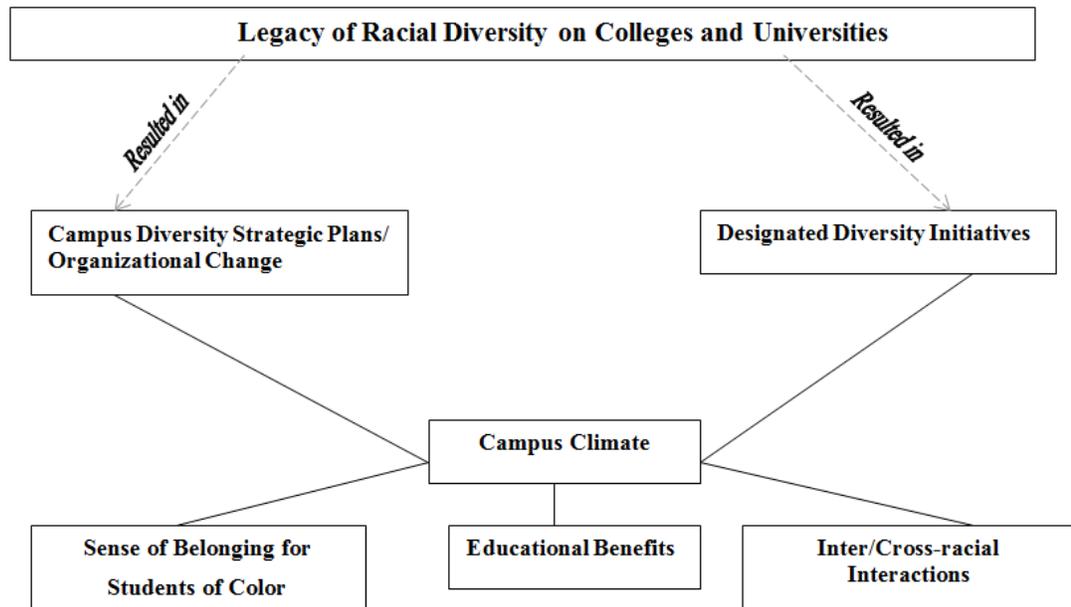


Figure 1: Addressing Racial Diversity in Higher Education

My goal is to elicit individual experiences and give voice to the lived realities of self-identified students of color. Many studies have not differentiated the experiences for students of color who actively participated in designated diversity initiatives from the experiences of those students not attached to such programs. Many generalizations have been made regarding students of color overall experience. My purpose was to assess the impact participating in an intentionally designed diversity program had from the student's perspective. More specifically, my research is intended to elucidate the student of color experience within a very specific context, living in a designated multicultural community.

How does intentional proximity across racial/ethnic differences in a designated living community impact how students make meaning across differences? What is their overall sense of belonging within the greater campus community? These are two of the underlining questions explored in this study. Through the use of emerging themes based

on the students narratives of their lived experiences on campus, in conjunction with Van Maanen's existential themes and the use of documents and publications about the community and the campus will provide the content-thick descriptions to better understand how student's view and experience their everyday lives.

Overall Design and Rationale

The purpose of this study is to capture individual student stories and realities that reflect the complexities of the students of color experiences living in a designated multicultural community. The findings will reflect the different ways in which students of color make meaning of inter/cross-racial relationships at a PWI. Utilizing qualitative research methods provided the most optimal way to gather in-depth data. This phenomenological case study will contribute to the overarching body of literature regarding diversity on college campuses by focusing in on student's experiences in a particular context. There is a limited amount of literature recognizing the multiple ways in which students make meaning of their campus environment racially, and what they identify as most beneficial to their overall academic success. Student of color voices are often marginalized or simply not heard. Therefore, this study provides the opportunity to add to our collective knowledge as scholars, and may prove to be personally significant for participating students. As stated by critical race theorist, Richard Delgado, "they [marginalized groups] reveal things about the world that we *ought* to know" (1990, p. 95). The value of conducting a phenomenological qualitative study was to provide a more in-depth narrative that allowed meaning to emerge as the study progressed, and for students of color to articulate their own experiences; which in turn provided a more complex understanding of the racial issues on campus.

My focus was specifically on self-identified students of color who attended a PWI. Therefore, I intentionally selected an institution that met the following criteria: a residential, public, research extensive campus that also offered an intentionally created multicultural residential living option. During fall 2009, the first-year student population at UW-Madison consisted of approximately 13 percent students of color on campus. As mentioned above, the specific community from which I have chosen to select participants is defined as a multicultural residence hall, or living/learning community. This particular living/learning community is currently in its seventh year of existence. The purpose of this multicultural learning community (MLC) is to intentionally foster and explore aspects of race and ethnicity as it relates on an interpersonal level, and for students to critically examine how aspects of diversity intertwine within their academic disciplines. Furthermore, according to the MLC webpage (Appendix E), the purpose of the community is to “discuss the intersections among aspects of identity and systems of oppression” and how these elements occur on an individual, societal and institutional level. Interactions across race/ethnicity is the essential element of difference being explored in this study, therefore this community provided the greatest pool to intentionally meet these criteria. Furthermore, the selected community provides additional resources dedicated to engaging students around the topic of diversity. In addition to tailored programming initiatives, students are also required to enroll in an academic seminar specifically designed for students living in the MLC. More training regarding awareness and cross-cultural dynamics is provided for student staff.

Participants

Participants self-identified as a student of color, and were in their first year of living in the same designated multicultural community; the participants represented a racially diverse group. My intention was to have 6-10 participants to sufficiently capture a range of shared, yet unique perspectives; I ended up with 11 participants. Since this is a phenomenological case study, the small number of participants afforded me the ability to facilitate in-depth interviews “who all experience similar structural and social conditions gives enormous power to the stories” (Seidman, 1998, p. 48), an approach that is consistent with the intended goal of this study.

I only interviewed students of color who are in their first year living in the MLC, and will use a purposeful selection of participants. As my focus is to study and gain insight about a particular shared phenomenon, purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990) served as an appropriate design strategy. Specifically, my participant pool consisted of the approximately sixty students that live in the MLC. Therefore, in addition to the broad invitation to participate that went out to all the residents, I relied on a degree of snowball sampling (Patton, 1990). This strategy addressed my second goal of ensuring maximum variation sampling (Patton, 1990) as a way to identify participants with different desired characteristics, in particular racial/ethnic identity. The process for obtaining my sample was to work with the Housing and Residence Life office to secure access to the community. I also worked specifically with the housing assignments office to determine what percentage of students of color lived in the community. Once access to the site was secured, I reached out directly to the professional staff that oversees the MLC residence hall to further assist me in identifying students to participate in the study. Information

describing the study was communicated via welcome e-mails, and handed out at community meetings held during the first week of the fall semester.

Data Collection Methods

One group interview and up to three individual interviews was my intended process to gather data, each interview was designed to last approximately one hour. Ultimately, the group interview and only two individual interviews were used to gather the data. The specific reasons for this strategy were: (1) to gain in-depth knowledge through dialogue to better capture the meaning individual students placed on their experience(s); (2) the use of a phenomenological approach allowed for greater descriptive and reflective learning to occur (Rossman & Rallis, 2003); and (3) the group interview provided the opportunity for individual student's to recognize that other students are participating and provide an opportunity for them to make greater meaning of their own experience through listening to other related perspectives and experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) within a shared context.

Once the participants were identified, I sent an email with the consent form (Appendix A) attached. My intention was to verify that participants met my criteria prior to meeting for the interview. However, based on the structure of the interview process, I waited until my first individual interview to learn how students self-identified racially/ethnically. During the group interview (Appendix B), I also reiterated the purpose of the study, reviewed the consent form and answered any initial questions that the students had before we began the interview.

For the interview process, I employed inductive inquiry (Creswell, 2007) as a way to remain flexible during the interview, and to seek further understanding based on the

participant's own words and meaning. I adapted Seidman's (1998) interviewing philosophy and conducted multiple in-depth interviews with the purpose of understanding the student's experience. Guiding interview questions (Appendix C) were used during the initial interview to learn about the student's experience in relation to living in a designated multicultural community. However, in order to be responsive to the student voice and experience, subsequent interview questions were not determined until after the first interview was completed. A general set of questions (Appendix D) were created as a guide, but were not necessarily universal for each student during the second interview. The goal of this research was to allow for the data to emerge as naturally as possible. Although the initial interview questions served as a working template, I refined succeeding interview questions to best follow the student narrative. Specific questions also needed to slightly shift focus based upon the particular period of their experience (i.e. beginning of academic year and late spring). All interviews were recorded, and subsequently transcribed. I also took ongoing field notes tracking my observations during the interviews.

Much of a college student's experience is shaped during their first year (Boyer, 1990; Tinto, 1998); therefore, it was ideal to conduct the first round of individual interviews in mid-September. The intention was to capture some of the student's decision-making process regarding what influenced their choice to live in a designated multicultural community. Additionally, since their environment will inherently impact how they continue to make meaning of their experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) in the residence hall and throughout campus, the first interview focused more on preconceived and early perceptions, rationale for selecting the specific residence hall,

expectations, and any additional background information that informed their view of the University.

The second interview was structured to allow the participant's to reflect on experiences up to that point, to revisit how their expectations were or were not met, challenged, changed, etc.. Some of the same questions were used, while other questions were specifically related back to responses participants provided during their initial interview. Since interviewing is an inherently iterative process the participant can be more reflective in her experiences (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Unique to the second interview, the participants all had a greater understanding of the environment and were able to provide more vivid details that reflected more depth to how she made sense of her experiences within a particular context. Moreover, the participants tended to engage in more "reflective dialogue" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) highlighting how she made meaning of her experiences and made new connections from the earlier interview. My goal as the interviewer was to follow the participant's narrative, summarize key thoughts, and ask follow-up questions based on better understanding how the participant made meaning, not on how I think meaning is being made.

As stated, I facilitated one group interview with all of the participants. The group interview took place before all individual interviews. As mentioned earlier, the purpose of the group interview was to provide students with the opportunity to hear others perspectives that in turn assisted in a better understanding and clarity to one's own experiences (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The additional value of the group interview for this study was to gain insight from a shared context and to add depth to the overall individual and shared experiences (Solórzano et al., 2000). Since groups

tend to be more socially oriented, a group interview offers a more relaxed atmosphere for authentic voices to be heard and validated (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

In addition to the structured interviews, analytical memos served as an immediate follow-up. The memos served as an internal journal of my observations during the interview, emerging thought process and documentation of any information that assisted my thinking for subsequent interviews, and/or potential emerging themes. Field notes based upon observation of the multicultural community were also documented and included as background information. Since I had access to the community I was able to make observations that enriched my understanding of the community, and provided greater context of the participants lived space. Visiting the site early on provided a broad sense of the community, and the follow-up visit enhanced my understanding and allowed for a better understanding of the emerging themes (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Data Analysis

The data analysis is specifically designed to capture the student's lived experiences in a particular context. As a way to organize the emerging data and to recognize the particular moment in time and context, I relied on the framework created by Van Maanen (1990) as my lens to reflect how meaning is made in the student's everyday lived experience. Van Maanen's existential themes coupled with the emerging themes provided a richer portrayal of the student's experiences.

To best capture and reflect a thick description (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) that provided a greater understanding of the students' lived world within a particular context, an inductive design best-afforded patterns to emerge naturally without defining preconceived dimensions (Patton, 1990). Furthermore, in order to represent an authentic

student voice, it was important to not presuppose that the participants would use language, and/or identify their lived experiences in the ways the majority of current literature reflects the themes as presented in the literature review. Using a framework that captured data within a contained moment, the themes based on time, body, space and relationship proved to be valuable for analysis of the data.

As the interviews occurred during distinct time periods, it was possible to promptly transcribe the interviews and perform an initial analysis of interviews in a timely manner. The transcriptions served multiple purposes. First, they allowed me to become more intimately acquainted with the data. Secondly, the multiple reviews of the transcribed data provided me with the opportunity to revisit my own notes from the actual interview process and added to my initial understanding and interpretation. Thirdly, I was able to continue assessing if I was capturing the *emic* voice and not the *etic* (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) through ongoing field notes. This reflexive process served as a guide for subsequent interviews and provided greater insight and prompted me to analytically engage with what I perceived to know and how I know it (Patton, 1990), which led to a more informed analysis.

I served as the sole transcriber of the recordings, but had initially informed all of the participants that an outside transcriber might also assist in completing some of the transcriptions. Once the group interview and final set of individual interviews was transcribed, major themes were captured in individual matrix sheets. To increase my understanding of the data I sorted the data into multiple formats. I maintained portfolio on each student that provided a holistic picture to reflect upon the participants individually. I sorted the data based on the Van Maanen (1990) existential themes, and I

then sorted the data based upon emerging themes. Through this process I was able to identify overarching themes shared amongst all the participants, including the data from the group interview. This allowed me to triangulate the data based upon the multiple individual interviews, the group interview, field notes and additional materials and documentation related to the institution and the MLC.

As categories began to emerge based upon the participant's own words, I clustered data from individual cases for deeper analysis of the collective data. In order to identify categories and eventually themes, I generated summary forms initially for each individual case (i.e. student) that pulled out descriptive narrative and fit into Van Maanen's (1990) existential themes. First, I did an initial read through to simply become more acquainted with the data. I then did multiple reads of all the interviews to capture each specific existential theme: time, space, body and relationship. I then reread all the transcriptions to begin identifying emerging themes. What this process led to was how I organized the findings sections. The iterative process as the researcher assisted me to organize the data that reflects the Van Maanen themes as underlining conceptual framework, while integrating and honoring the student's voices through the emerging themes. I was able to synthesize the data in a way that informs our understanding of the students lived experience within a specific context.

One additional means of authentically representing the data was to seek feedback from the participants. In addition to the strategies mentioned above, I invited participants to read the transcribed interviews to check for accuracy and clarification of meaning. Although I received no feedback from any of the participants, this could have provided greater insight in how I interpreted/made meaning, as it may not fully align with how the

participants would interpret some aspect of their experience. Ultimately this extra measure of data checking related directly to facilitating research that would be deemed trustworthy and cognizant of ethical dilemmas that were tended to throughout the study.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

I am confident that this study will meet any potential scrutiny regarding trustworthiness as valid and useful qualitative research. Trustworthiness comes from a study meeting ethical standards of practice (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). My intention is to provide research that contributes to the broader discourse, is viewed as credible by fellow researchers, useful to practitioners and informative for policymakers. Therefore, this study aims to complement the standards of rigor set by the professional field; is well grounded in the relevant literature and provide a sound conceptual framework to guide the research.

As my study will be bound by time and context, therefore, how rigor is defined is not based on other's ability to replicate. Consequently, it is essential that I am clear in my ability to illustrate a study that is conceived through critical, thoughtful reasoning and in my ability to conduct the research in a well thought out and critically relevant manner. This study will apply a systematic process for gathering and analyzing data as a means to validate the credibility of the research (Creswell, 2007; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). My methodology will be transparent and I intend to be scrupulous in tending to the details of the data gathering and analysis process. It will be clear how information from round one interview's informs my decisions and direction for round two interviews, with the possibility for a round three interview. An initial group interview will occur prior to any individual interviews. An audit trail of transcribed interviews, interview notes, analytic

memos, field notes and participant feedback will all serve as a means to be intentional to although purposeful data to emerge and to represent participant voices accurately and authentically.

In terms of meeting the standards of the host institution for my research, the Institutional Research Board of the institutional guidelines were followed thoroughly. I ensured that the process of obtaining participant consent is formally documented; assurances that taking part is completely voluntary and that the participants were able to cease their involvement at any given time during the study. I have safeguarded the participant consent forms to ensure the integrity of the study and to honor the privacy of the participants involved. Furthermore, I am mindful of the participant's personal rights for privacy and confidentiality. I assured participants that our conversations and recordings will remain confidential. Each participant was given a pseudonym to safeguard their privacy, however I did inform participants that ultimately it is impossible to guarantee complete anonymity. All recordings will be kept securely and destroyed once recordings have been transcribed. Originally transcribed interviews will be kept for a minimum of three years or length of time dictated by the host institution, upon completion of the study.

The final consideration was to recognize how my own personal values and beliefs can impact the study. I do believe that I have some experiences and characteristics that potentially placed me as both an 'insider' and an 'outsider' simultaneously that influenced the interview process. One way that I addressed this dilemma was through what Creswell (2007) refers to as *bracketing* my own experiences. This is to say, that to honor the *emic* (participant) voice, that as the researcher I needed to by extremely

cognizant of my own understanding and experiences. Considering the nature of my study, my interactions and interviews inherently impact the participants to varying degrees. The goal is to honor their voices, and to recognize when the *etic* voice is more prominent than desired.

Limitations Of The Study

There are two obvious limitations to this study: limited number of participants and the narrow focus of one institution. Since the purpose of this study was to take a snapshot of student's experiences in a very specific context, the knowledge could be informative for future studies, but the specific findings are too limited to a particular space and time for any broad assertions to be made based on the findings. However, based upon this study, other institutions may recognize the value of conducting their own related research and/or evaluation of similar programs. This study was conducted with a limited number of participants, which allowed for a more in-depth description of individual narratives and the formation of a *thick description* (Geertz, 1973). Based upon the comprehensive description of the student's experiences the reader will be able to determine if the findings can be applied or related to other settings.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This chapter consists of four primary sections. First, provides more in-depth background information on the multicultural learning community (MLC), and university context in which this study was completed. Secondly, background information on the students who were interviewed, their cultural background and how they chose to live in the MLC. Third is how the students made meaning of their own experiences living in the MLC are presented. Selections from transcripts interviews, university publications, institutional diversity reports and documents, and observation notes will be used to convey the findings. Lastly, suggestions on how to strengthen the MLC are offered by the students.

The Multicultural Learning Community and University Context

One of the underlying questions that this study seeks to answer is *How does living in a designated multicultural community relate to students' overall experience on campus?* It is important to provide a campus context regarding the University's history in supporting students of color. Cited in the previous chapter were the various diversity reports (Appendix E) that were each developed to guide the University's diversity efforts throughout the past three decades. Some of the primary tenets of these documents are to increase the number of faculty and staff of color; to increase the number of enrolled students of color; to increase the number of students of color graduating from the University; and to foster an environment in and out of the classroom that instills respect for racial/ethnic diversity. In conjunction with these reports, there are many academic bridge programs (Appendix E) and support services that are designed specifically to

reach out to guide and assist with the transition for incoming students of color. There are seemingly many initiatives on campus with the primary goal of assisting students of color to succeed academically and emotionally.

University of Wisconsin-Madison has had specialty living/learning residential communities since 1995. The MLC was originally conceived with students, staff and faculty during the 2000 academic year in response to part of the university's diversity initiatives. Fall 2003 marked the first semester of the MLC that consists of one floor of 54 coeds living in a building housing over 1150 students. The mission of the MLC program, according to the official website (Appendix E) is to create a residential living/learning community that is "dedicated to serving students who have a thirst to understand the problems, issues, benefits, and contributions of human diversity and social justice." As previously covered, communities like the MLC at UW-Madison are not unique to this college campus.

An additional fee is added to all the living/learning communities as a way to subsidize the extra staff and enhanced programmatic opportunities that are offered in these programs. Although the MLC has always had an additional \$200.00 student fee, Fall 2009 was the first year that the residents were required to pay this fee out of pocket; previously the costs were absorbed by preexisting budgets within University Housing. It is important to mention that the fee created a point of dissonance for some of the students I interviewed, which I will address in more detail in the last section of the findings. Although small in numbers the MLC depends on these additional resources to assist in fulfilling its purpose as a living/learning community, and to better support the opportunities offered to students living in the MLC.

The MLC, like all of the living/learning communities, has its own distinct evolution and structure tailored toward the overall mission of the community. As pointed out in the literature review, many students of color express an increased sense of isolation and alienation (Fries-Britt, & Turner, 2002; Fries-Britt, & Turner, 2001; González, 2002; Martínez Alemán, 2000; Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999; Turner, 1994) attending a PWI, meaning there can be a heightened sense of loneliness where students live on campus. One of the purposes of the MLC is to assist students of color in their transition to the University by creating a supportive community. As the findings from this study are presented later in this chapter indicate not all the students are equally enthusiastic about living in the MLC, and some were glad to be moving on by the end of the year. However, the findings also reflect that all of the students developed supportive friendships in the MLC, or found the MLC to serve as a respite from other parts of the campus community.

As with all on campus housing assignments, students had the opportunity to rank order their preference for which residence hall and learning community they would prefer to live in for the year. Throughout the seven-year existence, the MLC has never filled up with students who selected it as their first choice. Over 50% of the students have consistently ranked the MLC as their first choice, and the remaining 50% consist of students who ranked it 2nd through 5th. During the year in which the study was completed, forty-six of the students identified racial/ethnically as either non-White or as multi/biracial. Specifically, 3 students identified as bi/multiracial, 1 as Native American, 11 as Chicano/a or Latino/a, 14 Asian American/Pacific Islander, 16 as Black/African American, and 9 White students. The University undergraduate population consists of

approximately 13.2% self-identified undergraduate students of color, and in University Housing approximately 7% of the students self-identify as students of color.

Structurally, all of the on-campus residence halls of this size at UW-Madison, have two fulltime, masters level staff, one that lives in the residence hall and one resident assistant (RA) assigned to live on the floor with the students. Additionally, the MLC has dedicated five more student staff positions: a Diversity Coordinator, two interns, a program coordinator, and an administrative assistant. As with all of the living/learning communities sponsored through University Housing, there is a Faculty Director and teaching assistant who work with the community. Their primary responsibility is to teach the academic seminar each semester that students living in the MLC are required to take either fall or spring semester. The steering committee also convenes once a semester to review the past year and to discuss any pertinent issues for the upcoming year.

From its initial inception in 2000, MLC has received varying degrees of support from “key stakeholders” throughout the University. Campus administrators and faculty who work with the various bridge programs, campus partners who are involved and committed to improving the campus climate for students of color and staff internal to University Housing represent this body. Many of these individuals have been invited to serve on the steering committee for the MLC that provides ongoing advice and support for the program. Some of these individuals have resisted working in concert with the community, feeling like creating a “multicultural floor” somehow “ghettoizes” the students who choose to live in the community. According to the primary MLC staff, little effort is made to avoid scheduling conflicts due to the philosophical difference from some campus partners who oversee particular bridge programs. However, other bridge

programs have embraced the MLC and in turn, have required that their students live in the MLC during their first year. Unfortunately, even with supportive bridge programs conflicts are not necessarily avoided; there are still competing commitments for students simply based on the time constraints and overlapping programmatic requirements. Thirty-six of the fifty-four students living in the MLC are affiliated with one or more of the marquee bridge programs on campus. All of the students interviewed for this study were affiliated with one or more bridge programs.

Unfortunately, based on the small number of students of color on campus, some of the bridge programs inadvertently end up competing for the same students. Depending upon the incoming students' financial and academic needs a student could be affiliated with more than one program. Each bridge program has its own demands and expectations, and at times they overlap with other programs, which in turn presents the student with competing commitments. Since the bridge programs provide financial assistance and require that the students maintaining a particular GPA to remain in the bridge program and receive financial support, students have limited choice in how they spend their time. According to the students, this is one of the primary factors that often forces students to prioritize bridge programs over more involvement in the MLC. Each of the bridge programs has its own orientation at the beginning of the fall semester and regular meeting commitments; one of the programs also has a required course during the fall semester. The additional course overlaps with the seminar affiliated with the MLC, therefore, limits and/or hinders involvement by many of the students living in the MLC. Once students choose to live in the MLC, they are required to enroll in *Multiculturalism in Societal Places And Other Spaces*, the three-credit seminar course, during the fall or

spring semester. Students are also expected to become actively involved in the floor community, particularly at the beginning of the semester as a way of developing the community and getting to know their floor mates.

Student Backgrounds

Students who participated in the study were all self-selected participants. The criteria for their participation was A) that they lived in the MLC and B) that they self-identified as a student of color. During the initial outreach fourteen students indicated interest in participating. However, I ultimately only interviewed 12 students during the fall semester. One student, who I reached out to multiple times and left messages to meet, ultimately elected not to be interviewed during the spring semester for unknown reasons. One student did identify as White racially and ethnically, but grew up in a predominantly Dominican Republican neighborhood and she was determined to make cultural distinctions based on this cultural influence. I did interview her during both semesters, however I did not include her story in my findings, as seeking the White student perspective was not the primary focus of the study. Below I provide a broad sketch about some general characteristics of the students interviewed. I then introduce the individual students using pseudonyms prior to discussing my findings and emerging themes. It is worth noting that pseudonyms have also been given when the participants directly reference other individuals as well.

The group interview was conducted before all individual interviews during the fall semester. All of the students, with the exception of two who had a conflict based on their involvement in a bridge program participated in the group interview. As mentioned, all of the students who were interviewed were affiliated with one or more of the primary

bridge programs on campus; four students were in the bridge program that required that they live in the MLC. The remaining seven students self-selected to live in the MLC based on older students' recommendations or based on the University Housing material sent to them over the summer. One student was a second year student who had lived in the same building the year before but not on the MLC floor. At least half of the students interviewed stated that the only reason they attend UW-Madison, is because of the scholarship provided through their respective program.

Three of the participants were male, eight female; five identified as Black/African-American; one Asian/Pacific Islander; one Chicana; four as bi/multiracial. Considering the racial make-up of the MLC, the participants were not as diverse as I would have preferred. The most prominent void was the lack of representation of Asian-American student voices. Eight of the eleven Asian-American/Pacific Islander students living in the MLC self-identified as Hmong, having their voice and perspective included could have provided a narrative that is rarely presented. However, the students who did participate reflect diversity in terms of how they individually identify and embrace their racial and ethnic backgrounds.

As a way of getting the initial individual interview started, I asked each student to share a little about their background, and to begin by sharing whatever was most salient to them. Due to the student's awareness that my research topic focused on student of color experiences in the MLC, it did not come as a surprise that the majority of the students readily shared how they identified racially/ethnically as a part of their introduction. The two who didn't were both Black females, which I suspect was an

assumed understanding as they both referred to their experiences being Black throughout the interview. Below is a compilation of students self-identifying, in their own words.

Lakisha Robinson-*Well, I am biracial, my dad is Black and my mom is White. I went to school in Columbus, really rural and predominantly White--me, my sisters and my brother were the only people of color that were there;*

Genella Jackson-*My mom is Caucasian, Irish, Italian, German, umm Swedish and Mongolian. And, then my dad is half Mexican and half African American;*

Monica Johnson-*From African American descent. I live with my mother and my father, I have two brothers. I have a really close knit family, I have a huge family...almost like the Cosby's;*

Maribel Jaramillo-*My father emmigrated here from Mexico, I don't know when, but he's Mexican. And my mother was born in Texas, she's Chicana, so I kinda...I consider myself Chicana;*

Crisanto Delgado-*I think beside myself there were like 3-4 other Filipino students;*

Leticia Badeau-*My mom is Puerto Rican, and grew up in NYC. My dad is White and grew up in Wisconsin. My whole experience growing up is being with my moms' family which is Puerto Rican;*

Forrest Ellis-*I'm from, I'm originally an immigrant, I'm from New Amsterdam-Berbice, Guyana in South America, right next to Venezuela and I came here when I was 9 years old;*

Calvin Dickson-*Openly homosexual, Native American, African American and White-Irish; father is white; my mother is Irish, Native American Blackfoot and Cherokee, and black. My family ranges from all tones of people--as light as me to as dark as an African;*

Dionne Emerson-*I guess the best place to start is my heritage, I'm African American and Sicilian, my father is biracial, I'm not familiar with my fathers' family as much.*

What makes the above sequence so illuminating is not merely the variation of backgrounds, but the ease in how they articulate their own identity. How the students make meaning of her/his identity over the course of eight months between our interviews becomes much more nuanced. For each student a greater sense of discovery takes places

which for some seems to provide a greater sense of clarity, while for others a deeper and more complex sense of identity seems to be unfolding. As I interviewed the students individually, and in the group interview, I was struck by how reflective they were about where they came from, why they chose this institution and the ways in which they were hoping to learn and grow while living in the MLC.

To better understand the findings a more textured introduction of each student is in order. It is important to note that the descriptions below are how I experienced each student during the interview process. What is represented here is a limited slice of how I interpret how each student actualizes self.

Monica - had a very strong sense of self, reflective and thoughtful, and viewed herself as a leader. Monica is one of the four students who is required to live in the MLC and is on a full scholarship via her involvement in the *First Wave* bridge/scholarship program (Appendix E). She and the three other students who are a part of *First Wave* clearly articulated that none of them would be attending UW-Madison if they were not receiving a full scholarship from *First Wave*.

Forrest - Also a *First Wave* recipient actually competed with Monica for the same scholarship in the New Jersey/New York City area. Fortunately for both of them, the program granted two winners this past year. Forrest is very independent which he attributes to being raised early on by his grandmother while his mother was already in the United States trying to establish the home that Forrest arrived to when he was nine years old. Forrest was very methodical in his responses and self-assured about his purpose for attending UW-Madison and the strategies that he would use to succeed.

Dionne – grew-up in a predominantly Black neighborhood of Chicago, and has a very strong African American identity. She came to UW-Madison from a performing arts high school and was another *First Wave* scholarship recipient. She resented being required to live in the residence halls, much less the MLC, and in turn was the most vocal about having to pay the additional \$200.00 fee. She felt strongly that simply living together with other students of color was not enough to create a sense of community. Furthermore, Dionne mentioned how much time she spent in the MLC the year before while visiting friends during her senior year of high school. She very much had a “been there, done that” attitude regarding the MLC experience. She too had a very strong sense of self, and seemed very clear in terms of her goals and hopes for attending the university.

Crisanto – was a fourth *First Wave* student. He identifies as Filipino, more specifically as Chamorro³, and this seemed to present him with some tension in terms of what that was supposed to mean for him. Crisanto was as he put it, a self-defined “radical intellectual”, meaning he is an activist regarding many topics related to social justice and social identities. Crisanto engaged with a much more complex and critical lens regarding aspects of race/ethnicity and all aspects of identity. And, although he too was required to live in the MLC, he was very clear that this would have been his choice of community regardless.

The two students who did not mention their ethnicity when introducing themselves were **Brandi Perkins** and **Wilhemina Jackson**, both Black females. Brandi

³ Referring to the indigenous population of Guam and the Marianas, the term “Chamorro” is one that has its oldest documented origins in records dating back to the 16th century European expeditions in the Pacific (<http://tiny.cc/sorlm>)

was the most guarded of all the students I interviewed. Although she was less reserved during our second meeting, she certainly still held a lot of her feelings and experiences inside. She grew up in an urban community in the Midwest, and was much less self-assured than many of her peers. Brandi was one of the students that probably most relied on the MLC for a sense of community throughout the entire year.

Wilhemina was also reserved but it seemed she was simply a quieter, more soft-spoken person in general. She was one of three students who also happened to grow-up in the community in which the University is located. She did not provide much depth throughout the interview processes, but she was steadfast in her enthusiasm about living in the MLC. However, when meeting with her during the second interview she did not seem to have many close bonds or connections to many of the students living on her floor.

Maribel – grew up in the same town as the University and was the one student who opted not to be interviewed a second time. She identified as Chicana, although she seemed to do so with some reservation. When I engaged further into why she identified as Chicana specifically, she simply stated, “because that is how my mom identifies.” She did not seem to have a sense of cultural awareness in terms of the history behind identifying as Chicana, versus Mexican American, Latina or Hispanic; and did not identify as Mexican like her father.

One of the other student’s, who graduated from a local high school, was **Lakisha**. She was very enthusiastic about living in the MLC and excited to be living with so many students of color. She identifies as biracial, Black and White, and is the student that mentioned being the only family of color in her town growing up. Lakisha’s second

semester interview was significantly impacted by the fact that during winter break she got engaged to be married and found out that she was pregnant. She had been drifting away from the MLC community since late fall semester, by the time spring semester Lakisha only went to the MLC for a change of clothes.

One of the most colorful students that I interviewed was **Calvin**. Calvin's name had come up numerous times by other participants and by the professional staff in the building prior to our meeting. Calvin seemed to be negotiating his multiple identities and one way for him to do this was through being very animated and very loud. He openly identified as gay and although he also self-identified as being multiracial, his Black identity was most salient to him. Calvin was very forthcoming with his opinions that caused for ongoing tension with other members on the floor. Because of these tensions by the time I met with Calvin in the spring he was more than ready to be moving out of the MLC. Yet, when asked to reflect on his experience living in the MLC versus another floor, he was thankful that he had not live on a predominantly White floor.

Leticia – grew up in the mid-Atlantic region with the Puerto Rican side of her family through her junior year in high school. The high school she attended was racially diverse, primarily with African American and a mix of Latino students; Puerto Ricans and Mexican students who were either first-generation or recently migrated to the United States. Listening to Leticia talk about the segregation at her high school, there was a strong disconnect in how she identified culturally, yet did not seem to relate to the other Latino students. She tended to place herself outside of the racial diversity of her school. As she finished up high school in the Midwest, she and one other student were ultimately the only persons that identified as something other than White. That experience seemed

to provide Leticia with a greater desire to integrate more fully with students of color in college.

Genella - is the only second-year student that participated in the study. She lived in the residence hall that houses the MLC during her first year and found that she was more comfortable on the MLC floor than on her own. Since she was planning on returning to the residence halls for a second year, she chose to live in the MLC anticipating a supportive and welcoming community. Genella identifies as multiracial and was strongly influenced by her Mexican grandmother and heritage on her dad's side of the family. She grew up dancing in Ballet Folklorico with her grandmother, aunts and sister. Coming into college Genella talked about not feeling readily accepted by the White students, or by the Black and Latino students. The first time she mentions feeling connected on campus is once she befriends the RA on the MLC floor, who is a Black female.

The students interviewed for this study provides a small window into the experiences of students of color at a predominantly White institution finding their way in unfamiliar terrain. What follows are the emerging themes that best capture their individual and collective voices living in a shared community that is designed to develop cultural insight and incites further curiosity. Although one could draw some similarities to many of the overarching themes cited in the literature review in chapter two, I do believe some nuanced differences were captured in this study. Most importantly is the use of the participants' own language to identify prevailing themes that work in concert with the conceptual framework outlined in chapter three.

Findings - Themes

My first interaction with the students came during the group interview, and it was readily evident that they were a group of confident individuals. Although it was only the second week of the semester, most of the students already seemed familiar with one another and were eager to talk about their experiences and perceptions. The group interview provided the first insight into the tensions of feelings that many of them had about living on a designated “multicultural floor.” On the one hand, students could see and feel the value of having such a comfortable place to come home to after a busy day on campus; yet, there was a decidedly shared sentiment of “why should we have to pay for such an experience.” And, it was more about the *idea* of having to pay more, not necessarily the nominal fee that was tacked on to their housing payment. As one student put it, “we’ll have to pick one floor to see people of our kind [it] is ridiculous and is sad in some ways.” This is one way that they acknowledged that the racial and ethnic diversity throughout campus was sparse. Monica continues on:

We’re paying to seclude ourselves, because since this campus is so big and it’s filled with so many White people, we have to pay to be around people of our color and then on top of that, we lose out on getting to know so many other people because there’s just so many [White students], it’s like I can’t live on the upstairs floor, and it’s like we’re the only floor on campus and it’s just a floor—it’s not even a diversity building because we couldn’t fill a whole building because there’s not that many of us.

Comments like this were recurrent threads in many of the student interviews. There was a constant push and pull with what it meant to meet their own needs while feeling like they either needed to be concerned with others or reconciling what they valued internally.

Conducting the group interview prior to meeting with the students individually proved to be interesting and revealing. The students fed off each other’s ideas and feelings about

their new surroundings, yet there was also a strong sense of independent thought regarding their individual experiences. During the group conversation the primary sentiments that surfaced was a desire to live in a community that felt comfortable, accepting and where they were not the only student of color in a sea of White faces.

More extensively, the themes that I identified from the group and individual interviews embody the ongoing juxtapositions of experiences for the students, if not in title, certainly in content. The primary themes that surfaced were 1) horizons broadened; most students also talked about hoping to gain new perspectives through their experiences in the MLC; 2) identity; intersections of social identities and the ongoing dialogue of how to make meaning of their own racial/ethnic identity; 3) “shouldered responsibility”, meaning on the one hand feeling compelled to contribute and give back to their community, while at the same time trying to stay engaged with White students around topics of diversity; 4) microaggressions, encounters of casual everyday acts of racism; and 5) MLC as family. As the student narratives shaped the themes, it became apparent that using Van Maanen’s (1990) existential themes of “*lived space* (spatiality), *lived body* (corporeality), *lived time* (temporality), and *lived human relation* (relationality or communality)” (p. 101) served as a valuable framework to analyze and organize the findings. How the Van Maanen themes relate to the findings will be explored in detail in the discussion chapter.

Horizons Broadened/Gaining Different Perspectives

Although students seemed to wrestle with disharmonious feelings, many of them were excited at the prospect of leaning into the unfamiliar and uncomfortable to learn from different perspectives. Having their “horizons broadened” exemplifies how the

“lived relationships” (p. 104) students developed and maintained, and the interpersonal space that they were willing to share and explore with one another. The extent to which students were willing to expand their experiences or how they viewed the world varied. Simply living with a roommate of a different racial/ethnic background or being exposed to topics and ideas from a viewpoint that they had never considered was pinnacle for expanding student’s awareness.

During the first individual interview I essentially asked students what they hoped they would gain by the end of the year. During the second interview, I revisited this question and asked them if what they initially anticipated has been achieved. For many of the students, they talked about meeting other individuals from different backgrounds, or becoming more culturally aware. Wilhemina shared that her roommate is from Japan, and had she not lived in the MLC that they likely would have never met. She shares how living on the MLC has opened her eyes to differences and the potential values she will gain long term:

There's just so many different backgrounds of people I've been meeting, so I like it. I'm just learning that I can get along with anybody and it's not really been a problem before, cause I just like meeting other people and learning about their ways. [...] I think being on the MLC will just help me be more willing to help anybody and just keep an open mind of what they've been through and what their struggles have been, since I'm living with such a diverse group of people I can't make assumptions about what they've been through because of their race or anything like that. So, it will just help me be more understanding.

Others spoke of meeting students from different racial/ethnic backgrounds, either as their roommate or floor mate. Many of their initial insights reflect a cursory exposure:

Maribel: Gaining different perspectives and learning people's ideas and beliefs, and just like, learning different cultures because I've never met a Filipino before and there's one on our floor, and so that was new and different and I like that.

Monica: My roommate is from El Salvador. I'm getting to know her music, her way of dress, the poetry she likes and all that stuff and where we can relate.

Brandi: my roommate is a Hmong student. It's pretty nice, she's nice. I mean we don't see each other that much, because I mainly hang out in Calvin's room when I'm not studying. Oh, she's Hmong, that's cool. I learned that a lot of Asian people don't put butter on their rice. I don't know, it's different for me, in my family and a lot of Black families we put butter on our rice. We don't eat plain rice.

Calvin: My roommate, more specifically, (Vietnamese), he pisses me off with some of the things he says that he feels about Black people, but I get pissed that because we gotta live together. I mean, we talk and we've had so many discussions such about how Asian culture in general is such a prideful culture, it's a lot with honor and a lot about education. [...] We've had discussions where at the end we were able to recognize each other ethnicities, that they had their faults.

During the second round of interviews students tended to provide more depth to talking about their cross-racial relationships, and more clearly articulated what they had learned or gained from these new relationships. I specifically asked students to share what cross-racial relationship had been most meaningful to them during the academic year, for Forrest, he had a very nuanced response:

One thing that I've learned is that, I don't think it's just me per se, but you tend to make friends who are similar to you, you know. Or, umm...I'm not a pachanga⁵, I'm not having these (friendships) for one purpose, these are multipurpose friends you know. I can study with them, I can hang out with them, play video games, I feel comfortable with them and can talk to them about my problems, you know and to me that's what a friend is...people that are multi-purposed, in your life, they can do a lot of things for you and you can do a lot of things for them depending on if they want you to. Ethnically, a lot of them are Black, but they're Black and something else. One of my friends, he's Black and Indian; one of my friends in Caribbean, he has Carribbean heritage like myself; another one of my friends, he's African; another one, he's Buddhist. Through my other friend, his roommate, who's also my friend, he's Indian and also not from this country like me. They're from everywhere...

Calvin's deeper growth was recognizing how he was impacted by internalized oppression as a Black male, and identifying ways to reconcile his relationships with the other Black

⁵ According to Forrest, his use of the term *Pachanga* is slang to essentially mean someone who used to be your friend, but is no longer because it's not convenient.

males in the MLC. However, he also grew in terms of cross-racial relationships, with his Vietnamese roommate and with a couple of Latino students on the floor.

I use to not like that fact that they didn't speak English, I use to not think that immigrants should not automatically become citizens. Both of those were dispelled I have become more sympathetic of that situation as well because of my personal relationships.

Calvin is less polished than some of his peers, and was much more steeped in making sure that others understood his multiple identities, specifically being Black and gay. For him to recognize that he also needed to be more open to others from different racial/cultural backgrounds was significant in his growth. Based on some of Calvin's comments during our first interview alluding to him being more *aware* than his peers around issues of diversity, I do not believe he had the capacity to identify or articulate that he too could engage with others around their race/ethnicity in a way that was meaningful to his own growth.

Leticia's circle of friends also expanded during her year living in the MLC, and she offers how this is likely the case for others within the community:

In terms of people changing and the pettiness that was going on last semester, is changing because people in-and-of themselves are growing. I think one of the great things about this floor is that everybody is so different that you may think because we have similar skin tones, or similar ethnicities or similar towns that we come from that we're going to be a like. So the initial pairings that formed aren't really close anymore. A lot of people have drifted and found new really close friends who are completely different from themselves.

Leticia goes on at length about the development of a friendship she has that evolved with a White female from the South. She shared how this particular friendship helped her to challenge her own assumptions and opinions, while at the same time doing the same for her friend as it related to stereotypes about the Puerto Rican culture. Living on the floor with such a racially and culturally diverse group provided deep and rich opportunities for

students to engage in meaningful cross-racial interactions and to develop some important friendships. One of the other aspects of living in the MLC was the ability to take a seminar together that has been specifically created for students living in the MLC.

The MLC seminar offered a more structured avenue for students to participate in meaningful cross-racial interactions. According to the syllabus (Appendix E) the seminar is an introductory course on multiculturalism stating the following as learning outcomes:

- Examine your own beliefs, ideas, behaviors and involvement in issues
- Discuss the intersections among aspects of identity and systems of oppression
- Identify the dynamics of power relations and the associated material effects
- Examine how life experiences are shaped by factors at the individual, societal, and institutional levels
- Identify and/or formulate plans of action that challenge/resist oppression/oppressive forces

Students talked about the seminar as significant to their learning and a place where their views were challenged. The seminar provided the space to consider issues of diversity and differences from multiple perspectives.

Genella: I feel...like we talk about oppression and who's being oppressed and I guess for me, I realized that there were a lot of different groups being oppressed, but to me it was more of a Black/White issue until we talked about it in class.

Lakisha: In the seminar, right now we're focusing on social justice and what it means[...]the discussion and the things we talk about there, like, I would never have imagined that we would be able to do that in class anywhere, we talk a lot about race and what it means to be Black or White or how there's different types of oppression that I've never even heard of, ever. Like sexism, well I've heard of that, but heterosexism and classism, like they were things I was aware but I really didn't think that it was oppression in a sense.

For others, the seminar was such a profound experience because it altered or added clarity influencing the direction for their academic and career choices. Leticia, who ultimately did not participate in the floor significantly throughout the year, shared the most poignant example:

one thing that I think impacted me most was through the seminar. [Share a little bit more about the seminar and how that helped you make meaning around your experience here. What was it about the seminar?] The topics that we covered and like just becoming aware of what's going on, especially about things on campus and things that are [going on] globally. [is there one particular example that sticks out for you, or one topic that you got involved in...] inequality in education--I mean learning about that, I think just solidified like me wanting to do education even more. I still want to teach, but I think I might want to go into administration or policy.

Beyond introducing students to concepts and perspectives that they were previously unaware of, the interactions in the seminar provided the students with the opportunity to get to know each other in a deeper and more meaningful way that extended beyond living on the same floor.

Forrest: So there are people on the floor that you've only seen twice, you know...probably only met four times or there are people I've only seen once because they don't hang out on the floor. But umm, like the people that you do see you get to know a lot about them and how they conduct themselves outside of you, in big groups how they interact.

Leticica: I know that might sound a little cliché, but I think the seminar has helped me broaden my own views of the people I live with and not just see them as kind of one dimensional characters.

Monica: The MLC course that I am taking this year, with most of the students from the floor is something that has affected me as an individual and has helped me grow as a student. And that's directly related to the floor because students have to take the seminar, and there's something very special because it's an opportunity for all of us to get together outside of just our comfort realms and actually see how we think.

Monica shared the strongest opinion on the meaning of participating in the seminar. She was very thoughtful in her reflections and seemed genuinely appreciative of the exchange of ideas and discourse that were facilitated in the classroom. She shared a similar sentiment as Forrest about having the opportunity to learn more about peers on her floor, and their thought process. Monica also embraced the debates in classroom and experienced the conversations extending back to the floor after class.

Monica: I see myself debating with a lot of the students in the classroom and saying like, "okay, I know you feel this way about affirmative action, but this is how I feel about it", and we go back and forth, and it's beautiful because at the end of the day when we get on our floor we can say, "hey" like, you realize that like these people are extremely intelligent. I'm in the class with my roommate and me and my roommate have a lot of conversations with each other, but none like the ones we have in this class. And so you see the thinking patterns of people on two different levels from like just this comfort level where we can listen to music together and hangout and party together; and to this like collegiate articulate level in a sense where people are actually stating what they feel in an amazing way and in educated ways, and you just gain a whole new respect for people that you do and don't agree with.

Genella: I feel that I've already learned a lot, and it's only the second class. I feel like we've already bonded together and can trust what we talk about in there. [...] I like how it's people from the floor. Already last night I heard people go back to their rooms and talk about like, "this is what we talked about in seminar" even if they weren't in seminar with us or even if they were.

The extension of the class has enriched the friendships and cross-racial relationships for many of the students. Including students who disagreed with one another in the seminar, a better understanding of each other as individuals was developed. The seminar served as an extension of the student's living space that allowed for more intimate dialogue and reflection. Because the students lived together and have already established a degree of trust and support with one another students seemed to be more open to taking risks and being vulnerable in the seminar. There were some students who were frustrated by the seminar based on the content of the material, certain assignments or instructors. Yet, they too had their worldview broadened or found clarity to their own perspectives. For example, Crisanto who is the self-identified "radical intellectual," shares his frustrations when talking about a role-playing exercise the class did to explore grassroots social justice organizing.

As the conversation progresses it was interesting to hear a lot of people's opinions and how apathetic a lot of people were, and how that metaphor was directly tied to the battle that a lot of students are facing now [on campus,

regarding student fees] *and don't realize. [...] I grew up in a house, you know what I mean, with five queer folks that all really care about changing the world, and are doing the work. It's just, it's frustrating because it's like I clearly cannot change any of them [floor mates] or convince them to do more work, but it's frustrating because those are the people I need if I'm doing direct organizing, direct grassroots organizing, the people on the MLC are the people that I'm going to need behind me, you know what I mean.*

For Crisanto, some of the experiences in the seminar helped him view himself more as an activist in comparison to some of his classmates. His feelings about the varying degrees of commitment to grassroots organizing that other students had, and the fact that they were not as passionate about organizing as he was created a degree of uncertainty and incongruence of expectation with some of his floor mates.

Moreover, for someone like Calvin, the class helped to facilitate an ability to see his own internalized racism (this is covered in more detail in the “Identity” section). One of the assignments was to interview someone based on personal stereotypes. Calvin refused to fulfill the assignment because it felt too risky, because of his own stereotypes towards other Black males on the floor. When I inquired further about his resistance to the assignment, he stated, “I don't know, I didn't see any benefit which is why I did it the way I did.” Yet, the next section documents that he did benefit from the exercise and was pushed to examine his own stereotypes of Black males.

It is apparent that the students living in the MLC were seeking to have their horizons broadened and succeeded in doing so in ways they may have expected and in ways that they probably would not have imagined prior to the beginning of the year. Because many of the students intentionally selected to live in the MLC, it is certainly possible that they were more readily primed and open to learning about differences. However, as some of the students were seeking the MLC because it felt like a “safer”

space, their perceptions were likely challenged in deeper ways than some of the students were expecting. Calvin is a good example of entering in with certain expectations and perceptions regarding other men of color, and having those challenged in ways that surprised him. Also worth considering are the students affiliated with First Wave, they did not necessarily choose to live in the MLC, so how each of those students chose to “show-up” in the MLC impacted the degree to how open they were to learning from the lived experience in the MLC. Dionne clearly had predetermined ideas and feeling about what it meant to live in the MLC, whereas someone like Crisanto and Forrest were initially largely unaware of how the MLC differed from other residence hall communities. Yet, for others that had a more informed perception of what the MLC represented, mere action of choosing to live in the MLC likely influenced how they perceived what their experience and expectations would be like living in such a racially diverse community.

As Leticia puts it living in the MLC, “the thing I've learned most, is that nothing that I thought was a ‘for sure’ was a ‘for sure’. Things that I thought were a ‘for sure’ are always being challenged and I always have to rethink it. Whereas, Monica’s reflections illustrate how she has internalized some of the changes she experienced during her year living in the MLC:

Something that I really learned is that there are a lot of leaders here, and that there are a lot of people just like me and that the way I feel is not always the right way and the way I think may not always be the right way to think [...] I have definitely evolved into a person who doesn't walk into conversations with a mindset of convincing others that they are wrong, or convincing others to think like me, but to see what I can learn [...] If you want to be successful you have to be able to connect and relate to people who are not like you, and you do that by living on the MLC and by learning from the people in the MLC.

As much as this section explored the multiple ways in which the students had their horizons broadened, this next section delves more into their personal insights about social identity development and awareness. Some of their own stereotypes and the possibilities of bias/stereotypes within a community of color continue to reveal themselves, and as demonstrated in the next section it will become more apparent how many of the students have grown from the process of exploring their own identity and their own identity in relationship to others. The students are quite reflective about their learning of self and others.

Identity: This is Who I Am...and Who I Am Discovering

Many earlier studies have covered in depth student's sense of belonging at a PWI (Fries-Britt, & Turner, 2002; Fries-Britt, & Turner, 2001; González, 2002; Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999; Martínez Alemán, 2000; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000; Turner, 1994). Much of the students' sense of belonging, or lack thereof, comes from feeling "otherized" based on their racial/ethnic background. For some students, recognizing and embracing their racial identity and intersecting social identities became more complicated and impacted how they view and experience the world. Various examples that were shared reflected how the student's were engaging in an internal dialogue about how they perceived to "fit in" and ways in which they felt that they were being excluded. Brandi, who shared her discomfort with White people during the group interview, shared this during our first individual meeting:

To be honest, mostly every other floor [on campus] is predominantly White, and so I definitely wouldn't feel comfortable going to a floor of White people telling these White people that some White people were just being racist toward me. I mean, in that sense, where I can just go back and really tell them about my experiences or whatever, or...I don't know, we can just, I just feel comfortable talking to a lot of them about anything. I do like White people, some of them, not

all of them. I mean I feel like I still act the same. If you're cool...we're cool. I'm gonna be cool with you, but if you're not...get away from me.

Even though Brandi ends her comment with some acceptance of White people, openly engaging with White students is a challenge for her.

Calvin offers an example of how complex identifying is from within a racial group he is a part of based on race. During our initial interview he describes himself as “the lightest one, my cousins use to tease me and call me names like ‘powder’ and ‘Casper’” (as in the friendly ghost). Yet, during his second interview he reveals some of his initial concerns when he moved onto the floor:

Some of the Black guys on the floor, I didn't think that they would like me because I'm gay or, this is so mean to say, but maybe they're weren't as smart as me, because they were Black males. And Black males generally tend to generally not do so well in school, and I thought because they wore baggier jeans and walk around with the baseball caps on their head, they're just kinda like, "yea, you know I'm in this school because I got this scholarship and I'm gonna work hard or whatever", but it's just like, it's how I thought it was. But I started to get to know them last semester and I noticed that that stereotype had been broken.

There are obviously some conflicting messages that Calvin is trying to reconcile. One being his own assumptions regarding how he is going to be treated as a gay male from his Black male peers, while simultaneously holding some internalized superiority based on being a lighter skinned Black male. As our conversation continued I asked him why he thought he held such negative stereotypes toward other Black males.

I guess it kinda goes back to the whole light skin, dark skin kinda thing. How the lighter skin is smarter and whiter skin is better. And it's not to put myself on top at all, but I think it's a psychological, unnoticed thing that just continues to go on. [That comes from where?]-honestly, I think that dates back to Jim Crow and to Willie Lynch, and further back...it's funny that you actually say that, now it actually dawns on me how stupid that sounds.

What was most interesting in this exchange is how quickly Calvin was able to identify the conflict of identity. His was not the only interview that explored the complexity of racial identity of how each were raised and how each began to make meaning of their own racial and cultural experiences while in college. Genella, who identifies as multi-racial, struggled during her first year in college as this statement exemplifies:

I didn't think minorities were going to accept me at all because I was lighter, and then I honestly didn't think I was gonna last here, just because I wasn't gonna get accepted by the minorities and that's what, I shouldn't say this but that's who I feel more comfortable with [students of color], and that's what my friends were.

Whereas, Lakisha quickly reflects that she is already more comfortable in college than she was in high school:

See the thing about being mixed is that when you're growing up you feel like you have to choose a side that you identify with, and that's what I struggled with in high school, because I came from Columbus so I guess like I was "too White" for the students of color, so I wasn't really accepted so I stuck with what I knew.

I asked Lakisha how that has played out for her being at college in terms of her friendships:

I'm with students of color more than with students who are not [White students], I don't isolate myself from them, like I wouldn't mind having friends or being associated with people that aren't students of color, but it's just something that I've been missing and now that I have, it feels like I just want to stay with it.

As Lakisha seems to be relishing in her new surroundings and community of color, Genella reflects a more nuanced experience when reflecting on her White friendships. She seems to make more comparison of self-validation in relation to her White friends, although this manifests itself in mostly materialistic ways reflecting the intersection of social class, as explained here:

I felt like I was accepted by both in high school but it was the fact that I felt like I didn't fit with them [White kids], because I was always comparing myself, "oh, I

don't have that, or I can't do this..." and I feel like coming here the minorities wouldn't even talk to me and that the White's were going to accept me but, at the same time I would still be going through my four years of college still comparing myself. Then when I got here, it was totally different, like everyone's been accepting.

Genella is the second year student who spent so much time on the MLC because that is where she found a sense of comfort and acceptance; she then made a conscious choice to live on the MLC during her second year in college. As she explains it:

I realized it was somewhere that I felt comfortable and I'd rather come to somewhere comfortable, where I can go and talk to someone, instead of being in a hall that's pretty much an all White or a floor that's all White and not really having that many friends that I really know.

As Genella finds solace in the MLC she continues to become more comfortable in her own skin. She shares this with me by reflecting on a paper she wrote for one of her diversity courses related to living in the MLC.

I would always wish, "what if I was White, would it be different?" Then I realized I wouldn't be me if I was just one and I'm happy that I'm all three and that I get to go through all the problems that one race has to go through, but at the same time I feel like I go through twice as much, than like an African American or a White person because I'm dealing with all those problems that they're going through; but I'm also dealing with problems being accepted by a race or just someone saying...a lot of people are surprised when I say that I'm African American, because I don't look like it. So then they bring up all of these questions, like, "well, your dad is but you really don't look like it." In high school some people questioned me, and I'm like, I'm not just gonna randomly throw that out...so, I guess I'm happy that I'm all three and from last year, I have realized that I have accepted who I am and I am proud of it.

When Genella and I visited during the spring semester, I was surprised to find out that she had begun spending less and less time in the MLC considering how much she had actively sought out the community. In addition to having a boyfriend who lived off-campus, Genella realized it was a challenge living with so many first-year students who were having experiences that she had already gone through. However, she did credit

living in the MLC for her increased capacity to hear and engage in race related comments from a healthy place:

To listen to people's stories the first couple of months...and the fact that the racist comments said on the floor made me say, 'wait, you use to do that' so I think listening to someone else say it actually made me think more about what was coming out of my mouth, I wasn't thinking about what I was saying...so actually hearing it come from someone else's mouth, 'is that really how...is that what's really being said or what I think' is great, I give MLC credit for helping me figure that out.

The interesting aspect of the next couple of vignettes specifically relate to how students racial and cultural identity intersected with gender and sexual orientation.

Living in the MLC served as an intimate container for students to engage in their own development around social identities and to learn from and with others in a relatively safe space. Going back to Calvin's story, he was very open about identifying as gay on his floor. However, he did have some strong internalized feelings about what he might experience from other males on the floor. One of Calvin's initial impressions as he was moving onto the floor was:

I saw some of the kids and they were dressed "gangsta" and they just usually are the ones to be homophobic. The person [moving in] across from me, I thought he was going to be completely mean to me and then my neighbors Chris and Deshaun their gonna be uh-oh this "gay guy" and Forrest...these guys are gonna be afraid of me. Kenny is a wrestler and he was never afraid to come and "drop me" and usually people would be immature and like they're being sexual, but it was really nice to have someone treat me normal for once. That's what I really like about the MLC, that they make me feel like I'm normal, they know that I'm gay and it's like our brother we still gonna love him no matter what and they treat me like that [...] it feels really good and accepting and really welcoming.

In this exchange all of the males Calvin mentions are students of color, two-Black, one Hispanic, and one biracial student who identified as Black and Asian American. Calvin articulates that he is fearful of other men of color based on his sexual orientation, because he has bought into the stereotype that men of color are expected to be more homophobic.

On the other hand, Calvin's reflection also reveals more of his own internalized sense of racial identity of seeing himself as "better" based on his lighter-skin because he does not dress "gangsta". Having this encounter with men of color on the floor proved to be very foundational for Calvin and his ongoing interactions with the others in the MLC. To have such a positive interaction with other males of color proved to be very affirming for Calvin, as it debunked his expectations of how he would be received by other men of color based on his sexual orientation. This moment in time was significant in terms of how Calvin would define and make meaning of the floor community.

Calvin was not the only student negotiating multiple identities in the community. Leticia who identifies as Puerto Rican and White, and grew up with the Puerto Rican side of her family found herself trying to reconcile what it meant to be Puerto Rican while questioning her sexual orientation. This all came about during the seminar class that MLC students are required to take and the fact that she had developed a strong friendship with students who identified as bisexual and lesbian. Leticia had comfortably identified herself as an ally to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) community and as she became more involved in supporting the LGBT community on campus, she realized that she had not ever really questioned her own sexuality. Here is Leticia as she recalls that moment:

I'd never in my life had even thought about it, and we did this workshop where they were asking us different questions and one of them was, "okay you walk into this part of the Student Union, what part of your identity are you thinking of?" and even when they talked about the LGBT Student Center, I realized I never, ever, ever thought about my sexual identity because I never really thought about sexuality in general. I was just like, "some people are, some people aren't" and I'd never thought about mine.

Leticia goes on to share how this is something she had never really had to consider before and how she had simply conformed to heteronormative expectations and ways of being. She continues on sharing that she could meet a woman some day and that the relationship is more about the person than the gender. I asked Leticia if she felt living in the MLC assisted in her process of discovery and reflection; this is her response:

Yea, because otherwise I would have just stuck to what I knew, which was my own culture, being Puerto Rican. I am in Unión [college student group for Puerto Rican students], so I just would have stuck to that and never would have ventured out. Being amongst people who are so different...one of my closest friends self-identifies as gay and another one is bisexual, and I would go to clubs with them.

Implicitly, her comment illustrates how living on the MLC floor mattered in her experience, and being provided with the time to engage in her own exploration of identity. Leticia believed that if she lived on another floor that she would most likely hang out primarily with other Puerto Rican students, who seemingly did not identify as LGBT. I asked the racial background of the two friends she mentioned above, and if she knew anyone in Unión that identified as LGBT. One of her friends is African American and the other is White, and no one, to her knowledge, identifies as LGBT in her Puerto Rican student organization. Here is how she felt she would be received within her family and extended community if she identified as lesbian or bisexual:

That's a big thing with me, if I was (gay) I don't want to be or wouldn't want to acknowledge the fact that if I was Lesbian or bisexual because it's so frowned upon, I think in my culture. My family is very accepting, but I think a lot of my other extended family isn't going to be, they're very old-fashioned, they're very Roman Catholic and it would be completely not acceptable because as everyone is expecting that I'm gonna A) marry a Puerto Rican guy, and B) make Puerto Rican babies. I really want to have that kind of life, but I don't know if I want to have it because it's "normal" and it's expected and it's always been shown in the most positive light, like the quintessential marks of womanhood in being Puerto Rican, or is it because that's actually what I want? Is that what I'm aiming for, or is it because I've been told that's what I should want?

I had asked her earlier in this exchange how she tried to make sense of her intersecting identities, being Puerto Rican and questioning her sexuality. She brought the conversation back around to answer how she thought about her intersections of identity based on ethnicity and sexual orientation:

I've never seen any portrayals, media or otherwise, of Gay Latinas or Latinos ever in my life. [...] My opinion was like, Black people and White people could be gay, because I had seen that, but... I had never seen it in high school, never. Here, it was completely shocking, because there are people who are and it's really surprising.

Similarly to Calvin, living in the MLC provided a space that allowed Leticia to explore multiple aspects of her identity in a supportive environment. I was surprised at how prevalent the topic of sexual orientation was for several of the students, in terms of their own self-discovery or as an ally. Leticia's experience exemplifies this process of questioning:

I don't know if I'm going to wind up... what I'm going to identify as, because I've discovered that people are what's important, not really the gender because someone can completely change your opinion and I may not have met that person yet. I could meet a woman and it could be magic or something, and I might want to marry her or something. I don't know where I am. A part of my identity I've never even thought about and now I'm constantly questioning.

The MLC offers a weekly Lemon Squeeze, a “popular weekly ‘bittersweet’ controversial conversation where students discuss topics of all areas that affect them, their community, the campus and the world at large” (Appendix E). The Lemon Squeeze is a structured forum that encourages the students living in the community to engage in conversations and dialogues about different parts of their identity or identity in general. Overall, students seemed to be invested in these weekly discussions, although a couple of students struggled with the fact that no “solutions” necessarily came out of these discussions. For example, the Lemon Squeeze discussing sexual orientation was a topic that several of the

students mentioned, and was a topic that students felt strongly about with opposing viewpoints that were not easily swayed. Crisanto, who was the most in tune with the concept of multiple identities and engaging in his own development, had this to say during the group interview about the openness of the floor based on his experience at the first Lemon Squeeze:

our first Lemon Squeeze was about queerness, which I was like, "yup", we had this huge conversation and I don't feel like anybody was at a point where they weren't willing to say, "I'm still an open, loving individual to anybody no matter what they think about sexuality" you know what I mean...It's a place full of people of color and then also, people of color that I feel like we mistakenly get labeled as stereotypically more homophobic, that is an example of that [acceptance].

Crisanto and others seemed comfortable with one another discussing sexual orientation in this setting, and talking about the parallels and intersections of identity regarding oppression and privilege. However, when I met with Dionne individually, she had a different feeling about the Lemon Squeeze that focused on sexual orientation, "the Lemon Squeezes are interesting...sometimes. I stopped through, and then [when] people [started to] compare being homosexual to being Black and it's just like, 'it's time for me to leave'." Dionne was not interested in hearing how one oppressed group's plight for acceptance and justice could be related to another group's, specifically the LGBT movement being compared to the Civil Rights movement. This was not surprising, as Dionne had a very strong sense of her African American heritage and her own family's legacy within the United States. Overall, the Lemon Squeezes did serve as another forum for students to interact with one another and to make meaning of how others identified, how they self-identified and how they made sense of one another.

As strongly as Dionne reacted negatively to the interlacing of identities, Crisanto had an equally profound positive experience during his first semester. Crisanto participated in a Drag Queen show on campus:

It was tight, it was a drag ball, so it was sort of a competition. It really impacted, I think that it really impacted my life on the MLC because...I think it was the first time that a lot of dudes really understood, ME, as queer to them not necessarily like with a queer identity, although I'm sure that was an assumption that a lot of men made because I was choosing to do a drag show. Also, just recognizing that somehow my masculinity looked a lot different than theirs.

In the above quote, Crisanto is using the term *queer* to broadly encompass his sexual orientation and his gender expression. In the excerpt below Crisanto is more explicit about how he experiences his transformation in relation to his floormates before going to the Drag Show:

Actually it was a really fun experience because there are a few guys on the floor that are like, "wow, you look really beautiful", and I think...and just how supportive the floor was, umm I think was really dope, you know...And, it made me feel safe in a very, in a very different way I think. It was like now everyone's going to my drag show and they're just going to accept me for you know, everything that I am because clearly that's not true of many things.

For Crisanto to be able to physically present himself in a way that challenged gender norms was a risk for him, and ultimately an affirming and liberating experience within the MLC. As affirming as Crisanto's Drag Show experience was for him, it did not negate the fact that he had other challenging interactions with some of the residents on the floor when it came to intersections of identity though. Crisanto saw himself not only challenging the gender norms, but also serving as an ally to women by challenging forms of sexism. One example Crisanto shares is when he attempts to engage in a dialogue around sexism with other males on the floor and he encountered resistance:

It's a lot of energy for me to be around people who have certain patterns of behavior and saying certain words. For example, I feel real uncomfortable when

dudes use the "B" word, so I generally don't surround myself with guys that do that. Unfortunately for me, most men don't really care, or most men think it's okay, you know what I mean.

I ask him to expand on this comment further in terms of what men he is referring to, and how this might play out within his floor community.

I mean, I think like, I think that there are some spaces that feel safe to have that conversation and some that don't. [...] I don't think that I've really had that conversation with anyone on the floor, more in a passing type of way. I think I've tried to have that conversation with two people. The way that they didn't hear me, is that, what we disagreed about--I thought it wasn't okay to use the "B" word and they thought it was okay because the word actually "bitchy women", right? [shakes his head in confusion/disapproval]...so why don't you just hate on all women then. But that's the part where they're not hearing me, and we're possibly not hearing each other. I think also too, especially heterosexual men, think about my interpretation of that word is explicitly different because we have different encounters with women...people say that I can't be hurt by women and stuff like that.

The inference here is that if he did identify as heterosexual he would not as readily challenge forms of sexism, and that his male peers who do identify as heterosexual obviously see and experience Crisanto differently. And, in turn Crisanto does elaborate on his relationship with women on the floor differently from men:

there's a lot of women on the floor, a lot of women of color and when I talk about the guys that I've been with, I most always have a much better understanding from women of color than I do with White women, and I think that is also something that really sticks out to me in terms on my comfortability on the MLC.

This is an interesting reflection because it illustrates his need to connect with other students of color, yet his disconnect with some of the men of color depending upon the topic(s) of identity. As a complex example of corporeality, Crisanto is being treated differently for his gender, race and sexuality simultaneously, and he recognizes that he is being treated differently based on his multiple social identities.

Throughout my interview with Crisanto elements of his intersecting identities are constantly being woven through as he shares how it relates to others on his floor and how those friendships and interactions develop. At times there was a clear sense of frustration for the amount of energy he felt he was exerting simply trying to embody his full self around others.

My male identity is very much tied to my Chamorro identity, because that's the understanding that my dad put into me pretty much. Being queer, queer is my "guy" identity, at least with my father, right. I don't know that much about being Chamorro anyway, you know what I mean. So this is very interesting and a very fucked up thing that keeps happening where it's like they [intersecting social identities] all sort of trigger each other in very unique and frustrating ways. Like when I did drag, not just using some drag name. My drag name was Chamirita, which literally means, beautiful Chamorro woman, but you use it for every woman, you know what I mean. I put the literal translation in there because that's the very specific context that I know, it doesn't really come across if I just say it means women. I needed that reclamation of my racial identity and for that to be present with the reclamation of non-cisgendered⁶ identity. Umm...and also, it pisses me the fuck off, when...like I'm gay, but I'm also, I'm also not weak and when I'm doing or saying things that would portray me as tough and that's made fun of...doesn't necessarily take to well on very different levels for me, you know what I mean. Understanding my want to fight White people, as a response to my gender identity and my racial identity, for me to comprehend that and to be able to articulate that is becoming frustrating.

Crisanto is deeply engaged in grassroots activism on campus, and intentionally engaging in internal and external dialogues of how identity manifests within his surroundings is a very natural extension of who he is as an individual. One of his most poignant points of self-awareness comes from his ability to recognize how he interacts with White students, and White male students in particular. As other themes are explored, much of Crisanto's story will reveal this very point, and how living in the MLC essentially served as a sort of a social incubator to take these risks.

⁶ non-cisgendered is similar to transgender, in this specific context meaning, that Crisanto's biological sex does not necessarily align with how he identifies his gender.

Even though Crisanto is attuned to his different social identities, it is clear that what most often leads him, is his racial identity. He made various comments throughout the interviews about his comfort within the MLC, and his desire to be around in community with other students of color because that felt safe, as reflected in this comment, “Maybe I just wanted to live on the MLC because I wanted to be around some people of color and not have to deal with some White people, you know, when I come home.” Regardless of how complicated it might be to engage in conversations about other aspects of identity with his floormates he was most often willing to talk about the topics within this community, because the MLC provided the environment for that to safely occur. Leticia summed up well what it means to live in the MLC and talking about intersecting identities, “on a floor like the MLC everyone is different and you find out more about yourself and you find out that they're way more different than you thought they were.” Ultimately, for this group of students the MLC provided a safe place to explore various aspects of social identities. This section captured how students developed a sense of self, and how they learned to relate to others different from themselves. The next theme moves beyond the individual and covers the many ways in which the students feel they are responsible to give back to the broader community, in big and small ways.

“Shouldered Responsibility”

Crisanto: ...at some level I don't want the MLC to be anything more than the living space and at some level I want it to be everything more than that. [So pull both of those apart for me]--yea, well, I don't know I just think that it's really interesting that [pause] students of color get to pay to be around students of color or White students that feel comfortable being around students of color or want to feel more comfortable, whatever there, I don't know...and then have a living space that has this like sort of shouldered responsibility to be something more than a floor, at the same time I think we have the capacity to be something a whole lot greater than that and we can choose to....we can choose to create a community that is strong and vibrant in a beautiful way on the MLC and hopefully start to

create, you know, community conversations, community work, social justice work throughout campus.

As mentioned in the introduction, this is a confident group of students, who as individuals are committed to having an impact on society in big and small ways. The language student's used was not always explicit, yet their stories unearthed this idea of wanting to have a meaningful influence in their current or future community. Each student interviewed, at one point addressed the importance of either "giving back", "making a difference" or talked about engaging the campus community in ways that increased the level of support and inclusiveness for all students on campus. When I asked the students during the initial individual interview what they hoped to get out of their experience during this first year while living in the MLC, some of the responses alluded to having a sense of responsibility that would transcend their time in college. Brandi, who was the most reserved, commented about her hope:

To just talk about how we can better ourselves and try and better the world. Even if it's not the whole world, we probably can't do that...but a little part, just a fraction of it might make a difference somewhere.

Wilhemina, who also was limited in terms of how much she shared overall, led with a similar sentiment focused on the college community, "I hope that we can like bring the diversity we have here [in the MLC] more out onto the campus more." Other students put forth some very specific suggestions about their involvement on campus related to diversity and social justice activism. For example, Dionne who had misgiving about being mandated to live in the MLC, mainly because she felt much of the engagement in "multicultural issues" was at a superficial level, she intended to be actively involved throughout campus.

I just feel like more energy can be put towards, and I feel like MultiCultural Student Coalition (MCSC) is doing this, I wanna learn more about what they're doing and how I can get involved and push that more through other things and bigger events and volunteer activities and community with people of color, rather than just living on a floor and be like, "hey I lived on a multicultural floor."

Crisanto valued living in the MLC and shared a similar sentiment as Dionne, "I hope that everybody in the MLC at some level gets involved with some student organization involved in social justice, but that's my hope for everybody you know." He expands on this thought specifically as it relates to students of color, "I think students-people of color that feel like they can be, you know, catalyst of change...those that can expend that energy should when they can, but, *NOT* just students of color."

When the students were interviewed during the spring semester, their early thoughts from the fall about the importance of diversity and engaging across differences were supported by their actions and reflections. Some of the most telling examples of the student's commitments were through their involvement on campus, or how their future plans had evolved because of their time living in the MLC. Leticia shares how her academic goals have shifted to reflect her new career plans:

Now, I really want to be in a field where I help people grow and learn, and overcome obstacles that they have within themselves and develop as a person. So, to me, this kind of life lesson is invaluable and I think will really help me in my career choices. But honestly, even if you're going to be a Chemistry tutor or major, Physics lover, I think it's still useful to realize that in any way you can develop interpersonal relationships is going to be beneficial, in any situation-- your career, your family, when you meet somebody you like, you don't want to walk up and just be ignorant, and it just helps to understand people. How can we expect to be effective members of our society and work to promote change if we don't even recognize the differences in people, and if we're a nation based on, essentially very diverse [people], we need to recognize all the forms of diversity. I'm not saying that this floor is representative of all the diversity in the country, but it is a good example of just the diversity that can exist within a University.

Lakisha now plans to pursue a career in education policy, whereas prior to living in the MLC and taking the seminar her sights were set on being a teacher. This is a great example of broadening the student's worldview in a way that allows Lakisha to see how she can have a more institutional impact if it is something she chooses to pursue. In a more immediate way, Genella was planning to volunteer during the summer at the local Boys and Girls Club near her home, because it is the most racially diverse location. As she puts it, "to get them to realize that you can actually do something with your life."

A few of the students became very actively involved on campus doing work related to diversity and social justice. Forrest began his own student organization with a couple of other Black males, Wisconsin Association of Black Men. The purpose of the organization:

basically focuses on building community amongst Black men and strictly the interaction of Black men within this campus and Black men within themselves and how to treat other people and the way they go about things and actually staying in the University. That's our main goal, is to increase the retention of Black males, because statistically we're not staying here [in college].

Forrest shared the most direct example how he has actualized this idea of "shouldered responsibility" and ties back, as for many of the students, the influence of their family.

For Forrest, his actions are a reflection of how he views the sacrifices that his mom made for him:

My drive, you know I came to this country for a reason, I have a goal. My mom tries to make my life better for me and I have to make my life better for my children and hope that I instill in my children that they have to make their lives better for their children and so on and so forth. [...] I can make a substantial amount of capital so that I can give my children opportunity that my mother couldn't give me, that she still tries being a single parent. [...] I'm always trying to think ahead and things like that. The belief, "the world isn't ours, we are just borrowing it from our children" you know what I mean? I've always believed in that, so that's the belief I have now and hopefully when I do graduate from the University I will go to medical school. So that's what I'm trying to achieve.

What is most remarkable about Forrest starting a student organization on campus is that it directly ties back to his upbringing, and his sense of obligation for generations to come. His notion of “shouldered responsibility” is not static and can be connected to his past, present and future ways of being.

Crisanto provides a related journey. He became actively involved on campus in various student organizations, and has engaged in individual conversations regarding power, privilege and oppression. Crisanto is a very passionate student, clearly engaged in activism and social justice work and frustration comes through in the stories he shares, not unlike the example presented earlier regarding the use of the “B” word with other males on the floor. Crisanto seeks change that he views as more equitable and is challenged when others cannot see the injustices that he sees, or do not share his level of passion or awareness. As the year progressed, Crisanto found himself less engaged in the MLC because the ways in which he was committed to doing “community organizing” was not compatible with many students living in the MLC. Here he shares how some of this came about internally for him:

the conversations about oppression that I had with folks at the beginning of the year just seemed really...hard. [What does that mean?]-umm...for me it's a lot harder to be disappointed by a person of color's response to something that is to me clearly racist, that they may disagree with me about, than it is for me to talk to White folks about that. [...] A lot of people and I weren't necessarily seeing eye-to-eye and that was sort of frustrating, not because I think that my interpretation of oppression is the only one that is valid, but just like, [I've not only been] surrounded by people who cared about the world being fucked up, but also are doing the work to try and fix it. I think I've had a different understanding than some folks, not necessarily one that is more valid, you know.

Crisanto was mostly raised by one of his older sisters who is “a domestic violence advocate for a queer domestic violence agency” and lived in a household, as he puts it

“with five queer folks that all really care about changing the world.” His upbringing has greatly influenced his interest and how he feels he needs to be involved in anti-oppression work. His primary campus outlet came through his involvement in MEChA⁷, and according to Crisanto several students living in the MLC are also involved with MEChA, which does create a bridge for his involvement and sustained connection to the MLC. Although Crisanto talks about his grassroots involvement and understanding of social justice work more broadly, it is his engagement with a White peer that seemed to have the most profound impact on him.

Crisanto’s involvement with MEChA demonstrates one aspect of his community involvement. The friendship he developed with a floor mate gets at the heart of his commitment in a very personal way. When I asked Crisanto what was the most meaningful cross-racial relationship he had developed during the year, he talked about his friendship with Luke (pseudonym), a White male. He shares that his friendship with Luke is teaching him about his “capacity with White folks”, meaning that this is the first in-depth friendship he is committed to developing with a White person. He shares with me how he came to recognize his limited, or essentially non-existent exposure to White males:

My sister doesn't have any White male friends. My sister doesn't have any White straight male friends, my sister doesn't have any straight White friends. And, that's who I lived with and that's the community I grew up with. So learning that that is a choice for me, or that that can become a choice for me...

The simple awareness that this was a new experience seemed to be jolting for Crisanto, as it was genuinely new terrain for him to navigate. As the conversation goes on, he

⁷ MEChA stands for "Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan" or "Chicano Student Movement of Aztlan" and functions as a student organization on many college campuses.

explains how he defines parameters with Luke in terms of staying engaged in dialogue to challenge Luke around power and privilege and balancing when he may need to walk away to take care of himself at times.

I had that conversation with him, and was like, "you know what, you fucked up the other night. I didn't react well, I'm sorry...[...]" "I'm gonna check you on your privilege when it matters to me and, AND when I have the capacity to do so, but otherwise I might just walk away from you or tell you that I need space from you." Developing the ability to say that to somebody, especially to a straight White dude, ummm...took a lot, especially my best friend, you know what I mean. [...] And just being able to have conversations about what's going on within myself is really dope, really huge. And also, I've just been able to start having really intense conversations with him about all kinds of things.

For Crisanto, it is impossible to be invested in social justice work without also being invested in relationships on an individual level. His friendship with Luke expands beyond merely a new friendship; the friendship reflects Crisanto's commitment to engaging in social justice change on a personal level. Crisanto does go on at length about his friendship with Luke as it pertains to their male identities as well. He talks about how liberating it has been for him to be so open with a male friend, and still shares some of the disconnect and hesitation he has trusting Luke when integrating his Chamorro identity as a male into the conversation. As Crisanto stays invested in his friendship with Luke, he continues to balance his own emotional safety while recognizes the broader importance of supporting Luke in his awareness around racial identity.

What is most revealing overall in this section is the students' sense of community, on a macro and individual level. The opportunity to have an intentionally created lived experience for a limited time has afforded this group of students a space to engage and self-reflect in critical ways as it relates to their own development. In addition to the many encounters that students had that were positive, unfortunately the students also expressed

some very real experiences that felt racist in nature, real or perceived. The next section will delve into the student's experiences and examples of being treated differently based on race, some subtle and unfortunately other examples that were much more overt.

Encountering Racial Microaggressions

As previously covered in the review of literature, students of color who attend PWI's often experience multiple forms and levels of racism. Some of the encounters are obvious with no attempt to mask, however, more of the incidents are considered to be subtle and often times unintentional and unconscious forms of bias and discrimination, also known as microaggressions (Sue, 2010). The students that I interviewed shared multiple examples of this phenomenon throughout our individual conversations as they shared accounts of their everyday experiences on campus. Considering the purpose of the MLC is designed to specifically nurture cross-racial differences, how students are received and perceived based on their racial/ethnic identity is not entirely surprising. What is unsettling is some of the negative ways that students encountered being "otherized" based on race/ethnicity.

Many comparisons were made in terms of what it meant to live on an intentionally racial diverse floor versus on a "typical" floor in the residence halls. Much of the tenor reflected Lakisha's initial reasoning for choosing the MLC:

I picked this [floor] because I felt like it would be...more comfortable to see faces like mine everyday. Versus like, I couldn't imagine myself like just living on one of the other floors when I hear the horror stories of like, "I'm the only person of color on my floor" like, "nobody talks to me, they avoid me completely" they have all these presumed assumptions about how they are so they completely avoid them.

Lakisha was not the only one who selected the MLC based on an assumption or hope for comfort based on racial identity. Brandi, who already stated that she is not very

comfortable around most White people clearly stated, "I came here because, and I'm not even gonna lie, I came here because a friend told me to sign up for the MLC because it's where the Black people are gonna stay." Wilhemina also shared that she chose the MLC because others who are familiar with the University recommended that she would likely be most comfortable in the MLC. I would consider these examples of preemptive strikes, based on the assumptions or experiences of others to help these students avoid some potentially negative encounters based on race. Brandi and Wilhemina relied on the experiences and stories of others to inform their decision of where to live.

Whereas, what other students shared went beyond hearsay, and some of the students expressed their own accounts when either visiting friends in other residence halls, or when friends would visit them in the MLC. During the group interview Maribel talks about going just onto another floor within the same residence hall to visit a friend and what that felt like for her:

just like walking down the hallway, just like open doors and I looked in and, "White, White, White, White..." and just like when I walked into my friends room and like her roommate, I don't know, just like, I said "Hi" and I didn't get any response and I thought the same thing, "is it because I'm from B Tower?" or "is it because I'm Chicana" or something? Maybe she wasn't brought up [raised] around people of color and maybe not as comfortable?

Monica related a very similar experience during our first interview:

I went to visit my friend in Martin⁸ [Hall] and I have a friend in Reilly⁹ [Hall], and just going on their floors and just noticing that you're the only minorities and it's [starts to say scary] weird because a lot of Hispanics and just Spanish people, some of them look White so it's a little easier for them. So if you saw them, you'd say, "oh, she's White, he's White" but they're really something different, but nobody would notice so easily. But me, I'm a Black female and you look at me and you can tell that I'm Black, and if you can't specifically tell that I'm Black you can definitely tell that I'm not White. So, it's just like this energy, that I don't

⁸ pseudonym used for the name of the residence hall

⁹ pseudonym used for the name of the residence hall

know...and I don't know if it's done [feelings of separation] to everybody or if it's done just because you're Black or just because you're a different ethnic group, but like the simple things of speaking and no one speaks back; or there's this feeling of, "I think I'm better than you..."

Monica expressed feelings of “otherness” when visiting friends and she shared an exchange she had with a friend who would frequently visit her in the MLC, “I have a friend who lives in Martin [Hall] and Martin [Hall] is a beautiful dormitory...and she hangs out in my small little room. I'm like, ‘why are you always here, your room is like a palace?’ She's like, ‘Oh my God, it's so uncomfortable there.’” Dionne echoes this story when talking about her friends who live in other residence halls and one that lives in the other tower of the same building:

I have a friend who is the only Black person on her floor, her and her roommate. I have another friend who is the only person on her floor period...her roommate is White and everything, and she's like "chocolate Black", so she often sleeps on our floor or like stays with us.

Dionne goes on talking about how students of color in other buildings are familiar with the MLC, and that many of them migrate to the MLC to hang out because it feels more comfortable than their own residence hall.

Unfortunately, the feelings of prejudice include encounters within their own residence hall community as well. Wilhemina shared an example with the group of an interaction she had in the building on her way to the group interview.

When I was coming [over], they [students] were having a meeting in A Tower and it was just a sea of White kids and they were all just kinda staring at me, "like, what is she doing here?" "She doesn't belong here". This one guy, he just would not stop staring at me, like he was kinda trying to figure out what I was doing, in the dorm.

Come to find out when interviewing Maribel the next day, she too had a similar experience to share. According to Maribel, when she and Wilhemina left the group

interview early they experienced an uncomfortable interaction with students in the hallway, “like right when Wilhemina and I walked out of the group interview yesterday, we walked out and people were just like staring at us, and it was just like a sea of White people, people were just staring at us...I don't know.” The sentiment of “I don't know” captures the sense of feeling that something does not feel right, not necessarily wanting to attribute unconscious acts of racism, yet left wondering if racism is the root cause. Other students related similar stories when talking about what it felt like to have to go onto another floor to use the bathroom when their bathroom was being cleaned. Crisanto tries to avoid using the bathroom on other floors all together, “I try not to use the bathroom when they're cleaning the bathrooms because I'm not trying to feel awkward when the White people walk in and look at me funny.” Monica expands on this type of episode in more detail:

Even when I go upstairs to use other bathrooms it's just like-students are "she's not on this floor" and there are kids on my floor that I don't know, honestly, but if there's an Asian girl or a Black girl, I'm not gonna look twice because this is the multicultural floor, that's acceptable. [you are saying based on your skin color you stand out on a different floor...] Yea, based on my skin color those kids look at you and they say, "ohhh, whoa, this is not her floor" and it shouldn't be that way.

Not all of the examples of microaggressions were left to the same degree of subjectivity. Crisanto shared a more pronounced example of an act of microaggressions:

I also...think that there's sorta this hostility toward the MLC. I feel like the other Resident Advisors are more hostile to us in general than on other floors [in what ways? How do you feel it even if it's overt, what are the subtly ways that you feel...?]-just the way that they phrase things and the differences, like I've been on other floors in other buildings and you know maybe it's just our resident advisors are more mean or something, which I find hard to believe because our Resident Advisor is really dope on our floor. It's just like the level of kindness I think, something as simple as 'I'm gonna shut your door, it's quiet hours' as opposed to, 'Hey, it's past 11:00, do you mind if you have your door shut', right. I've never heard anybody on the MLC that is doing their nightly run ask like that, like the latter. It's always been more like the former. [...] you know, there've been

experiences where I've seen Resident Advisors walk down stairs as soon as they open the door and start to walk be like, 'man, I really hate that floor', umm... [really?]-right.

The other pronounced example that occurred within their living community was shared by more than one of the students, recapping an encounter that happened in the elevator. Calvin recalls within the first couple of weeks of school this incident, “people get upset because we live on the 2nd floor...even with our laundry basket. Sometimes they make racial comments. Somebody was like ‘go back to Africa’, rude things, like ‘you’re being lazy’, ‘your kind is lazy’, I didn't understand that.” During his individual interview, Crisanto relayed a similar example about using the elevator, “last weekend somebody wrote on all of our little like name things [door tags], ‘take the stairs, fat ass’ and like I would say the majority doesn't ever take the elevator.” For some this example might be challenging to distinguish between individuals simply being rude, or acknowledging that some actions are rooted in acts of racial microaggression. Unfortunately, for many students of color these examples are all too common to simply excuse away as poor social skills.

The students’ examples of being treated differently, and/or feeling that they are being treated differently based on race were not limited to their residence hall. Students shared encounters that occurred when visiting friends in other residence halls, walking on campus and in the classroom. Monica relays another example when riding the elevator in other residence halls:

I'll go on the elevator in a different dorm and say “have a good day” and get no response back and you can't help to think, “well, is it because I'm Black?” and then there's just walking past someone in the hallway, “have a good day” and no one responds, and it's like, “or, maybe it's cuz I'm Black?”

During the group interview Brandi shares an interaction with a classmate in her Chemistry class:

And then it was like, for me, in Chemistry class, we was umm, doing a lab and part of it was on the computer so I was paired with this White girl and it was like, uh, actually we were taking a quiz, I had already taken the quiz so I knew the answers. But every time I told her the answer and I told her why it was the answer too, and it was logical, like come on now...and she picked a different answer every time, and I was just thinking, "is it because I'm Black, you think I'm stupid or something?" I don't know...that's how I felt.

Multiple voices in the group begin to clamor and chime in, wanting to give other examples of times that they had felt discriminated against because of their race. For some students coming to UW-Madison was an unwelcome awakening to a new reality.

Crisanto shared an experience that he had in class similar to Brandi's:

I have a class where I'm like the only person of color [other students in the group, echo with "same here"] it's really strange, my first class...this White dude straight stared at me the whole time, kept looking at me, I kept looking back to see, if you know he was still looking like [laughter by others in the room], "what the hell you looking at", you know what I mean? And it was just like fixed the whole time, like we were supposed to read a poem and he just sat there, like this [demonstrates the fixed stare] like looking at me, trying to figure, figure me out or something, I don't know, it was weird.

Dionne, even with her steadfast self-confidence and sense of self-identity, also dealt with new crossroads facing the fact that she was the only Black person in one of her classes.

One of my classes is Africa 277 and it's interesting because it's a 4 credit class, umm, taught by a White professor [...] there are about 7 African American people in the course, like in a lecture hall of at least 300 people, at least 250, there are like 7 African Americans, and its chilling cuz like I'm use to that, but today was the first discussion for that course and in the discussion of about 20 people, I'm the only Black person. I've never, so far on this campus been like the only Black person. It was just really, really awkward, umm especially since they'd share like, 'oh, I don't know much about Africa.'

Maribel, although less specific, shares a similar sentiment of how it feels in classes when being the only student of color, "in most of my classes I'm mostly...I mean I'm the minority obviously and when we're told to form groups, like people hesitate to work with

me and just kinda feel like they have to.” The students readily shared examples of microaggressions, although that obviously was not their language for what they were encountering. What they did articulate was how they felt in different parts of the campus community, unaware of the formal language to name what they were actually experiencing. Equally so, the students shared stories of what it felt like to live in the MLC, and what this last section illustrates is the juxtaposition of their broader campus experience and the affirming space that the MLC provided.

MLC as Family

In this section students share how the idea of family served as a constant theme while living in the MLC. The stories that are reflected in this section illustrate the natural journey of how such tight-knit communities often develop, and ebb and flow over a sustained period. During my first round of interviews the newness of the experience and living in an intentionally created community was met with enthusiasm; during the second interview the student voices offered a more critical reflection of relationships and interactions within the community that are not unlike how many of us experience family dynamics. Some of the students shared about the relationships, some shared how coming back to their floor feels, and others tied their overall sense of community together. All of the narratives thread aspects of how many of the students related the MLC community to family, in good ways and in more stressful ways. You can hear in the student’s vignettes how their relationships evolved and how their sense of identity continued to take shape.

Throughout the interview process students’ provided examples of what living in the MLC meant to them. The prevailing sentiments that were shared by the majority of the students interviewed focused on a sense of family, safety, and belonging that was not

as prevalent in other parts of their college going experience. A comment by Wilhemina simply captures much of what students shared about living in the MLC, “being in the MLC people don't judge you and people are friendly and like out on campus it seems like you get stared at and people are trying to figure out why you're on campus or what are you doing here, but the MLC is not like that.”

I entered into the study not knowing what types of responses I would receive, but knew I wanted to engage in a series of questions that would ideally elicit reflective thoughts and responses. Therefore, during my initial interview I asked students a series of future oriented questions about how they hoped to be able to look back on their year living in the MLC when we meet again in April. More specifically, share how living in the MLC has influenced/impacted your overall experience? What are you hoping you will be able to take away from this experience that will support you throughout the remainder of your time here at UW-Madison? Then when we met in April, I revisited this line of inquiry, and asked an additional question that I found to be more revealing: If I were an incoming student of color would you recommend the MLC to me?” The responses to this question provided some of the most enlightening responses to the ways in which the students made meaning of their experience living in the MLC. Some of the responses highlighted embodied the idea of family that some students found in the MLC; whereas, other responses refuted “family” as an inherent quality in the community.

The one student who had been most resentful for being required to live in the MLC was Dionne. Because of her scholarship with *First Wave*, she was required to live on the floor and asserted that she found very little value in the overall experience. The one positive aspect she shared was related to her class in Afro-American Studies:

there's one girl from the MLC actually in that class, and we sit together basically everyday in the front of the lecture hall, so that's cool because I don't have her in my discussion so its cool to like know somebody and have that person if you ever need to borrow a book or be like, "hey, what does this mean" live on your floor and not shun you, that's really cool.

What is most stark about Dionne's perspective is that she is the only student who plans to transfer schools because of the lack of racial diversity, specifically a Black community.

As she states it, "[I] just need to be in a place where Black people realize how important it is to have a community, to be about that community and to keep creating community."

Dionne presented nuances and contradictions in terms of what she was looking for in a community, how she believed communities formed, according to Dionne "living on the same floor with someone does not, [...] they [MLC] try to force this communal bond among people who don't know each other [...] and it doesn't give you a chance to really get to know the people." Yet, she believes that being around more Black students will inherently provide her with a sense of community. Dionne remained steadfast in her feelings about not wanting to live in the MLC, and I still believe that she did find some degree of comfort within the community.

During the second interview when I asked all the students if they would recommend the MLC to an incoming student of color. Dionne's response was, "if it's to just 24/7 be around people of color, then I guess, but to me it's kind of a waste of an extra \$200.00." Dionne did not appreciate the fact that she was expected to participate in programs that were offered the year before and that she had already experienced. As we engaged further on this topic, Dionne's lack of interest in the MLC kept coming back to the fact that she spent so much time in the MLC the year prior to her attending the University:

I know the problem with me and attending the little events that they have, having two friends who are in First Wave and are now sophomores, but lived on the MLC last year and me being here very, very often, knowing all of this stuff prior to me coming, some of the same Lemon Squeeze questions we did the same things. And I know like for me, it's anti-climatic.

Dionne's experience was less about the MLC being a valuable resource and support to her, and more about the fact that she had already taken advantage of the community's support and resources the year before. One of her initial comments during the group interview was, "I think it's important to be around people of color on a 96% White campus, but also to form your own groups".

This idea of being around other students of color reflected the student's desire and need to have a place where they felt comfortable and were able to let their guard down.

Sentiments like this one from Calvin:

I feel like once I'm to the MLC like, you know, I don't have to feel like, 'Oh my God, someone is trying to figure me out the whole time' you know? But like, I have to get to the MLC first, feel me?

were quite common throughout the interview process. One of Brandi's earliest comments during the group interview, about living in the MLC was one of the most unfiltered responses, "It's just about staying where I'm comfortable, and I'm comfortable around people of color. I'm not comfortable around White people at all, at all." For her to share so openly in a small group within the first couple of weeks demonstrated to me her level of comfort with the others in the room, and the value she was finding within her community. Brandi's uneasiness toward White students underscored her need for comfort being around other student's of color in her living space. Ultimately, the MLC did serve as a reprieve from negative encounters and microaggressions she felt she experienced

throughout other parts of campus. Genella shared a similar sentiment about how living in the MLC provided her a sense of support, and a sense of family:

The MLC just made it feel like no matter if you were on our floor or not they were still going to include everyone, and to me, it just felt more like a family. I realized it was somewhere that I felt comfortable and since I'm never really in McIntosh¹⁰ [Hall] until late at night, I'd rather come to somewhere comfortable, where I can go and talk to someone, instead of being in a hall that's pretty much all White or a floor that's all White and not really having that many friends that I really know.

The feelings of comfort extended beyond the simple act of returning to the floor community, Brandi shared how much she enjoyed when the students on the floor would hangout together in the student lounge of their floor, “almost every night for a couple of weeks we watched a movie in the den together. And it was chill time, and we had people from other dorms come over and watch it with us.” It was this type of informal interaction that enticed Genella to move onto the floor for her second year, “[on] the MLC everyone's a family, everyone lives together...figures out problems, helps you. You can go to anyone's room, just knock on the door and walk in or talk to them.” Monica expressed in greater length the sense of openness she felt when talking about living in the MLC and how it provided a sense of family for her:

People have their door[s] open, music is blasting, people are in the hallways talking, running around joking having pillow fights and that stuff is okay. The difference is like, when you come here, you are going home, like, the biggest issue for me here is like being all the way from NJ [...] how do I make this place home? That's the biggest struggle--it's not the work, it's home, how do I make this big university, who has 43,000 students and the minority ratio is so low, how do I make this place home? So that was my biggest goal. Not only did the First Wave do it, but the multicultural floor did it. Cause it's like I can come home, I don't go to my dorm, I go home when I leave class-so that's where the multicultural floor fits in, because it's home.

¹⁰ pseudonym used for the name of the residence hall

Crisanto took it beyond the social comfort, and shared how the floor also contributes to his ability to focus academically:

I feel comfortable coming back here to study. I have friends who don't feel comfortable coming back to their dorms, like in general. So...I mean like [so that's big?]-yea, you know I can get work done on my floor. I also feel like I can write, I feel like I can leave my door open and work on my art without feeling like the token minority, you know.

Leticia bridged the connections between the student's academic and on campus experiences to their living on the MLC. When I met with her for the second interview she was much more reflective and made more meaningful connections that she was unable to articulate during our first visit. It was interesting that she shared the following thought in third person, which kept her a bit distant from what she was saying:

You're gonna think, "okay, I'm in college, I'm gonna learn a lot" and yes, you're going to take a lot from classes, but you're gonna take a lot from the social experiences you have and also you can't walk away from this lesson [living in the MLC], it's your home, it's where you sleep, it's where you go to relax. It's your floor, you can't just say, "okay, well it's a class, it's over, I'm done" no, that's not how it is, it's constantly going to be in your face. You're gonna evolve and realize who you are, who other people are and realize how you can make your life and other people's lives better.

It was apparent to me during the interview that Leticia was reflecting on her personal insights and experience from the year living in the MLC. Brandi also addressed the ups and downs of living in such a close community. For as much as she enjoyed and found a sense of support living in the MLC, she was also talked about some of the conflicts that would occur on the floor:

there is a lot of drama, but I mean there's a lot of good stuff too. We do a lot of stuff together, we have a lot of great discussions, the class is great. Umm....it's just like we're one big family, and of course in some family's there is drama, so like it can't be avoided, but overall it's pretty good.

Brandi's way of sharing the complexities of living in such a tight-knit community was very real and unfiltered. Considering Brandi remained most guarded of all the students, when she did share, she was exceptionally forthcoming about not painting just a rosy picture, and she still recognized the importance of feeling like she was a part of a family. When I asked Brandi the question about whether or not she would recommend the MLC to an incoming student of color, she paused for an extended period as if deciding whether or not she wanted to share her thoughts, then she offered this as a response:

the best part of the MLC and the worst part, were the people. I mean, they're all great people, but everyone has their faults, and some of them show more than others, come off stronger. I mean, it's just, I don't know...some people can, can really hurt you but at the end of the day they're still your friend.

Brandi's above comment is honest, and was a measured response seemingly as to not betray others in the community and revealing her own vulnerability; not unlike how members within a family tend to protect even when offering a degree of frustration or critique. Yet, regardless of some of the interpersonal challenges she experienced, overall she believes that the MLC can be an affirming experience for future students.

As mentioned earlier, all of the students said that they would encourage or recommend the MLC to incoming students of color. Forrest had a response that reflected how much he had come to rely on the MLC, how he made personal meaning and the value living there could have for others:

if you want community, if you want to feel at home, you know, if you want to come back to somewhere that you'll be proud to come back to and that you can actually go, "hey, I'm about to hang out on my floor today," "I'm about to chill with some of my friends today" you know like real home, especially if you're not from Madison...you know it would just be better for you because a lot of these people will become family to you. You will care a lot about them if they get into trouble, you'll want to know what's going on, people you'll be concerned and care about.

Monica's response to this question highlighted the cross-racial relationships that students can learn from:

you have the opportunity to not only connect with people who look like you, but also with people who are of different ethnicities. By living here you take the opportunity to get to know and actually experience different cultures, because you're gonna have people who are African American, you're gonna have people who are Polynesian, you're gonna have people who are White, as well as people who are from Guam. And everyday you get to take that chance and actually work with these people, and find your similarities and find your differences and to make the decision, which one's you'd rather focus on and nourish. [...] If you want to be successful you have to be able to connect and relate to people who are not like you, and you do that by living on the MLC and by learning the people in the MLC.

Monica was one of the most vocal students when talking about nurturing and caring for one another as a community. It is not surprising that one of her parting comments about what she will carry with her from this experience throughout her time on campus is:

...the MLC family, the fact that I can be walking down the street and like I can wave to someone and say I know that person, or just like if we're at a party and we're leaving-we all look out for each other, it's like that's family. [...] When you go out and choose to make a difference, I will support you. I respect you on a level that not many people can because I see you when you come out your room, I see you when you're on the phone with your mom, when you're addressing the classroom, I see you when you don't think you're being seen. So, it's like I see both sides of you, so now we have this full circle of a person. And I think the family comes in where, "I respect you" and because I respect you I am willing to go to new limits to new heights to support you and to work with you, because I want you to do the same for me.

These students clearly found extensive meaning through living in the multicultural learning community in a way that the community functioned as a familial unit for them. The floor provided resources and support that engaged the students on multiple levels, individually and collectively. Some of the ways in which student's attributed familial qualities was anticipated, and it is clear through their many stories that much of what they learned was unexpected.

Overall, the five themes emerged through the student's lived experiences in the MLC. The students actively engaged in their own growth and development throughout the year and had unforeseen revelations. There is little question that living in the MLC served as a meaningful opportunity for this group of students, and provided a unique living experience that allowed them to develop in ways that they may not have in a different residence hall or floor community.

Suggestions For Improvement

However, like all communities, whether on a college campus or otherwise, not everything is perfect. As a community, the MLC did not meet the needs of all members equally. During the second interview I asked students "if there was one thing that you could change about the MLC, what would it be?" The responses varied from a more personal perspective to broader structural changes for the overall program. Interestingly enough, much of the critique reflected an essence of care and wishing more students could take advantage of such a community.

What follows are the student's perspective of how some believed the additional resources were being allocated and added value to their community, and some of the critique offered is questioning how the added fee and additional staff did little to enhance the priorities of the MLC community. It is important to note that the additional fee is directly related to the MLC's capacity to have additional paraprofessional staff at the undergraduate and graduate level. The reason this is significant to point out is because some of the suggestions for improvement directly implicates how students living in the MLC viewed, valued and experienced the additional staff affiliated with the MLC.

On the one hand, the additional fee unquestionably provides more support for the MLC, in terms of staff support, opportunities for additional programs, and the ability to have a seminar directly supporting the students overall experience. However, some of the structural aspects that students would like to see improved upon go beyond the financial and human resources, and are geared towards enhancing the norms and standards for participation and involvement in the community. Students articulated their desire for more capacity building regarding engaging across differences, serving as agents for change within the UW-Madison community and beyond their time on campus. Students seemed to have a strong desire for more opportunities that helped assisted in developing their community, and the development of their interpersonal and leadership skills.

The one suggestion that was raised by a few students during my first visit was related to the \$200.00 fee. Some of the comments about the fee were tied to assumptions students made about the services that they felt were lacking on their floor, or the quality of the residence hall that housed the MLC. During the group interview Forrest made one of the initial comments linking the extra fee to services.

I'd be going in the bathroom to take a shower and be like, 'hey, wasn't that stain there yesterday?' I know I pay like an extra \$200.00, but, I don't know...it's odd, cuz you're like paying just to live around people [someone else interjections 'like you'] like you, but sometimes you don't get those same services, that's what I feel.

Monica readily related to some of what Forrest was sharing and added:

I kinda feel like I'm paying for um, Jim Crow, because um, like, I pay \$200.00 extra dollars to say, "well, this is the all Black section, this is the all minority/diverse section" when your school has to say, "we're gonna put a diverse floor in one of the campuses, on one of the biggest, in one of the biggest schools [Dionne interjects, 'on the worst dorms']...in one of the biggest schools in the nation," in the worst dorm, you have to realize that there is a demographic problem. And, there is, I don't think that the Black population has hit 2000 people [on campus] yet. And the fact that we all have to live, we'll we all have to pick one floor to see people of our kind is ridiculous and is sad in some ways.

Although there was some conjecture by students linking the fee to the “quality” of building that housed the MLC, most of the students protest was more on principal. As mentioned earlier, some of the students felt like they were paying for the “privilege” of living in a more racially diverse community. During the group interview Forrest expanded on his comment from above:

I don't think, I don't know if that's necessarily like a good think that we have to pay like...to be around replicas of self or we all (hear snaps of affirmation in the background), most of us on the floor like, the reason that we chose this floor was because we're used to being in like a diverse situation, or we grew up in diversity and most students that didn't, did not choose the floor because they don't feel that way.

Others were more focused on knowing how that additional fee was spent. Wilhemina actually touched on both aspects:

the fact that we have to pay extra to live on this floor and be around people who look like us or be able to be in a diverse area, I don't think that we should have to pay extra--at least that much extra to say that we lived in a diverse floor. [what do you think that paying extra has contributed to?]-umm...I think the extra money went towards the interns, like we didn't even do things with the money. It seemed like we didn't even have choice as to what we did with the money. I remember, other floors, they get to plan trips or go to Six Flags or something like that [...]

Dionne felt students should have more of a say in how that extra \$200.00 is to be spent each year. She was particularly upset during a program around the Thanksgiving Holiday when she thought she was attending a community dinner, and arrived to find out it was actually a program intended to illustrate the lack of resources many people are without in the United States.

I was so upset with the Thanksgiving meal. Okay, we were told that we were going to have this big Thanksgiving feast, so I actually went, I had only been to one event. Then it was like they gave us rice, then somebody had a piece of bread, and somebody didn't have anything. It was supposed to teach you what it's like to be homeless, and it's like, I get that, but there are other ways to convey that, that I feel are more effective, because right now you are also wasting this food, you just

got all of this rice and it's like, 'you wasted my money' like I could have taught myself this lesson or we could have had a conversation about this. I am not paying \$200.00 to sit here and fake me out first of all, then give me a plate of rice. It pissed me off so much, and I was trying to think about the lesson, and it was, "okay, but no...but still, \$200.00 for things like this?' What if this isn't what I wanted to learn, what if this isn't geared toward what I am living on this floor for? So I feel like the desire of the people who are paying the money and are living on this floor, yea, we have events but they're not necessarily events we want, they are events that people have chosen for us.

For a few students, the awareness of an additional fee and the fact that the students were now responsible for paying for the fee out of pocket raised some practical and philosophical questions.

However, during the second individual interview, participants focused more on the value of living in an intentionally diverse community, and felt that there should be more than one. Genella states, "I feel the more that people get involved in it [MLC] could change or open their eyes, maybe not change them but, find themselves and at the same time, it'll [living in the MLC] help you learn, meet new friends." Monica also mentioned that she wished a floor like the MLC should be offered not only in every residence hall on her campus, but on all college campuses. This desire to expand the number of students who could experience something like the MLC is underscored by students' views of their hopes for change and ability to equip more students with the capacity to make a difference. Crisanto expressed earlier that for him living in the MLC was important simply knowing with certainty that he would be around other students of color, and that provided a sort of sanctuary. However, he is also very aware that for change to occur beyond the individual level, the MLC needs to offer more than a safe haven:

To me, the MLC should be about equipping people with the tools, to understand themselves and their place within oppression because that to me is about understanding how we can be multicultural. I don't think multiculturalism can

exist without an analysis of oppression, at least not a multiculturalism that I want to be a part of.

Monica echoes a deeper and more collective responsibility that needs to be encouraged differently or structured into the MLC in other ways.

I would say...more urgency for community change. Not just the thought process of us as individuals, like yea, that's important, but we need to do more of applying our thinking, our group thinking to the actual streets. How can our individual ways of thinking change this world, this campus, like MLC activism, what does that mean? Does that mean giving to the homeless? Does that mean like renting out the satellite [student lounge] and doing a food drive? What does that mean, how do we apply this? Don't let this be all talk and you say, "they'll make a change when they leave here" but, no, how do we make a change here? Activism exists, if you want it to.

These students easily articulated the layers of what the community offered and the ways that the MLC could be enhanced. Monica's comment above certainly extends beyond the facilitation or programmatic structures of most communities, yet she believed strongly that there is an inherent responsibility to foster action. Other students offered specific staffing or programmatic ideas that they believed would add to student experiences living in the MLC. A couple of students mentioned that more involvement by the MLC interns, who were former residents on the floor, would have been beneficial as role models. As Leticia shares:

I feel like since they [MLC interns] were on the floor, they have a lot that they can give and need to share that, because I feel like if I had been...if I had talked to someone who really understood the benefits of the floor it would remove a lot of the apathy people have for it. Because there will be events, and people just don't care, they don't come. They know it's there, but they don't care because they're like, "why should I care, what's it gonna bring to me? I've got a project to do, or an assignment to write, and I don't have time..." Whereas if it come from someone who you've seen, that they've changed from it and they said, "this meant so much to me", "this floor has given me so much, you know, that's why I'm back here working as an intern, doing these things for you" then a lot of people expect to care more.

Wilhemina also mentioned that the MLC interns could have been more involved during the year. I asked her if she could suggest what the intern position would do, her response was, “be more visible and be more involved, and just be part of the MLC. They just seem like they come to do their job, which they should, but be more...involved personally.” Calvin is the one who brings this shared sentiment full circle with his suggestion for mentors in the MLC. The purpose of having interns in the MLC is to provide current residents with additional support for what they are experiencing, essentially serve as a sort of mentor. However, some of the students obviously felt that was lacking. Calvin offered this insight:

If you're gonna live on the MLC, there should be a mentor that not necessarily lives on the MLC but identifies with this mission statement that the MLC has. And to help students realize that we share a common goal, and I don't think that there was anybody there that helped us realize that we all had a common goal.

Brandi suggested that the MLC should have more workshops to learn more about diversity and better cross-racial interactions.

I say we should have more workshops or whatever to helps us bond. Even though we all have each others backs or whatever, at the end of the day we are still cliquey. To help us, just stop cliquing up or whatever and get out of these cliques, and start hanging with other people. That would be more helpful. Umm...I would say more workshops talking about diversity issues on this campus [...] But, I don't know though, because making things mandatory...people start getting mad. But not making them mandatory, no one comes unless you have some food or something [...]

Regardless of how much of a safe haven the MLC provided for Brandi, she was seeking more skills and opportunities to further develop her capacity to interact across differences.

It is interesting that most of the suggestions offered by the students reflected a desire to receive more tools and guidance in their overall experience and development.

Forrest believed that the professional staff working with the MLC could have reached out more regularly by simply asking how students in the MLC were doing. He elaborates:

I think that they [MLC staff] need to see how things are going, they need to check in a lot more, [...] just how things are going programmatically and how the floor is being run. I don't think I have yet, one on one or personally or physically been asked what's going on on the MLC floor by someone from the MLC floor. You know, you've asked me, some Vice Provost has asked me, some "up" people have asked me but, people those who are actually a part of it haven't asked me and I haven't really heard of them really asking. I might be wrong, but from what I recall, they haven't and I feel as though you should ask, really check up. [...] I do credit that people are busy, there's a lot more things that the MLC does beside house us, but it needs to be a part, very crucial to the enjoyment of the experience.

Forrest's comment about staff being more intentional and checking in with the students ties Calvin's thoughts about mentoring together and links back to Brandi's desire to have more facilitated workshops on diversity. The criticism that the students offered of the MLC still reflected elements of community and identifying ways to strengthen what many of them already view as an overall positive experience.

Overall the findings illustrated more than how they made meaning of their experiences, but how they valued and learned from this unique opportunity. The student's time in the MLC was not without challenges or critique of each other or the program overall. It does provide insight of student's developmental journey and insight on what can be learned from such a community. The final chapter will discuss at length what some of the greatest "takeaways" are for practitioners, scholars and policy makers.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

I can't blame people for not knowing, but you can blame people for not wanting to know.
-- **Monica**

All of the students interviewed for this study shared some very personal and poignant aspects of their lived experiences in the Multicultural Learning Community. Throughout the student narratives the stories went beyond individual journeys to each of the students shared their hopes and expectations for future incoming students of color and for the University as a whole. The burden shouldered consciously or unconsciously, by many of the students interviewed provides a unique insight for practitioners and policymakers to learn from and to *know* what it means to be a student of color attending a PWI. Many of these students clearly stated if it was not for the financial package they were receiving to attend UW-Madison, they never would have considered attending this institution. Most of these students knew before enrolling that UW-Madison was a much less racially diverse community than their home communities. Attending a PWI created a sense of trepidation and worry about support and finding a sense of community for several students; this is not a dynamic unique to UW-Madison. Many PWI's deal with the tensions of finding ways to recruit and support the much-coveted racially diverse student population; and, many students of color enter into PWI's seeking points of community that support them racially and culturally. One of the efforts created to ideally address support and community for a small number of incoming students of color at UW-Madison is the Multicultural Learning Community.

The purpose of this study was to shed light on the forgotten voices during a period of great debate about diversity initiatives at PWI's. More specifically, *How do students of*

color who live in a designated multicultural community make meaning of inter/cross-racial relationships? And, How does living in a designated multicultural community relate to students overall experience on campus? As stated early on in Chapter 2, a great deal of the research addressing racial diversity on college campuses largely focused on the prevailing themes: campus climate, educational benefits, cross-racial interactions, and sense of belonging for students of color. Less information is known about how self-identified students of color make meaning of their own experiences attending a PWI, particularly from those students who are involved in a designated multicultural program or initiative geared toward supporting students of color attending a PWI.

Many previous studies habitually use two frameworks that are a disservice to students of color; first, several of the studies are framed from a “student of color” in relation to “White” students structure, and secondly, treat “students of color” as a monolithic group. On the first point, when directly or indirectly creating a study that looks at the contrasting experiences between “students of color” and “White students”, the act of “otherizing” students of color in relation to the dominant racial group inherently occurs. Furthermore, studies that are this broad in nature tend to ignore how students of varying racial/ethnic backgrounds grow and learn from those in racial/ethnic backgrounds different from their own. Meaning, for example, that very little data exist in the current literature discussing how a Latina student grows from her interactions with an Asian student. This failure to respond to cross-racial experiences connects to the second concern about treating “students of color” as a monolithic group, offering little space for individual and cultural nuances to be recognized and understood. In recent years a few studies (Bourke, 2010; Fries-Britt, & Turner, 2002; Fries-Britt, & Turner, 2001;

González, 2002; Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999; Solórzano and Yosso, 2000; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009) have focused on a particular racial group addressing specific challenges and ways of succeeding at PWI's. But, again, most of these studies offer little in the way of cross-racial interactions that are not related to White student interaction. Another significant portion of the literature that has been dedicated to racial and ethnic differences addresses adjustment and integration linked to long-term college success in college (Fischer, 2007; Gall, Evans, & Bellerose, 2000; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Padilla, Trevino, Trevino & Gonzalez, 1997; Terenzini, Rendon, Upcraft, Millar, Allison, Gregg, & Jalomo, 1994; Tinto, 1987).

However, the purpose of this study was to place the student of color voice at the center, while capturing the nuances of their individual stories and collective experiences within a particular designated multicultural program. Entering into the study, I used Van Maanen's "existential themes" (1990) as a guiding framework to understand how the students I interviewed made meaning of their lived experiences. The relationship between the student's narratives and developed themes proved to have a salient connection to the Van Maanen themes: "*lived space* (spatiality), *lived body* (corporeality), *lived time* (temporality), and *lived human relation* (relationality or communality)" (p. 101). Using the Van Maanen framework provided an innate relationship from which to consider the personal narratives, and enhance our understanding of how the students made meaning of their experiences living in the MLC. The study was contained within a very specific context (lived space) that provided the backdrop for students to critically reflect on their lived relationships (lived human relation), and the ways in which students were received and perceived based upon their bodily presence (lived body). The study took place over a

defined time period (lived time), however, how the students expressed ideas of temporality transcended such a definitive definition of time.

Although Van Maanen served a useful starting point for reflection and understanding of the findings, it was the actual student narratives that provided the themes that captured how they made meaning of their experiences. The themes identified in this study are not necessarily new revelations: horizons broadened, identity, “shouldered responsibility,” racial microaggressions, and lastly, family.

However, there are interesting intersections between Van Maanen’s constructs that were used to launch the inquiry in this study and the themes that came from the student’s voices. Table 5.1 summarizes some key quotes that demonstrate the intersection between the emic and etic themes that inform the findings from this study.

	Spatial	Corporeal	Temporal	Relational
Horizons Broadened	the MLC is encouraging the differences that make us beautiful, but working together. [...] we accept each other cultures keep them around and don't try to get rid of them. So that's why I really like the MLC, it's trying to keep cultures around without making us all one creature.	I just hope that I can open my mind more cause we have a few Caucasians on our floor. I want to experience from other people to, because there are some people on our floor who come from another countries [...], just so many different cultures and nationalities and ethnicities and I just hope to benefit and learn from that.	I just don't know who I'll be by the end of this year, but I'm very excited about that. I think that I will be more culturally aware.	I just want to be able to open up to like other things, but cause no matter what I still have my prejudices about other people and everything like sometimes I tend to forget that White is a cultural still.
Identity	Like if I lived on an all white floor I would just kind of meld in, and I wouldn't have stood up for my own, who I am, but with everyone so different you have to.	I never encountered the harshest of multicultural [meaning treating differently based upon race] I never really thought about it, maybe it's because many people assume I'm White and then they'll treat me how they would a White girl.	growing [up] in Guyana away from my mom because she was already here in America and I being raised by my grandmother.	I don't know how to describe it, it's just different because I usually didn't hang out with so many people like that [students of color], but now that I am, it's definitely more of a comfort zone.

Table 5.1
Van Maanen Themes Intersecting with Identified Themes

continued on next page

	Spatial	Corporeal	Temporal	Relational
Shouldered Responsibility	I want to create on the campus [...] more dialogue between Blacks and Asians, because I feel like [...] if we want to have this collective idea of moving forward [...] we need to be conscious of all ethnicities and everyone has to be conscious of the mistakes they make with everyone. And learning, like in class, the stereotypes that everyone has, trying to get rid of those stereotypes.	it's a lot of energy for me to be around people who have certain patterns of behavior and saying certain words. For example, I feel real uncomfortable when dudes use the "B" word, so I generally don't surround myself with guys that do that. I think I've tried to have that conversation with two people on the floor. Unfortunately for me, most men don't really care, or most men think it's okay.	My mom tries to make my life better for me and I have to make my life better for my children and hope that I instill in my children that they have to make their lives better for their children and so on and so forth.	...but it's frustrating because those are the people I need if I'm doing direct organizing, direct grassroots organizing, the people on the MLC are the people that I'm going to need behind me, you know what I mean.

Table 5.1
Continued from previous page

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	Spatial	Corporeal	Temporal	Relational
Racial Microaggressions	Like being in the MLC people don't judge you and people are friendly and like out on campus it seems lie you get stared at and people are trying to figure out why you're on campus or what are you doing here.	Like being in the MLC people don't judge you and people are friendly and like out on campus it seems lie you get stared at and people are trying to figure out why you're on campus or what are you doing here.	Last year I felt like residents were clumping themselves into little cliques and I would be a part of a clique one day and the next day, not get invited to do things.	I feel like the other house fellows are more hostile to us in general than on other floors
MLC as Family	I don't go to my dorm, I go home when I leave class-so that's where the multicultural floor fits in, because it's home.	what I really like the MLC, that they make me feel like I'm normal, they know that I'm gay and it's like our brother we still gonna love him no matter what	Expectation-wise, not only like new friends, but life long friends...friends that I can call in like 10 years.	the familial sense of the floor. You know if I see somebody from the MLC around campus, you know-now, I say "what's up" and give them a hug, I don't think--I hope that won't change.

Table 5.1
Continued from previous page

It is possible that the findings could have easily been constructed only into pre-existing frameworks covered in the literature review. However, the intended purpose here was to reflect the *emic* voice as holistically as possible, and I believe that the identified themes best reflect the student voices in this study.

The themes also contribute to what was learned in relation to the central research questions: how do students make meaning of cross-racial relationships? How did their MLC experience relate to their broader campus experience? What were benefits and challenges of living in a designated multicultural community? And, what were some unexpected outcomes? I will respond to each of the above questions in more detail, highlight which of the theme(s) provides insight to addressing the question, and present key learnings.

How do students make meaning of cross-racial relationships?

Cross-racial relationships or interactional diversity, “the opportunity to interact with students from diverse backgrounds” (Gurin, 1999, p.41) has been researched extensively in previous studies (Chang, Astin, & Kim, 2004; Hu & Kuh, 2003; Milem, & Umbach, 2003). As mentioned earlier, much of the findings are framed in relation to the experiences students of color have with White students, not necessarily across racial/ethnic identities. The purpose of this study was to drill deeper into individual narratives that explored the nuances and complexities of cross-racial interactions. Although there were a few stories shared about meaningful relationships between students of different racial/ethnic backgrounds, the most profound examples reflected interactions with White students. For example, Leticia who identifies as Puerto Rican and White, shares how she learned a lot from a White friend on the floor.

she has helped challenge a lot of my opinions, because we started talking once and I make a comment about the "majority culture" and she asked me to clarify, and I was like 'White people' and gestured towards her.

Leticia goes on to share how she and her friend engaged in a long back and forth conversation about Whiteness. Even though Leticia never shared a comment that seemed overtly derogatory toward White people, the willingness for her to stay engaged in this conversation about race gave her a “really close” friend and as Leticia shares, “she made me start thinking about it, ‘are you really ready to say that about every White person you meet?’”

Crisanto’s story demonstrates how a the cross-racial friendship that created the most critical reflection for him as a student. Crisanto’s ongoing encounters with his friend Luke are covered in-depth in the findings chapter. However, here is another example of how Crisanto is engaging internally and externally in this newfound friendship.

Luke and I can be together on this gender level, but he's just now reading about intersectionality. It was so cute, so cute, he calls me and is like, 'hey Crisanto, I'm working on my women's study midterm right now and ahh, I was wondering if you had a definition for intersectionality for me?' And I was like, 'yeah, it's my life...I'll be right down there so I can help you figure out what to say.' [...] for him to be like, 'yo, do you know what intersectionality is?' was frustrating, especially because he has intersectional identities, you know what I mean? [...] I'm sure he's had that experience and hasn't been able to articulate it. And I know there are people of color and oppressed people everywhere that can articulate intersectionality, BUT can in their [own] experiences.

Again, Crisanto, expresses his frustrations, and has committed to staying engaged in this friendship where Luke’s whiteness functions as a catalyst for growth for both of them.

Genella provides another example that highlights the appreciation for developing a greater friendship with a White student. Although Genella roomed with a White student during her freshmen year too, she talks much more positively about her White roommate in the MLC.

I feel that we've [roommate] gotten along with each other, we got close. We actually thought about going to each other's houses for break. We've met each others' families more than like last year, my roommates family would come and just say, 'hey, how you doing,' we've actually gone out to her family's [house].

Each of the student's encounters reinforces some of the primary findings in previous studies (Antonio 2001a, 2001b, 2004b) on cross-racial relationships. Through the above examples it is reasonable to see that the friendships were positive in nature, the interactions helped the student's expand beyond how they identified racially, and broadened their understanding across racial differences. The examples shared here and those mentioned in the findings section all describe a meaningful cross-racial relationship with a member of the MLC community. The fact that the students were a part of an intentionally structured multicultural community, with some perceived shared values and interest supports the role perceptual propinquity has in fostering intentional cross-racial relationships. The majority of the students living in the MLC had a high desire to live in the community, and the fact that they shared such close living space added to how much students were willing to invest in cross-racial relationships.

How does your MLC experience relate to your broader campus experience?

For some students living in the MLC served as a reprieve from unfriendly encounters and a sense of isolation they felt throughout the broader campus community. The findings on racial microaggressions highlighted many of the student's negative encounters in detail. The fact that living in the MLC was a sort of a familial sanctuary where students could let their guard down without feeling judged by others were reinforced in the "what it means to live in the MLC" section of the findings.

For others, living in the MLC contributed to increasing confidence and courage to engage in cross-racial interactions with others throughout the campus community,

particularly in the classroom. Calvin and Leticia both shared that their capacity to disagree and engage with classmates across differences in racial background and opinion. As Leticia states, “be willing to ask questions about what you don’t know,” and she meant that this was valuable lesson for her to learn and for her White classmates to learn and reciprocate. If universities are committed to “produc[ing] skilled graduates with the capacity to lead a diverse democracy” (Stearns, Buchmann, & Bonneau, 2009, p. 192) more efforts that help develop student’s capacity to effectively and authentically engage across racial differences is paramount.

What were benefits and challenges of living in a designated multicultural community?

The overarching theme of “what it means to live in the MLC” and “Horizons Broadened” provide the clearest examples of what the students identified as benefits and challenges. Words and phrases that were used to describe positive attributes of living in the MLC were: “people are friendly”, “people don’t judge”, “felt more like family”, “I don’t go to my dorm, I go home”, “comfortable”, “one big family”. Each phrase reflects this idea of having a sense of belonging, which supports current research studies (Fries-Britt, & Turner, 2002; Fries-Britt, & Turner, 2001; González, 2002; Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999; Turner, 1994). Feeling like they had a safe, welcoming and supportive place to return from being on campus all day was clearly the most prominent benefit the students articulated. Gaining new perspectives and engaging in topics of diversity and social justice was also a benefit that students named as valuable. Student’s individual investment entering into a program like the MLC certainly adds to how likely one is to engage in the topics surrounding such a community. The reverse of that is also

worth noting, how students experience a community like the MLC impacts their short-term and long-term perceptions on topics of diversity and social justice.

The two structured aspects that the students mentioned impacting their perspectives and willingness to engage the most was the seminar affiliated with the MLC, and the *Lemon Squeezes*, the in-hall weekly discussions. The students viewed both of these an extension of their living community, and students framed the *Lemon Squeezes* and the seminar as benefits to their overall learning. Unlike other classes, where students interact one to three times a week in a very defined way, the seminar and *Lemon Squeezes* were viewed as extensions of an already established community. Institutionally fostering cross-racial interactions in structured and in intentional ways was received positively and as a benefit by the students, which reinforces the educational benefit to students and their sense of belonging.

Interestingly enough, the challenges identified by the students were mostly structural in nature. The most prevalent critique, not necessarily a challenge, was paying an additional fee to be a part of the MLC community. Additionally, a few students felt that the MLC was housed in a less desirable residence hall. A few students also struggled with how the seminar was facilitated and the materials that were covered. Other students wanted more visible involvement by the paraprofessional staff in the MLC. Forrest elaborated on many of the related points mentioned

I think that they [staff in the building] need to see how things are going, they need to check in a lot more. [...] I don't think I have yet, personally or physically been asked what's going on, on the MLC floor by someone from the MLC floor. You know, you've asked me, some Vice Provost has asked me, some "up" people have asked me but people those who are actually a part of it [MLC] haven't asked me and I haven't really heard of them really asking. [...] but it needs to be a part, very crucial to the enjoyment of the experience.

What is helpful here, is that students overall benefited from the philosophical underpinning in which the MLC was created. The challenges identified by the students are all aspects that can be easily reconsidered, and addressed by administration.

What were some unexpected outcomes?

The most surprising finding was how much intersecting social identities were thoughtfully and critically reflected upon by the students interviewed. The most salient intersection mentioned by students was between race/ethnicity and sexual orientation. For some students sexual orientation was mentioned on a very personal level as a new awareness and questioning of their own identity. For the students that were questioning or identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ) how that intersected with their racial or cultural identity was complex. However, all of these students found support within the MLC community. For Calvin, this support was certainly not expected initially, and definitely an unintended outcome. The MLC intentionally engaged students on topics of diversity and social justice beyond race and ethnicity, and as an outcome more students were willing and able to reflect on multiple aspects of their identity.

One student shared how her personal values regarding sexual orientation intersected with her racial identity were challenged during a *Lemon Squeeze* and she walked out. While a greater number of students shared how they gained a greater understanding and capacity to be an ally to students who identified as LGBTQ. Living in the MLC seemingly has assisted many of the students in establishing a more complex sense of identity. Additionally, students more readily examine their own preconceived assumptions and are better able to interact with others recognizing multiple facets of identity.

The extent to which faculty and administrators intentionally integrate Queer pedagogy with antiracist pedagogy can prove to be extremely valuable for students of color trying to make meaning of two identities that are often framed in opposition with each other, real or perceived. The value in challenging long held codifications that Queer equals White opens up the space to recognize the complexity of intersecting identities, “Queer theory has been less than cognizant of the fact that being White and Queer often does not mean the same thing as being Latina and Queer” (Loutzenheiser, 2001, p.197).

Implications for Practitioners, Policy Makers, and Future Research

The stories and experiences shared by the students of color in this study are not unique, but one could argue that their stories are not heard loudly or often enough. Diversity initiatives have been an intentional part of the fabric within higher education for over four decades and will continue to be a priority for most institutions. Knowing that an increased racial diversity in higher education is only going to continue to rise in numbers, figuring out how to better integrate students of color must be paramount for practitioners and policy makers alike.

UW-Madison has established a useful structural blueprint for other institutions to build upon. The MLC community is not without flaws and student’s narratives provide some starting points for administrators and affiliated faculty to reflect on how to further improve the students experience the MLC. The findings in this study support one of the assertions made prior to the start of the study, that gaining student perspectives can contribute to the institutional insight and assist to better tailor successful diversity initiatives. As one of the challenges with well-intentioned diversity initiatives, such as the one described in this study, is that they often continue exist without periodic formal

evaluation. Without a commitment to ongoing assessment, programs such as the MLC risk being nothing more than a hollow symbolic gesture to note in an institutional strategic plan or campus brochure.

Furthermore, when programs invest in ongoing assessment the findings can often provide concrete information for policy makers that control funding and other resources that can increase support for students of color attending PWI's. One of the resounding sentiments shared by students is that it is not enough to have just one floor that is intentionally diverse. Beyond wanting more White students to live in communities like the MLC, participants felt strongly that all students in the University should be required to take a course like the MLC seminar. These two suggestions are direct calls to action for policy makers that are genuinely committed to building a more racially diverse, open and supportive community.

As significant as the above suggestions may be, it is also important for further research to be conducted that examines the influence of self-selection into communities like the MLC. Although some of the students in this study were required to live in the MLC, the majority of the students intentionally chose the community. Is it possible to isolate out how particular individual characteristics intersect with organizational features of such a community? Do certain intersections of individual qualities and organizational aspects contribute to a particular cause and effect on one another? It is a challenge to isolate out the multiple ways in which students are involved on campus, to solely determine the extent that one aspect (e.g. the MLC) can be attributed to student's growth and engagement.

Ideally, a future study would consider the notion of “contamination” effects. Meaning how much do students physically and psychologically invest in MLC versus other activities that influence their development? Astin (1997) has provided a foundation to examine how student’s predisposition upon entering college influences their ongoing college experiences and the ways and extent in which they are likely to be involved.

Beyond the policy and practitioner implications, more research needs to be conducted that raises the voices of students of color beyond statistics. The students in this study are a powerful reminder that their stories matter, and that they are not one-dimensional characters simply based on their racial/ethnic background. Further research can only enhance our understanding, by seeing the institutions through the eyes of the student’s, greater knowledge on how universities can be more intentional and supportive can be gained. As the student population entering college becomes increasingly diverse, research needs to reflect the depth and nuances of the student body.

Conclusion

Entering into this study, my primary focus was to bring the forgotten voices of students of color back into the discourse on racial diversity on college campuses. One of the most profound learning’s from inviting individual student of color voices intimately into the conversation is that the students have a lot to teach us. The students in this study should serve as a call to action for those of us dedicated to supporting students of color in institutions of higher education. We need to collectively identify and institutionalize efforts to intentionally create a more inclusive campus community. There is obviously still a lot of work to be done, but truly soliciting student voices and hearing their stories can help focus our efforts on what matters most to our students. Furthermore, the findings

exemplified that students of color are not a monolithic group. Although some similar struggles are present, recognizing that cross-racial learning occurs across racially diverse groups is also important to note.

Granted, engaging with students of color alone is not enough. Assisting White students to increase their capacity to interact across racial differences is also paramount. The challenge for practitioners and policymakers alike, is to figure out how to develop programs and opportunities that A) create a safe and affirming space for students of color, B) challenge White students to engage and learn the value of a more racially diverse environment. The problem is that too often institutional efforts are pitted as either trade-offs or as competing commitments. Yet, as the students in this study expressed, it is important to put forth a stronger effort on both ends of the spectrum.

If the students in this study are any indication, it is clear that they are aware and desire to assist in creating more inclusive campus communities. All too often we allow experiences to be framed from a dominant viewpoint, and we can learn so much more when we invite all voices into the conversation and potential solutions. The students in this study were reflective, critical and extremely aware of their surroundings. They have hopes of a more inclusive future for institutions of higher learning, hopes for campuses that do not have to be defined as PWI's. We need to get beyond identifying that racially inclusive universities matter to authentically creating inclusively diverse institutions where all students are heard and valued.

APPENDIX A

LETTER OF CONSENT

Dear [name],

As I have mentioned per our email correspondence, I am a graduate student at the University of Massachusetts Amherst in the Education Policy and Leadership program with the School of Education. I am undertaking a research project to learn more about the experience of students who have self-selected to live in a designated multicultural learning community.

Your participation will entail up to two individual interviews throughout the spring semester, and participation in one group interview at the beginning of the semester. Each interview will last approximately one hour in length. My goal is to learn about your experience living and being a part of the multicultural residence hall community. With your permission, I will tape record the interviews; the recording will be safeguarded under lock and key and once the recordings are transcribed they will be erased. I will be the only person to review and transcribe original audiotapes.

I will also offer you the opportunity to review the transcriptions of your interviews as a means to ensure that I have understood and captured your words and meaning accurately.

I will guarantee you that your real name will never be used, and that I will use a pseudonym to protect your identity. Although you will be provided with a pseudonym, it is important to recognize that I cannot guarantee absolute anonymity. As my intention is to use direct quotes from your interviews as a part of my dissertation and any related future papers from my overall research, there is always the possibility that assumptions will be made about who the participants are since my study is based on such a small number of participants.

I will keep all recordings safeguarded while in the process of transcribing the interviews. Upon completion of transcription, the recordings will be destroyed, leaving only the transcribed version with your new pseudonym as my way to track your identity. Please be assured that there are no known risks or discomforts associated with this study. However, as this is a very personal process, based upon your own past and current experiences as a student of color the possibility to have unexpected emotions triggered a potential risk you are taking.

I truly appreciate the amount of time and commitment you are willing to give to me, and what I believe is an important study. I also appreciate the opportunity to hear part of your

story and to learn about your experiences as a student living in a multicultural residence hall community. Please be assured that your involvement is completely voluntary and if at anytime during your participation of this study you wish to withdraw, you can certainly do so without regard to any consequences. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 413-687-8333 or kathys@educ.umass.edu. You are also welcome to contact my University of Wisconsin-Madison faculty sponsor, Dr. Aaron Brower at 608-262-5246 or ambrower@wisc.edu.

Thank you,

Kathy Sisneros

The study has been explained to me, and I understand the conditions described above. I freely agree to participate.

(Signature) _____ (Date) _____

APPENDIX B

GUIDING QUESTIONS GROUP INTERVIEW

- What does it mean to live in the MLC?
- What are the perceptions across campus about the MLC?
- What makes living in the MLC different in ways that you would not experience living somewhere else?
- How has living in the MLC influenced your friendships?
- How has living in the MLC influenced choices you make regarding involvement on campus?

APPENDIX C

GUIDING QUESTIONS INITIAL INTERVIEW

A phenomenological interview process will guide this in-depth process. The goal is to facilitate up to three inter-related interviews over one academic year. Semi-structured, open-ended interview questions will be used for all individual interviews and for the focus group. The questions below will serve as a guide for the initial interview, and as a means to open up a more dialogic exchange as a way to better understand participant experiences.

- Begin by introducing/sharing a little about yourself.
- Share with me any key experience(s) you have had living in the MLC.
- What have you learned about yourself as a result of living/participating in the MLC?
- What sources of support do you have while attending college here?
 - a. Can you share with me the item you brought that symbolizes/represents a source of support that keeps you centered here?⁴
- How do you identify racially/ethnically. (ask only if/when student doesn't volunteer information).
- What influenced your decision to attend this University?
- What influenced your decision to select/live in the MLC?
 - a. What experiences and relationships influenced your choice?
 - b. What do you expect/hope that you will gain by living in the MLC?
 - c. What messages have you received from family and friends about your choice to live in the MLC?
- What sort of racial/ethnic specific groups, organizations, communities have you been involved with prior to college?
- What messages did you receive about UW and the MLC prior to your commitment to attend the University? From whom did you receive these messages?

⁴ Participants were asked during earlier email communications to bring an artifact that represents/symbolizes a sense of support for them while attending college.

APPENDIX D

GUIDING QUESTIONS SECOND INTERVIEW

- Check-in, get reacquainted...anything significant change in your life since last we met?
- Share with me any key experience(s) you have had living in the MLC.
- What have you learned about yourself as a result of living/participating in the MLC?
- What sources of support do you have while attending college here?
- What have you gained by living in the MLC?
- What have you learned about yourself? Others?
- What has surprised you most about your experience living in the MLC?
- What have been the most meaningful cross-racial relationships you have developed this year?
- Revisit overall campus experience in relation to MLC; and would you recommend/encourage incoming students to live there?
- If you could change one aspect of the MLC what would it be?

APPENDIX E

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS AND PUBLICATIONS

First Wave, Office of Multicultural Arts Initiatives. <http://omai.wisc.edu/?cat=9>

The Holley Report (1987)

The Madison Plan (1988)

The Madison Commitment of 1993

MLC Housing Assignment information. Personal contact.

MLC *Lemon Squeeze* description. <http://www.housing.wisc.edu/mlc/>

MLC Seminar syllabus.

MLC Staff and Student job descriptions.

MLC Steering Committee Historical documents.

MLC webpage. <http://www.housing.wisc.edu/mlc/>

MLC Welcome, summer letter. <http://www.housing.wisc.edu/mlc/>

Plan 2008 (1999)

University Residence Halls Information Booklet

The University of Wisconsin System: Design for Diversity (1988)

Women in REDZINE, student publication. Campus Womens Center, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

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