

WHEN BLACK IS WHITE: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF RACE AT
PREDOMINANTLY BLACK AND WHITE COLLEGES

By

LOUWANDA EVANS

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ABSTRACT

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Louwanda Evans, M.A.

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Supervising Professor: Dr. Ben Agger

The intended purpose of this project is to examine the social construction of race for Black students attending predominantly Black and Predominantly White colleges. Previous research has examined the experiences of Black students at the college level, but few have attempted to understand the meaning of “Blackness” within these settings. From the perspective of social construction, in-depth interviews were conducted with twenty African American students attending two major universities located in the state of Texas. In this study, several emerging similarities and difference were discovered and discussed concerning what being Black means to students in these contexts. The data takes us through the process of understanding the experiences of these students in the

university setting, through the ways in which these experiences are internalized, and finally how race is ultimately constructed. Finally, we are provided an opportunity to examine the similarities and differences in environmental factors contributing to how race is socially constructed.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	i
ABSTRACT.....	ii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Justification For Research.....	5
2. CONCEPTUALIZATION.....	6
3. METHODOLOGY.....	12
3.1 Data Collection.....	12
3.2 The Settings.....	14
3.2.1 Predominantly White University.....	14
3.2.2 Predominantly Black University.....	15
3.3 Ethical Considerations.....	17
4. HOW DID WE GET HERE: EARLY EXPERIENCES.....	19
4.1 Familial Influence.....	19
4.2 Where I Grew-Up.....	27
4.3 There Is A Time and Place For Everything	31
5. EXPERIENCE AND INTERNALIZATION.....	37
5.1 Peer Influence	37

5.2 Faculty Relationships	42
5.3 Stereotypes and Discrimination.....	49
5.4 Personal Experience.....	55
5.5 What is “Black and White?”.....	59
6. INTERNALIZATION AND CONSTRUCTION.....	65
6.1 Media Influence.....	65
6.2 Commonalities With Other Blacks.....	73
6.3 Where Do We See The State of Black People.....	80
6.4 Do you Feel That Things Have Changed.....	85
6.5 What is Black Culture?.....	90
6.6 The Meaning of Black.....	94
6.7 The Construction of ‘Black’	98
7. CONCLUSION.....	102
7.1 Implications For Future Research.....	106
Appendix	
A. CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT.....	108
B. FACE SHEET.....	111
C. INTERVIEW GUIDE.....	113
REFERENCES	120
BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION.....	124

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When attempting to understand the concept of race in American society, there are several initial ideas that come to mind. The concept of race has been best understood as inherently political and social in nature. As Bonilla-Silva (1997) states, racial categories were historically created to label and justify the exploitation and conquest of various peoples. The invention of these categories entails a dialectical process of constructing the category of “other” and hence a category of “same.” In its entirety, we can deduce the political nature and social implications underlying these constructs. It is political as it is often a purposeful means of differentiating and categorizing individuals on the basis of skin color and other distinctive features. In a society that continues to oppress individuals who are non-White and non-male, this type of ideology is manifested in most areas of society, and subsequently most areas of life. Therefore, this facilitates the ability to place people or groups of people in subordinate and superordinate positions.

While examining the system of higher education in our society, we can continue to understand and perceive differences that may be influenced by race and/or culture, gender, or other areas that are usually constructed to marginalize various groups or classes of people. In the system of higher education, mainly the college or university setting, students have options when deciding which type of institution to attend and

which institution will best suit their personal educational needs. In understanding this, we do know that various factors can influence these important decisions.

African American students, or Black students, as I will call them, often consider attending a historically Black college or university for several reasons. Some may select a school because of geographic location, cost of tuition, or admission requirements, while others may attend due to the homogeneous nature of the student population. It is shown that black students consider the rich history of predominantly black colleges as well as a positive campus environment as some of the reasons to apply and subsequently attend HBCU's (Bennett and Xie 2003).

For me, a Black woman, I find myself in a subordinate position when examining the structure of our society. To be Black signifies that I am different, in other words, not White. To be a female says that I am not a male. By placing me in these categories, it says that I am different. I am in a sense an "other." As a graduate student at a university where Blacks do not make-up the majority of the student population, I often pondered how "being Black" plays out or manifests itself in this particular environment. I ponder this as the majority of the courses in which I have enrolled: I am either the only Black student, or one of a small few. In these settings where I am the only Black student, what does being Black mean? If there are no other Blacks in my surroundings that carry a shared or similar meaning, does it mean anything? Because of my surroundings, being Black means or can best be understood through my personal meanings of Blackness. At its simplest and most basic form, it means, in a sense that I am opposite my classmates. This is not to diminish the college experience of all minorities and nonminorities, but my

focus in this work is primarily on the experiences and construction of race for Black students.

I do not intend to imply that all classes at this university contain only one Black student, but I do posit that Black students are definitely the minority in the classroom setting. While keeping this in mind, I ask, what does it mean to be Black, or what does being Black signify to these students? What does it mean in terms of education, culture, and what does it mean in a social context? In these settings, what is Black as described by culture, dress, language, ideologies, and so forth? If examined collectively, would these students have similar and shared meanings or thoughts on being Black?

What happens when Black is White? White, in this sense, signifies the majority, not the minority? Is race a socially constructed concept, does it remain constant across different contexts, situations, or locations? For the students at predominantly Black colleges or universities, is “being Black” different from those students who are Black at predominantly White universities? For purposes of this project, I intend to examine how conceptions of race vary for Black students at predominantly Black and predominantly White schools. With this in mind, how is race socially constructed?

By utilizing the perspective of social construction, we are permitted to understand that meanings are derived from our everyday experiences. These meanings come about not only through the way we perceive ourselves, but can also be understood by how others construct or give us meaning. Often in literature, when we think of race as a concept and how it is constructed, we as Blacks are often reintroduced to the meaning of Black by individuals who are non-Black. What is Black in the eyes of Blacks? If we examine the

influence of the Black Power Movement, to be Black is to be beautiful. It is something that is different, yet unique and deserving of elevation in its difference. To be Black is to share a sense of community, to share a distinct culture, and to denounce all things not positively associated with Black culture and Blackness.

If we go further and examine existing literature on Blacks by scholars such as bell hooks or Cornel West, we see the necessity of coming into an appropriate definition of Blackness that aligns itself with the positive definition associated with The Black Power Movement. It is to grasp the knowledge that as Blacks we carry a different understanding and construction of our race and of our identity than those who are not Black. This is important as we understand how race, more specifically, Blackness is defined and constructed.

This project examines and details the construction of race for twenty Black students currently enrolled at two Texas universities which are considered to be predominantly Black or White. It catalogs their initial construction of identity through various early experiences with family, neighborhoods and school systems, their experiences with stereotyping and discrimination and their subsequent construction of race. Ten students were interviewed while attending the State of Texas University (STU), which is considered a predominantly White university and ten attending an HBCU. This project then highlights the commonalities and differences in their meaning of ‘Blackness’ and any variation across contexts and environments.

1.1 Justification For Research

There is a lack of research on how race may be socially constructed by students on college campuses that are predominantly Black and predominantly White, and the subsequent manner in which this social construction of race becomes reality. I intend to contribute to this area by going beyond the scope of experiences of students attending either predominantly Black or predominantly White universities, their experiences of discrimination or closeness to faculty and the institution itself by taking all of these aspects and understanding how students take these experiences not only in the educational setting but life and construct their idea of what it means to be Black. I will examine if there are similarities in a general sense of what it means to be Black or if race or Blackness as a construct is fluid or varies according to context. This study is important as it goes beyond the scope of definitions and quantifiable categories of Black and examines what it is to be Black from the personal perception of participants, as well as the perceptions Blacks have of others who share their race.

CHAPTER 2

CONCEPTUALIZATION

In the hierarchical structure of race relations in the United States, minority groups typically signify a social unit whose essence is defined by its relationship to a surrounding majority (Rosenberg 1979). In the context of this paper, the minority group examined is Black students and their overall relation to other social groups in the university setting. Although a significant amount of progress has been made in overall race relations over the years, there are still known and exercised differences in how race and racial identity is identified and manifested in situations and contexts.

Self-concept is known as the totality of feelings and thoughts that arise when the individual reflects upon him/her self. This comprises our various identities, attitudes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences along with their evaluative and affective components (Gecas and Burke 1995). Collectively, our racial concept consists not only of our external or physical attributes, but also our internal or intrinsic manifestation of the aforementioned properties or characteristics. Our outer skin color or more importantly, our race, is a salient and reasonable aspect of our identity (Van Ausdale and Feagin 1996). This idea, or how we identify our “self” can also contribute to how we identify and relate to others.

When speaking of the social construction of race, I will be examining not only students’ racial identities and their formation, but how they are constructed, reproduced

and lived in everyday life. Race continues to produce or reproduce itself and an individual's subsequent racial identity. Like reality, what it means to be Black is learned in the course of socialization and mediates internalization within the individual's consciousness of the objective structures of the social world. This reality or idea in turn has the power to shape the individual (Berger and Luckmann 1966). From the perspective of social construction, society inevitably produces and reproduces itself. This is also said of the individual's that actively participate in society. This reality not only shapes the individual, but places boundaries on the position he or she occupies in society. According to Berger and Luckmann, there are genetic traits of the self that are given at birth, but the self as experienced in later life is not. In this, we cannot be adequately understood apart from the social context in which we are shaped (1966). It is posited that men together produce an environment and in this, this social world would not exist without individuals to construct its meaning.

As we construct not only our ideas of self, but also the environment which we occupy, several things may be implied concerning race and the construction of its meaning in the university setting. For students who are African American and college students, they are identified as such. They attend classes, participate in academic affairs, and for those in this sample, are residents on campus. This affirms their position or role as students. When examining race, there are deviations of it's meaning according to the environment which they occupy. From the broader perspective of the university, these individuals are students and they are also Black, placing them in an altogether different position. To understand the meaning of this, these students experience college not only

as students, but they are also experience it as Black students. This is to say that in this context, they may occupy a different reality that is unknown to others.

In an environment that is predominantly White, what it means to occupy the position as Black male or female may have an alternate meaning to those students who shape or construct the larger environment, meaning White students. Black students attending a university where the majority of students, faculty, and administrators are not similar to them are confronted with constructing and maintaining their identity in an environment that often reminds them of their differences. When Black students attend a university that is predominantly White, it is noted, that the overall cultural atmosphere, ideas and ideologies, and general structure have a feel of being ‘White’ (Feagin, Vera and Imani 1996). This fact in itself may also contribute to the overall construction of race and racial identity.

On the other hand, when constructing ideas of what it means to be Black, this experience may signify a different meaning for students attending an HBCU. From the aspect of constructing identity in this context, students are likely to be in an environment where other African Americans dominate the student population, faculty, and administrators. These students are not obligated to construct their meaning to coincide with those who are non-Black. Students attending predominantly Black colleges are allowed to experience group collectivity while obtaining a diverse social experience by relating to individuals from various social classes and regions (Willie and Hedgebeth 1979). While attending predominantly Black universities, students have an opportunity to interact more often with students they feel they can relate to and share personal

experiences with. As we are shaped by the social world in which we occupy, the students in this sample attending an HBCU have to constantly alter their identity once they leave the predominantly Black environment provided for them on campus by dealing with the proximity of the university, which in this sample, is largely White. Once leaving the university environment, a different identity is constructed for them.

For students attending both types of universities, the position which they occupy is that of student. In other words, they primarily see themselves as students, not necessarily Black students. It is not until they interact with those who are non-Black that their race becomes a part of this, now making them Black students. The reality of everyday life is ongoingly reaffirmed in the individual's interactions with others (Berger and Luckmann 1966). For students attending STU, they become aware of their race when they hear stereotypes or other negative remarks toward Blacks. For students attending an HBCU, it becomes obvious when they leave campus.

Again, from the perspective of social construction, we are a part of the society in which we live and participate. It does not articulate participation in society where all cultures may not share the same or similar meanings of cultural acceptability that is an aspect of the larger social hierarchy that dominates American society. These ideas of constructing identities, mainly Black identities, are of concern as the idea of Blackness and Black culture exists contrary to what is widely accepted in mainstream society. According to Beverly Tatum, "The messages we receive about assumed superiority or inferiority shape our perceptions of reality and influence our interactions with others. The task for people of color is to resist negative societal messages and develop an

empowered sense of self in the face of a racist society” (2003). Tatum provides an additional perspective to social construction and the boundaries set by the dominant ideologies of society. The idea is for Blacks to construct their identity in a positive way although constraints are often set by the systematic negative perceptions of things Black.

As hierarchies and systems are in place for those who are White and non-White, there needs to be a disruption of the reliance on dialectical constructions. African Americans find a discrepancy between their self-perceptions and the images mirrored to them by society (Curtis-Tweed 2003). Cornel West notes that Blacks live in two worlds in order to survive: their own world and the White world in which they strive for social acceptance. They constantly reinvent themselves to fit into a context that marginalizes and yet excludes them (West 1993). This perspective speaks of the difficulty faced by Blacks in constructing their identity in a positive manner when they are often cast in the position of ‘different or other’ in the social hierarchy. Stokely Carmichael, in a speech concerning Black Power says that Black people must engage in a psychological struggle for control of their own self-concept and systematically question the dominant values of society as a whole. He continues by saying that to believe that complete integration into mainstream society is possible is to denounce freedom as this suggests that freedom can be given by a powerful group to a less powerful group (Gallagher 2001).

In this continuing dialectic of race, Blacks feel the need to move away from constructing their identity in two dimensions. They feel the need to move away from their marginal position and accept the power that is a part of their uniqueness. It is of

utmost importance to construct a collective identity contrary to what society predestines or constructs for them.

Although there are multiple things about us all that are the same, Blacks are told in society often that they are different or an ‘other.’ Their race is only a structural aspect of the perceived differences of their ‘Blackness.’ Race provides another opportunity to contribute to the “phenomenon of Otherness—of marginalized people and groups who are marginal precisely because other people and groups are not” (Agger 129:2002). I examine how all of these things are collectively combined to create or construct the general idea of Blackness.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Data Collection

For purposes of this project, I utilized qualitative methodology as a means of understanding the social construction of race at both predominantly Black and predominantly White colleges. Qualitative methodology was used as it provides an opportunity to illuminate how these students construct their idea of being Black and their subsequent meaning of blackness. The data for this study was conducted using in-depth interviews with an average duration of one hour to one hour forty minutes. Participants were interviewed only once during the month of February 2006. In total I conducted twenty interviews with students currently enrolled in college and residing on campus or campus apartments. The students ranged from 18 to 30 in age. All students had been attending their current university for at least one full semester. Students participating in the interviews had a variety of different majors from music, education, sociology, and engineering primarily. This was important to the sample as it allowed me to get a variety of experiences and opinions. Ten of the participants were male and the other ten were female. All participants in this project were African American, with one female student being of African descent. When deciding on a particular sample, I wanted students who resided on campus simply because this allows them to have a better perception of the campus environment.

When conducting interviews, I constructed a primary interview guide. The interview guide was semi-structured leaving room to ask questions and probe further into issues that were deserving. The semi-structuring of the process also allowed me to omit questions that were not pertaining to certain students and their environments. This also removed the necessity of follow-up interviews. I utilized snowball sampling as my primary method of recruiting students. Although initially respondents were found using this method, this changed shortly after. Due to an influx of students willing and desiring to participate, I was able to obtain different volunteers from a pool of willing participants. This allowed me to reduce the homogeneity of my sample. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Notes were also taken throughout the process. Before the interviews were conducted, students were given a pseudonym to protect their identity and protect participant confidentiality. Once the recorder started, students were referred to by their new given name. This was necessary as half of the interviews were transcribed by an outside source while I transcribed the rest. It deserves mention that notes were important for these interviews as the tape recorder introduced an unexpected dynamic. Before the interviews began the students communicated with me with an obvious ease. This is probably due to the fact that I am also African American. There was a level of comfort readily available to both of us. Once the recorder was started, the interaction between me and the participant became, in a sense unnatural. At the point of starting the recorder with their knowledge, their tone and type of voice changed. Participants began to sit-up straight and speak in a voice as if everyone was going to hear it. To alleviate this, once I informed the student that the interview was going to be recorded, I

immediately started the recorder during our initial interaction to eliminate the obvious tension created by the recorder.

In general, all interviews went smoothly. Students gladly answered all questions and upon concluding the interview wanted to talk more about some of the topics asked throughout the process. Students were willing to meet again if necessary and readily provided their information if subsequent meetings became necessary.

3.2 The Settings

3.2.1 Predominantly White University

As I began to think of schools to conduct research, this school was chosen out of convenience. When looking at the African American population as a whole, there is a noticeable African population that exists. I chose not to include these students as this provides a dynamic that is inconsistent with my project. Interviews were conducted at various locations on campus at the students' convenience. This university is a major university in the state of Texas. This university is located in north Texas, and will serve as the predominantly White school with a student population over twenty-five thousand. Of these students, twelve percent are classified as Black, with Whites comprising over fifty percent. Throughout this project it has been referred to as State of Texas University or STU. Students at this location were very willing to participate in this project as I initially recruited only two students. Those students recommended others and they also recommended others. At STU, I had approximately thirty students to chose my sample of ten from. Five of these students were male and the other five female. On average, the females in this sample were older than the male subjects. Two of the males in this

sample were eighteen and had only attended the university for one full semester. For the students attending this university, most had parents who had attended and graduated from a four year university. The majority of the sample was from middle-class backgrounds. The city that this university is located in has an approximate population of three hundred sixty-five thousand residents.

3.2.2 Predominantly Black University

This school was chosen due to it's location in the state of Texas. This university has over eight thousand students of which, eighty-nine percent of the student population is classified as Black. Initially, I obtained one volunteer at this university through a student attending STU. Once I met this student and set up an appointment, I was able to meet other students simply by visiting the campus with her. None of the interviews were conducted on their campus. All took place at an off campus location not one-mile from campus. Again, students began to seek me out simply through word of mouth. Again, to continue with consistency, five of the students were male and five were female. At this location, all were at least twenty years old and at least sophomore standing. Most of the students at this location classified their parents as working-class to middle-class. The majority of the participants had parents who obtained a four-year degree, while some had parents with no college background.

There was a different dynamic that took place at this location and during these interviews. Before three of the interviews began, my status as an African American was questioned. The students in question either asked me if I was Black, or "What are you mixed with?" This was something that I did not anticipate. Of the students who

questioned this, all were male. This goes hand in hand with this study as we all construct our identity. I did not think that my identity would be called into question; I am African American, though my complexion is considered somewhat fair. This caused me to question if other students wondered this but did not ask. The students who asked “What are you mixed with,” in a sense knew that I was in their words, “At least half black.”

This university is situated in a small town with approximately 5,000 residents. It borders another small town that is approximately the same size. I mention the towns as they played a part in the interviews conducted. I mentioned earlier that my identity was questioned simply due to my personal experience in this town as I was leaving. While I was visiting these towns, students warned me that I may not want to venture out very much. In all honesty, I did not understand why and I did not ask. Also, before traveling to this location, the student I set my first appointment with mentioned that I would not want to consider lodging in close proximity of the university. I agreed, but again did not question this statement in detail. Before I arrived, I phoned my parents to inform them of my arrival. At this time, my dad, who is a graduate of this university stated, “Don’t go to eat anywhere around there.” I inquired as to why this would not be a good idea. He simply said, “Never mind, that was thirty years ago.” That was the end of our conversation.

As I made a stop to purchase something to eat as I was leaving town, I stopped at a local and well known fast food restaurant to get some fried chicken, I asked the cashier for specific pieces. She proudly informed me, “We ain’t got no chicken.” As I stood there looking at a pile of chicken, I understood that the cashier did not question my

identity. She knew without a doubt that I was Black. I initially smirked about it as I was unsure of how to respond. An older White male entered at that moment and she gladly served him his order of eight pieces of his choice. I eventually left with no chicken, but was served a chicken sandwich. I did not say anything to her as I was alone and definitely outnumbered. For a moment, I understood what all of the ‘warnings’ were indicative of. If that weren’t enough, everywhere I visited in this town, I was met with distinct gazes, and as a matter of fact, all monetary exchanges took place by laying my money on the counter and not accepting it from my hands. I mention this as this could possibly contribute to how students attending the university located there perceive their status as ‘being Black.’

3.3 Ethical Considerations

There are several ethical implications in this study. For one, researcher position may have caused problems. My sample consisted of only African Americans and again, I myself am African American. My closeness to the topic and subjects may increase the subjectivity of the project. Also, the location of the predominantly Black university may have caused these students to experience more cases of discrimination and stereotyping simply due to their location. The initial location of the sample may also be of concern. As I originally enlisted volunteers through snowball methods, there may have been some initial likeness in participants. I eventually lowered this possibility due to the amount of volunteers I received. As STU is known primarily as a commuter school, I had some initial problems locating males to participate that resided on campus or campus

apartments. This concern caused me to interview a few males that were considered first year students.

CHAPTER 4

HOW THEY GOT THERE: EARLY EXPERIENCES

4.1 Familial Influence

As we attempt to look farther into identity formation as a means of understanding how Black students construct their meaning of Blackness, there are several variables that will be examined. In this chapter, I examine how the early experiences in the lives of these students assist in the construction of their racial identity. By experience, I examine familial influence and influences with early schooling and neighborhoods as a way to assist our knowledge of race as a construct. Like socialization, these experiences serve as an avenue to transmit values, norms, and beliefs from one generation to the next (Demo and Hughes 1990). For the students participating in this project, some of those students mentioned hearing information from their parents concerning the significance of race or in particular, being Black. Although these students are attending two distinctively different universities, parents often mentioned to their children what it ‘means to be Black.’ One student recalled a conversation he had with his mother when he was first becoming a young adult.

They [my parents] told us little things. Like my mom would tell us to never go out in public a certain way, like with a do-rag on our head. She used to explain to us our stereotypical image that we already have throughout the world, so she was like, basically you have to beat that

because everybody gone look at you like you a thug or a gangster because you're a Black male and between the ages of 18 and 25, so when you come in the store you gonna steal, or try to get over on the cashier or whatever, its just always negativity directed towards young Black males. So, she basically taught us to beat that. She'd say, "You can't be wearing t-shirts all the time. Put on a button-up." "Don't go out in public with house shoes on, don't go with that do-rag on because you just adding' on and fueling what they already think about you."

As you can see through this account, his parents were thinking of a method of informing their son of what he could expect outside of the home. As issues of race and racism not only persist, but are a serious concern for college students (Suarez-Balcazar, Orellana-Damacela, Portillo, Rowan and Andrews-Guillen 2003), his parents felt the need to tell him how to behave outside of the home. There is an underlying awareness that Black culture and the Black race are still perceived negatively by some. The parents of participants in this project were noted as allowing their children to experience incidents of discrimination or stereotyping before talking to them about what being non-White and/or non-male would possibly mean in society. At other points, some parents spoke with their children in a general sense throughout their childhood about the significance of race although it was not always received, accepted, or agreed with.

[Do you agree with the things that they said about being Black?]

At first I didn't. I used to keep my do-rag in my pocket until I left home. But now, I'm starting to really understand everything she said.

[Why do you think you are starting to understand?]

Around Waller County, the White people here are kinda set back in their ways so we have issues. I mean right down the road they have Knights of Columbus hall. It's a lot of racist people over here. From the way they treated me out here by school and on the job, I mean, I started to see, wait, that is true, they are grabbing their pocket books and purses or clinch their pockets when I get on the elevator with them. So, witnessing that with my own eyes as I get older has really changed the way I think about what my mom said. You have to be more presentable, speak with better etiquette and what not. That way, everybody won't take me to be the next thug or gangster or whatever.

The student mentioned earlier said that at first he did not agree with the things his mother told him as a teen. He did not see the importance of wearing a ‘veil’ in public and not be who he truly saw himself as being. He did not feel that things were as concerning as his mother made them out to be. Although this student initially disagreed with his mother, he eventually began to understand on his own what being Black means in reference to larger society. He gained an understanding of how he is perceived as a young Black male and what it means to others through the sanctions he received. He then mentions the need to be more ‘presentable and well spoken.’ To him, these things, such as clothing and speech are tied to a negative image of Blacks and therefore, tied to him. It reiterates the point that there is a negative stigma attached to things considered “Black.”

Another student spoke on how he disagreed with his father when he spoke on discrimination against Blacks in society. When asked about some of the things that were shared with him through his parents, he states:

[Did your parents ever talk about talk to you about the significance of race...or the significance of being Black?]

Uh...yea..., maybe not in like a direct way, but they'd say that you being Black or African-American, whatever you want to call it, ...it's not a bad thing, you know, you take pride in that you have your own culture and stuff like that. And what you do kind of...you're kind of representative of the Black culture whenever you do things, so kinda watch out how you do things, what you say to certain people and things like that, but for the most part, you know, they were just saying, yea you're part of the Black culture, whether you like it or not, and obviously I do...but yea, just be proud of who you are and where you came from.

[Do you agree with most the things that they would tell you about being Black?]

Most of the time, yea.

[Was there ever a time that you didn't agree with what they would say?]

Yea, they were saying...I was trying to get a job in high school, when I was 15-16 years old, and I applied to like 10 or 15 places and never got a call back or any interviews and stuff like that, and um, my dad was saying...he's like "well, you know, you being Black, it may be a little bit harder"...I disagreed with him on that. And I was like, "well maybe it's just that they've had a thousand other people applying for the job and I'm a thousand and one and maybe they don't want me, or maybe it's because I'm in high school and I don't have a diploma or a college education, maybe it's that". It doesn't have to be because of what my race is, so...we disagreed on that.

This student went on to say that he ultimately disagreed with his father because he doesn't feel that things are still based on decisions are made according to what race you are. This student believes in meritocracy. He believes and states that if you work hard, you will be rewarded with equal chances.

With some of these students, things may not have been verbalized by their parents, but that does not imply that these students did not learn of the significance of ‘being Black’ through unspoken events. A twenty-one year old student at the predominantly Black university mentions a conversation that she overheard occurring between her mother, grandmother, and aunt. Alyse says that all three involved in the conversation are educators in the public school system.

One thing that my mother, well she did not necessarily tell me this, but, listening to her talk to my grandmother and my aunts on the phone, who both are former educators, she would say that it is so different being the only Black teacher at her school. You have to constantly watch what you say, you have to watch what you do, you have to watch your back at all times and make sure you are on top of your game as far as what you have to do because if you are not together, if something goes wrong, they look at you first.

Alyse recalled numerous stories that she overheard between her mother and grandmother. She admits that at first she did not understand these things until her mother came to her one night to speak to her about an experience that she herself had recently experienced.

[Do you agree with the things that they said about being Black?]

Not until I got old enough to realize it. My first racial experience that I actually saw myself was when I was in the fourth grade. I had always made all A's, never made a B. So, this one six weeks again I made all A's and I had perfect attendance. We had an awards ceremony and my name was never called out for any of the awards. Students were trying to bring this up to the teacher during the assembly, the principal said, “Oh, they forgot.” I didn’t really think anything of it, but that night, my mother came to me and told me that I was old enough now to see the things that

go on. She said that it is not that they forgot my name accidentally; my name was left out on purpose. She did not say why, but I could figure out why. That was my first experience that I felt.

Again, these excerpts illustrate the importance of family influence on our decision making process and some of our underlying ideas of creating our identity and ultimately what it means to be Black. The influence of family is just one of the ways that collectively we construct our ideas, ideologies, and beliefs. It is in a sense a stepping stone in how we gradually continue to construct and reconstruct our ideas on our meaning of Blackness. When parents would speak with their children about what it may mean in society to be Black, the types of things parents said to their children varied from one university to the other. Parents in general would speak with their children about these things, however, those attending STU were less likely to hear anything from their parents concerning the significance of race. In conversation, it had nothing to do with geographic location, social class, gender or any other characteristics. All students mentioned hearing or learning from unspoken events the significance of their race and the significance of being different from the dominant culture. A lot of the conversations had the same undertones which were to be cautious, on the lookout, and understand that racist ideas and ideologies still exist in society. Josie, a female attending STU shared this story with me:

We're very [my family] we are all very politically driven in the sense that, um, everybody takes the stand on some issue, and somehow, it always ends up back in politics. And one...one thing that I remember early, early on, is my grandfather talking about the days when he first started to vote. And when he was able to vote. And votes being torn up in his face. Or, I

remember one story he told and he said, he voted...he did everything he was supposed to do...he voted and before he even turned to walk away, the person taking the votes said, "Well, nigger you voted, but it ain't gonna count" and tore it up. And any time we talked about voting, anytime any of the grand kids was turning of age to be able to vote or we talked about voting, he told us all these type...all these stories about what was taking place when there was just...when his generation or my parents generation was just fighting for opportunities that we have today. So, although we're not involved in politics, its always been the forefront of conversations, because, like I said, anytime we turned 18, he shared those voting stories, um, and making sure we understood the importance of what...of the right we have today.

Another student spoke of a conversation he had with his father.

I remember my dad simply saying one day, that you know, "don't be ignorant to what's around you, you know, there might be...there is gonna be people that are still racists out there, so don't think that every white person is gonna be your friend, you know, some of them might be trying to screw you over". You know, stuff like that. So kinda like, you know keep your eyes open. But my mom also told me not to judge anybody before you get to know them, and all that too.

[When they would tell you things like that, did you primarily agree with them or did you disagree?]

I mean I understood the point where they were coming from, but at the same time, you know...like my mom said, I don't want to judge anybody before I get to know them, so it kind of goes both ways on that. And I agree, definitely that you gotta...everybody is different and so you can't sit there and assume something about somebody before you get to know them, but at the same time, you can't just think that everything is going all good and everything and that nobody cares about race at all, because that's not true.

It is mentionable that students attending the different types of schools had different perceptions concerning the accuracy of the things told to them by their parents. Students attending the HBCU were more likely to have parents that

spoke of a responsibility to those things Black; school, image, and pride. Even in the case where parents did not have a college education, they encouraged their children to attend an HBCU to be around others who are like them. Some of these students had parents that attended well-known universities that were predominantly White, and they still encouraged their children to seek an HBCU due to their experiences in their university settings. These students were also more likely to understand and agree with the things told to them by parents or other family members. It is important to mention that these students were more likely to grow-up or reside in neighborhoods and attend schools that were predominantly Black and had more Black presence in their lives as both younger children and older adults. Even at the present time, these students were also more likely to continue to hold the views of their parents concerning what it means to be Black. It is noteworthy that these students are just as likely to have adopted their own distinct perceptions concerning their meaning of Blackness by their current experiences. By being in an environment with others who share the same race, it is easier for these students, through conversations with others and experiences of their own to adopt some of the same or similar views.

Students attending STU were more likely to denounce the comments of their parents. First, the parents of these students were more likely to speak of equality when it comes to race relations. Most often, these students were unable to recall conversations of this nature to even take place between them and their parents. It is like one student said, “My parents did not talk about what it means to be Black,

but I knew they were poor, so I understood that aspect of being Black.” This student not only associates a lower-class status position with being Black, but also mentions that this was something unspoken of by her parents. This was not the only student that shared these types of ideas. Their parents often encouraged them to get a good education, study hard, maintain a positive image, and there will be no problems with discrimination. It is mentionable, that a good education often meant attending a university that was not a predominantly Black university. The parents of students attending STU were more likely to attempt to move away from the idea that discrimination is still a factor in the larger aspects of life. It was important for them to express a sense of merit; of working hard to achieve the things that are readily available in society regardless of race.

4.2 Where I Grew-Up

Previously, I examined the role of familial influence and things learned from parents or other family members to provide a better understanding of the initial methods of constructing ideas of race. In this section, I examine social factors and how it may contribute to how race is constructed in individuals. Students in this project were primarily from working to upper-middle class families. There are some participants that recall early in their childhood being “poor,” but those who stated this also stated that they moved up on the socioeconomic scale. There is a lot of variety when speaking about neighborhoods, schools, and the atmosphere in these environments that influence their past interactions with other Blacks as well as those who are non-Black. Denise, a student attending the HBCU had this to say about her early neighborhood and school system.

My neighborhood growing up was predominantly Black. It was all Black. My elementary school, I only remember 1 white person, it was probably more than that, but that's all I remember. Where I lived, I guess it's like what you would call the ghetto. It wasn't like the slums like on TV. It was like on this street was government housing, on this street it was another set, and down this street it was another set. And we were like in the middle.

[What was it like growing up in an all black neighborhood?]

I actually like that. I knew most of my neighbors. I lived there but I only went to school there for like three or four years. After elementary, I switched over to a half White half Black school. So, it was a lot different. The transition was a lot different cause like, if you're in a predominantly Black neighborhood, I noticed they don't have the same materials or the same opportunities that a lot of mixed schools have or the predominantly White schools have, so the problem I had when I was there was like I was one of the gifted and talented students and when we went, me and my best friend, we switched together, so when we switched over, the gifted and talented class did social studies and we knew nothing about social studies cause at my school all we focused on was on reading, writing, and math. We only did a little science and social studies. We had no idea what they were talking about, but most of the students that were there, most of them were White, it was only a few of us in the class and most of us that were there had transferred from another school district. They were White and they had been in the school district since they were in kindergarten so they had an advantage, so it was a hard transition.

Denise mentioned that her neighborhood growing up was primarily Black. Earlier in this process, another student mentioned his perceived differential treatment in the educational system. This student mentions a similar experience in the school system. She eventually changed school systems and immediately perceived a difference in the education she was receiving at a predominantly Black school than that of her predominantly White school. There were other students who attended all Black schools or lived in neighborhoods that were predominantly Black. Most of them had only positive things to say about their neighborhoods as they felt it created an atmosphere of an extended family. There were

others who grew up in predominantly Black neighborhoods that did not have anything positive to say about this environment.

No...It was a rough, terrible neighborhood. Witnessed drive by shootings, I had to run, it was terrible. The hood as you'd call it.

[What did you think about that?]

I'm cool with it. That's all I see, cause my brothers they much older than me and they graduated from college you know. So I would go to their neighborhood to get away. When I was finally old enough to see things and understand where I was at and see what was going on and go outside of the hood, my brothers were already financially stable and they moved out of the hood, they had they own. So, I was able to go to their neighborhood and come back to mine and see and understand the differences. So, I really didn't feel nothing. That was just life for me.. Like, I see my brothers made it out the hood, so I figured I could make it out the hood too. Its possible.

This student mentions how his childhood neighborhood, along with his siblings, became a motivational factor in his life. His experience in things of this nature increased his desire for greater opportunities in life and provided an understanding of the necessity of being educated. On the other hand, there were several participants that lived in areas that were predominantly White. Meaning, the school systems they attended were predominantly White as were their neighborhoods. Most of the students attending these types of schools or living in these neighborhoods believed these circumstances to influence their lives in a positive manner.

My neighborhood was primarily White even though over the years more Black families moved in.

[What did you think about that?]

It wasn't too bad. There was a couple of older White people and at first they did not like the fact that we moved into the neighborhood so we dealt with that, but besides that it was alright.

[What was your schools like growing up?]

Except high school, the other schools were primarily White.

[What did you think about that?]

I just blamed it on the area we were in. There were other places that I could have been but would have been worse off, so, I was thankful for it.

Another student mentions her neighborhood as being predominantly White and she saw this as a benefit to meeting others and diversifying her friendship base. She says, "We all played outside, so it was cool." Regardless of neighborhood and earlier schooling, these students believed that the type of neighborhood they lived in still has an effect on their idea of self and their ideas of others.

One student who resided in a rural neighborhood spent both elementary and middle school with only five or six Blacks in that school system. She admits that when she entered high school, it was a complete "culture shock." Her new environment was something that she needed to adapt to. Being introduced to various cultures, as well as a large percentage of Blacks was something new.

With the students in this sample, again, there was a mixture of the types of neighborhoods these students grew-up in. It was also a mixture when it comes to environment and their early school settings. Ultimately, these aspects of their childhood appear to have an impact on the type of college they eventually chose to attend. There were several students who grew up in predominantly Black neighborhoods that went on

to attend an HBCU, and a small few that went on to attend STU. For those at STU, one of their primary reasons for attending this university was to get away from an all Black environment as they felt it skewed their idea of the real world. In their words, “Most areas of the real world do not contain mostly or only Blacks.” They felt the need to learn to interact more with those who are non-Black. On the other hand, those that had early experiences with White neighborhoods and school systems were more likely to go on to attend a university that is predominantly White. Collectively, these factors play a part in how these students view Blacks, their relationship to other Blacks, and it is useful in their consequent meaning and construction of Blackness.

4.3 There Is A Time and Place For Everything

In certain settings, the significance of race is obvious. This is often exacerbated by the negative connotation of anything “typically Black” in nature. Often in most settings, Blacks are faced with the task of adapting or conforming to things considered White. This is inclusive of school, work, and any other environments that are White dominated. Black students, as well as Blacks in the general population often have to alter their identity to conform or integrate themselves in most common settings. A lot of this coincides with W.E.B. DuBois’ idea of double consciousness. It perpetuates the importance of being an American citizen; in essence where White norms and acceptability prevail, and being Black and true to this identity as well. Admittedly students in this project not only understand this, but also speak personally on their need for two-ness. It is not to say that all individuals do not conform to their roles, and their identities as such, but it is to say that as Blacks, this is something related to an ascribed,

not achieved characteristic. Unfortunately in this idea of double consciousness, it is important to be Black, but also important is not having the doors of opportunity closed in their faces (DuBois 1903, [1965]). These students learned early on that acceptable behavior varies according to location and context. They were told, often by parents, that there is a time and a place for everything. This signifies the necessity of formulating an ‘acceptable’ identity in the face of environments dominated by those who are not Black. Not only were these ideas spoken of by parents, these students often went on to understand this notion through their own personal experiences. A student attending STU had this to share.

There's a time and a place. I understand that. I can't be at a meeting and be ignorant.

[What does it mean to say there's a time and a place?]

You have to be tactful in what you say. Like my momma say, sometimes you gotta play the WP's. You have to play the ‘White people.’ There are ways to figure out what you can and what you can't do.

This student speaks of understanding the necessity in society to portray an image that is acceptable to mainstream culture. What is acceptable is an idea of speaking and dressing in a certain fashion. According to some students, it implies the ability and importance of “fitting in” with the dominant ideas in the classroom or workplace.

Another student talks candidly about the advice given to him by his mother.

My mom is a banker and in the corporate world. She started at the bottom and worked her way up. My mom would tell me, “You sometimes have to

say what you have to say in order to get what you want to get, but when you come home, you are who you are.”

[What do you think she meant by that?]

It means that there is a time and a place for everything. You have to make it in the world. You have to make money; you have to do what you have to do in order to survive, so you do what you have to do. In the workplace in order to make money you can't talk with a slur, you may have to talk a little more proper.

[Do you agree with that?]

Yes. I think it is true. Not that I agree with that, but that's just how it is. I mean we are a minority, we're never going to be the majority it's as simple as that. So, you got to do things they way for right now.

There is an interesting undertone in this advice. His mother mentions that “when you come home, you are who you are.” This connotes the ability to behave a certain way when you are in a setting that is conducive and accepting of speech, mannerisms, and apparel that is not acceptable in a society that pronounces that things associated with ‘Blackness’ as negative.

When you get around your friends that's fine, but you need to kick it on when you get out there in the job force, when you're around people that are going to benefit you, you need to kick that on whether they're White or not.

“Kicking it on,” is to turn off the behavior that is acceptable around friends and family and to behave in a manner acceptable as mainstream or proper. It implies the necessity of wearing a different “face” in public than would normally be worn in private settings.

Another student provides an example of what it means to be a certain way in certain situations hence the term, “a time and a place.”

Like...you know it's like...if I'm going to an important function, like...we have a whole bunch of Air Force functions, and you know it's gonna be a whole bunch of Generals, and the Generals are gonna be these White men and everything...So of course you have to play the part so you can get on top. So, I don't know, it think it's just...make sure that you play the right part at the right time, to get where you wanna go.

[What do you mean, “play the part”?]

Well, like...lets see. If you'd like to try and connect with people the way that you can, like...if you're gonna meet with, um a White...if you're gonna be with like a whole bunch of white executives or something, you don't wanna be all, like talking, you know about what went on on BET last night, or whatever. You maybe want to relate to what's going on, on CNN...or and I'm not saying Black people don't do it too, but it's okay to bring that up maybe when you're around Black people. It's like, when you're around a whole bunch of men, as opposed to a bunch of women. That can also be looked at too. Cause if you're around a whole bunch of Black women, you know, you can just somehow relate saying, you know a girl is having marital problems, “oh, girl, yea, me too, da, da, da”. When you're around a whole bunch of White women, you know, I don't know what they talk about, but you just have to go to their level, whichever level it is...depending on whatever person you are. You just have to kind of go there, mesh yourself in there with them. Just like...like I know when my mom's talking to her teachers, as opposed to her friends. Cause when she's on the phone, she's just like “um-hum, yes this is Ms. Clara. How are you? You're son's fine”...you know “yes, yes”...you know talking all nice and stuff like that. And when she's with her friends, she's like “Bla, bla, bla” and laughing and screaming and all this kind of stuff, so...

[So you think it's kind of a survival technique?]

Yea, definitely. Survival of the fittest. If you can, you know play the part that people want...but of course, keep your own self in mind. You know, you're not changing yourself ...for um...permanently, you just kind of playing that role because you have to. Just like in school...when you're a student you have to be a certain way in class or around your professors. Like if you're gonna be in the corporate world or whatever, with...you

know, with affirmative action, they might need like a Black person up in the high area or whatever. You know if they meet you and they find out that, you know, your personality is like them...um what is it called? It's called, um...the token. Like you're gonna be that particular token or whatever, they're gonna um...they want you to be like them. Like you know, the people on top are gonna pick people who represent them, you know. They're not gonna pick somebody that's extremely different. So if you see how they act, then you act how they act, there's a more likely chance that you're gonna get picked. And then, so if you act how they act and you keep on rising and rising and getting to the top, you just...when you're at the top, you can do, you know, what you want.

These comments go hand in hand with ideas of survival and therefore success.

Students found avenues of understanding their public behavior by crediting it the fact that their private behaviors and personalities may not be appropriate in public. I asked students if this idea of playing the game hindered their identity or forced them to be something or someone different, and they would express that they are still themselves, they just have to do what is necessary to succeed. One student states that you have to "mesh" with them, or get on their level. This is important as it questions the necessity of Blacks to mesh or assimilate to the dominant and acceptable norms of society. This expectation is an impossibility as Blacks are far from those things considered White; in race, culture, and status. It does not go hand in hand; other races are not forced to mesh with African Americans or adopt their ideals of speech or dress or even promote them as acceptable. The primary responsibility falls on African Americans to alter their behavior and identity to fit into mainstream culture or be deemed unacceptable.

It adds a different dynamic when students feel that they have to portray themselves in a socially acceptable way. It adds significance to the idea of having and enlisting

separate identities. To give an example, when beginning this interview process, upon my initial meetings with students, there was an underlying comfort that went beyond the boundaries of social acceptability or desirability. There was no initial concern of being grammatically correct or using “proper language” for that matter. Once I informed them that the interviews would be recorded, students were careful to speak grammatically correct. It was not until I informed them that these tapes would not be played publicly, only for the benefit of data analysis did their voices return to what was considered comfortable, normal, or “Black.” It is mentionable that the idea of playing the game did not belong to a particular environment. Students from both universities were likely to speak of the importance of ‘playing the game’ when out in public. The only difference is the environment in which they occupy. Students did not mention having to ‘play the game’ while on campus, although if speculation is allowed, I assume those attending the predominantly White university often enlisted these behaviors while on campus simply as they do not make up the majority and often interact more with those who are non-Black.

CHAPTER 5

EXPERIENCE AND INTERNALIZATION

5.1 Peer Influence

In this section, I delve into the role of friendships as a means of constructing and reinforcing existing ideas of Black identity. Peer influence in this section examines the influence peers have on one another in the college environment. This is important as it lends perspective to the experiences of these students while in their setting. There is a mixture of feelings about the perception of having friends who are of the same race. Some students mentioned having significant friendships with individuals who do not share their race, while others saw race as an important ascribed characteristic. It is not to downplay other significant indicators of friendships such as, but not limited to, location, type of neighborhood, type of school attended, social class, or gender. Students attending the predominantly White university were more likely to not see race as an important factor in establishing friendships. During questioning one student at STU told me about her friendships.

[Are the majority of your friends Black?]

Yes

[Is that important to you?]

Not important, just how it happened.

[Do you and your friends ever talk about racial issues?]

Yes

[Can you give me some examples?]

I was talking to one of my friends about like I guess how we will do our kids. Pushing them to do things that may not be stereotypically what black people do, that way they get experience in different things. Well the importance of breaking away from the traditional roles. You know you don't see it much, but there's always a couple of people that might do hockey, you know, or play baseball instead of basketball or you know, play soccer.

Although this student did not place importance on race when making friends, she also mentioned that her closest friends were Black. It is explained this as “just how it happened.” For students attending this university, most of them stated that it is not important to have Black friends. It was often mentioned that it is necessary to bring people of other races into their inner circle to gain experience in diversity or be allowed the ability to learn more about other cultures. When asked about the importance of race in establishing friendships, one student stated,

Like, I don't know. I really have a lot of friends and they are White and I have a lot of friends that are Black. I guess you could say most of them are Black.

[Is that something that is important to you?]

Um, it's important for me to be very diverse, cause I just don't wanna be...you know, I just don't want to have, only Black friends...I have friends from many different groups and stuff.

On the other hand, students at the predominantly Black college were more likely to see the importance in having Black friends due to their ability to relate. Other students in this setting did not place significance on having Black friends although they see that as "just how it is because that is what's around." Tammy, a 20 year old female attending the HBCU explained the importance in having lasting Black friendships. When asked, "Why is it important to you to have Black friends," she states,

Cause I can relate to them. Its just some things that I can't.... For instance, I remember I was in high school, most of my friends were White, and we had a sleep over and I had my hair wrapped and they didn't understand why I had to have my hair wrapped or why I had to have a shower cap on. But it's all unspoken around them [my Black friends], we all have hair wraps and we all have to take proper precautions about our hair. And I don't have to explain that, they just know.

As stated, Black friendships are important to some of these students. Some of these students mention having a "struggle" that they believe others from different races may not fully understand. Denise believes that a White person may not perceive the daily struggles faced as a Black female. Of students at both universities mention, it is easier to relate to someone who shares their race. The primary reason given to this is for purposes of being able to relate to one another. Another female student attending the HBCU says,

My closest friends are women. All of my friends are Black

[Is that important to you?]

No it's not important, but that is all I come into contact with. When I meet people of other races, we get along, but my close friends, my roommates; I've been knowing them since the sixth grade so we can relate to each other better because we know each other better. You know things that we have gone through and I feel that as a Black woman you go through, that I don't really know if a White woman will go through some of those things. It's like if you're Black and a woman, I kind of think you have two strikes against you. Especially if you're trying to climb the corporate ladder or head up an organization because, a lot of White people or especially White men are going to look at you twice because you're Black and because you're a women they gonna think that you can't do the same things that they do. I say all that to say that I think Black women can relate more because some White women may not be able to understand some of the things we go through or understand our struggle. I really don't think we would be able to relate as much.

It is important to mention that students attending the predominantly Black university also stated that in most cases race is not a determining factor in establishing friendships although it is an important factor when it comes to close friends. As these students went on to share some of the conversations that occurred between them, most were racially driven. Some of these stories will be included later as they coincide with particular experiences that these students had pertaining to discrimination and stereotyping.

As I was interviewing students at the predominantly Black university, some students mentioned the hair dress that I was wearing. The day that I chose for travel to this location was a rainy and humid afternoon. I, personally, was wearing a bandana over my hair. To use the term that was tossed back at me, "I had not unwrapped my hair." One student mentioned that a White person would probably not understand why I still had my hair wrapped. I did not think of it when I traveled there; in other words, I knew these

students would understand. I had not taken into consideration why I felt so comfortable leaving my hair this way when I am pretty confident in stating that I would not have worn my hair this way to attend any of my personal classes. It is safe to say, that because I had at least one thing in common with these students, I automatically felt more comfortable, more relaxed. I was in a sense, not any different or an ‘other.’

In the area of peer relationships, there were differences noted between the students attending these universities. Students attending STU saw importance in seeking a diverse friendship base. Although most of their close friends were Black, they did not see this as necessarily important. Some of the female students attending this type of university said that they could not relate to a lot of the other Black female students as they did not perceive any commonalities in their lifestyles. One student said, “I don’t have much in common with the other Black students here because I don’t have the same drama they have. I don’t have babies and I don’t talk loud.” She felt or made the assumption that most of the Black female students attending the university would have nothing in common with her and even suggests the possibility of having babies and speaking loudly. This assumption is costly as it contributes to the stereotypes often held of Black women. Students attending the HBCU believed that other Blacks would have the ability to understand them in ways that people of other races could not. When it come to issues of stereotypes or discrimination, they felt that it would be easier to speak with someone who shares their race. They felt there was a likelihood they had similar experiences as well.

Most often when conversations would occur between students attending STU and their friends, they were usually pertaining to ways to ‘get away from’ things that were

typically considered Black. This is in areas such as moving away from sports that in their eyes are typical of Blacks or on the possibility of dating individuals who are not Black. Again, to use their words, it is very important for them to diversify themselves in all areas of their educational careers and in their lives; this is through friendships and music among others things.

Students attending the HBCU in this sample were more likely to see the importance of having Black friends. They felt it was important because they would be more likely to understand the things that they have been through and possibly have had similar experiences. It appears to be an unspoken commonality between these students and their friends. Between these friends, there are often things they don't have to explain, justify, or clarify concerning issues of race. So, these students were likely to mention the importance of having close friends that are Black, but also friends of other races if they would actually meet them. The only thing they were unsure of is the possibility of them being their 'close friend.'

5.2 Faculty Relationships

While interviewing students for this project, there is another important component that deserves mentioning for some of the participants. The importance of faculty-student relationships often surfaced for some students when speaking of race and their continuing idea of what it means for them and their culture. Although students at predominantly Black and White universities mentioned having some type of relationship with faculty and staff, students at the predominantly Black university spoke as though their instructors and professors played a role in how they view themselves, their education, their goals,

and ultimately their race and culture. Several students shared stories of how the atmosphere in the classroom became a home away from home. Often their professors, regardless of their race or ethnicity, spoke with them in a tone that connotes family. One student attending the HBCU mentions,

What is your relationship like with your professors?

I like [my professors] because, I had another professor that was like a home away from home. He would tell us to “read your bible, do this, do that.” He was always in our ear about that stuff. It’s like our parents aren’t here, but now and then you come across a professor that will kind of give you that motherly or fatherly advise.

In this setting, students were more likely to have Black faculty members as they mentioned this throughout the interview process. Students attending this university saw this as a benefit to attending this university as they felt that they received more from their faculty than they would have at a larger university or a university with fewer Black students. African American students fare better socially and academically at predominantly Black colleges because the philosophies emphasized are similar to the larger community (Coleman and Hoffer 1997). Students perceived their faculty to be motivators, counselors, and perceived a relationship that transcends academics. This student spoke about his relationship he has with his professors, specifically his Black professors by saying,

It’s nice. I mean I learn a lot. There has been several things that I learn from them that are not in textbooks at all; a lot of false truths. I mean, even about our history. Real stuff about our history that are not and have not been in the books. I feel that these are things we wouldn’t get

especially at a mostly White university. I mean the university's textbook editions, there are some things in there that will just blow your mind.

As this student spoke about this, he reveals that he learned things previously not taught to him in textbooks or in history classes about his race and his culture. He learned things about his heritage that inspired him to explore the depths of his race. Other students shared similar experiences when it comes to their relationship with their professors.

Most of my professors or better yet all my professors know our first and last names, they know where we are from, they know our career goals. I think that is important. And you making the best out of your situation it allows you to get to know them and it helps if you need a recommendation letter or a sponsor or a mentor. A lot of my professors just push us and instill in us the desire to do better. They talk about things that are in the news with us. It is like a parent-child relationship. Because not only do they teach us, they mentor us and help us view things in a bigger picture.

[Do you have any professors who are Black or African American?]

Yes.

[So, what do you think about that?]

I love it. Black professors are more interested in what you want to do and helping you achieve those goals. They understand you because they may have had some of the same or similar struggles.

When students spoke of their Black faculty, they often spoke of how they felt their Black professors are able to relate to some of their experiences in college and in the surrounding community. Students in this sample who has professors that share the same race are more likely to form lasting relationships with these faculty members. Students at

the predominantly Black university often spoke of how they were encouraged to seek professors for not only academic matters, but personal matters. One student recalled a conversation that occurred after his family lost their residence due to hurricane Rita recently. When asked about his relationship with his professors, this students talks candidly of the things he gets from them.

Mental and spiritual advice. They are not only your teachers. They are all there for you. You get spiritual guidance. I was able to call him [one of my professors] after the hurricane Rita and he had some connections with housing and we were able to get housing to house some of my family members. The fact that I was able to get on the phone and call my professor says that we have a relationship.

When asked about their relationships with professors, those students attending STU were more likely to admit that their relationships with professors are on a professional or academic level. I began asking Tim, a nineteen year old student at STU about his relationships with professors.

[So, tell me about some of your professors. Do you have a relationship with any of them?]

Outside of class? No.

[Well, do you feel like they would be there for you if you needed them? Do you get that feeling?]

From this semester?

[Yes.]

One of my teachers, my English teacher...she seems like the only person I think that actually knows my name. All of the classes are pretty big, so

you know...well, yea her. Other than her, everybody else doesn't even really know me and just...maybe they might know my face, but she actually knows my name, so maybe she...I think she might be there for me if I needed something or wanted to talk to her.

This student mentioned class size as a factor in the ability to communicate with his professors. He also mentioned that of his professors, he could only recall one knowing him by name. Tim, the aforementioned student has only been enrolled at this university for two semesters, so I do not discount the fact that the opportunity to get to know his professors through repeat courses may not exist for him at this time. Another student talks about his relationship with his professors. Jason, a junior biology major at STU shares a similar account with me.

[Do you feel that your professors are there for you if you need them? And can you give me some examples?]

No. One of them I do. She makes it known that if you ever need anything, you can come to her office. Most of the others are real strict and structured and don't leave room for anything else. Sometimes you will go to a professor and ask if you can ask a question and they tell you that they are really busy at the moment, but you don't see anyone else in their office or waiting to see them. I have to ask myself, "Ok, what are you really saying"

As Jason answered this question to the best of his knowledge, he recanted a story earlier in the interview about one of his professors that caused him to no longer desire to speak out or ask questions in this particular class. Previously in the interview, I asked Jason,

[Do you feel comfortable speaking out or asking questions in class?]

O.k., that depends on the professor. I had this one professor that wanted us to call him a specific name. I was raised to say ‘mister’, so one day, well, on the first day, he told us “do not call me mister, do not call me professor, and if you don’t like me you can call me jackass”. This is the first day of class. So, one day, I went to ask him a question and I said, “Mister Thomas”, and he took off. He said “I’m not a mister.” I said, “I’m sorry, that is just how I was raised, is that not enough respect for you.” He said, “well, I told you on the first day not to call me mister.”

[Did you ever go to him again to ask a question?]

No, not after he walked away like that.

For Jason, this experience not only left a lasting impression on him, it influenced his perception of the availability of faculty members. Although this was only one experience of this nature, it gave him the ultimate impression that he could not go to any of them if he needed to. Black students in predominantly White colleges and universities generally seem sensitive to the character and the quality of feedback they receive from faculty members (Feagin 1992).

Only two of the ten students at the predominantly White university mentioned having Black faculty and also said that this occurred due to independent studies that they had sought out. None of their departmental faculty were African American. The Black faculty member that these students spoke of was in fact the same professor that had been recommended and sought out by numerous African American students. This particular professor is in the history department, but was utilized as a way to study topics pertaining to race/ethnicity. The following conversation occurred with a female senior attending STU.

[Okay, lets talk about your professors. Do you happen to have a relationship with any of them, or do you feel like if you needed them they would be there for you? Do you feel comfortable talking to them?]

No.

[Why not?]

Um...I know them and I know uh, and I knew the majority of my professors by name, um, and I would speak...some I would speak in the hallway, some I won't. Um, it's just not that type of atmosphere for me. I don't...I know that there are other students, um, who say about the same amount of things I say in class, um, do about the same amount of work as I do in class and get treated, I think, better. I have this one Black professor that I took a class outside of the department with and I would go to her if I needed something. She is really nice and I feel that she can relate to me.

Collectively, students at the predominantly White university mentioned that they would not approach faculty unless it pertained only to class or their grades. These students also mentioned that if there was anything that they needed assistance with outside the spectrum of academics, they were unsure if their professors would be available. Again, some students mentioned that they had attempted to establish a relationship with professors but stated that the atmosphere was not conducive to such relationships.

I will not discount the fact that there are significant differences in university size, and for that matter, classroom size. With the exception of three male students, all students interviewed were upperclassmen and at this point were taking mostly major classes. They also mentioned at both universities that the student-teacher ratio was quite small. So, I do posit that although class size may be a factor, there are other things that contribute to the deficiency of student-professor relationships. When asked, students at

the predominantly White university generally said that they could not relate to their faculty members. The students who had the common Black faculty said that they would seek her out for information pertaining not only to academics, but both personal and professional advice. When asked why, they both simply stated, “Because she can relate.” Again, the faculty member mentioned is a woman and both of these students were women, so gender may also be a common factor in their interactions with her.

5.2 Stereotypes and Discrimination

As we continue to understand the construction and meaning of what it is to be Black, we can continue to examine various factors that may influence or contribute to how our identity is formed and maintained. As we know through existing literature, racial categories were initially created as a means of differentiating individuals on the basis of skin color. These categories were created as a means of facilitating the hierarchy in society (Bonilla-Silva 1997). These categories and the hierarchical nature are still not only in existence in the world, but continue to impose a meaning of ‘power and powerless’ by continuing to persist in all forms of communication. We are often reminded of this in our everyday interactions with others; with what we see and hear in the media, and what we are faced with in our environments. As we take this information that occurs and internalize it, it assists in our development and construction of meaning.

Stereotypes are inflexible images of a particular group that is held without regard to whether it is true (Kornblum 1998). It is often up to the individual being stereotyped to discredit the stereotype. African Americans often have to deal with stereotypes that supercede them as individuals. It is not uncommon for stereotypes to dominate

interactions with individuals who do not share the characteristics being stereotyped. In this work, I am suggesting that stereotypes are a common occurrence in the lives of these students. Be it at a predominantly Black or a predominantly White university, all of these students deal with stereotypical ideas of what their identity consists of. These stereotypes may come from individuals who are of other races and often come from individuals share their race. It is how these stereotypes are accepted or rejected that plays a part of the identity formation process. Students often do not relate to the perception and ultimately denounce it as false. One thing that deserves mention was the different means students used when dealing with stereotypes at the two different types of universities. Most students attending the HBCU did not recall hearing stereotypes occurring on campus. Most of their experiences with stereotypes occurred off campus in the cities bordering the university. On the other hand, those at STU would hear stereotypes but were more likely to see them as jokes or as “they did not mean it that way.”

When speaking about some of the common stereotypes or typecasting that occurs on a daily basis in the lives of these students, it allows for a greater understanding of the common perception of Blacks in society. Shirley, a twenty-one year old senior attending STU mentioned hearing stereotypes on campus when asked,

[Okay, have you every experienced any forms of discrimination, stereotyping, or negative attitudes towards Black on this campus? Even if it didn't pertain to you, have you ever seen it done to someone else, while being here?]

Hum...I don't know...maybe not in like a negative way, I don't think so. Maybe like in a joking way, but you know it could have hurt somebody ...cause you know you have those passionate Black people who are just so passionate about being Black, so anything about, you know, the confederate flag, or slave days, and stuff like that... Anything they'll just flip. Nothing that was intentional, but if they heard it, they would have been offended.

[Like, give me an example.]

I don't know, like when you go to the fraternity parties and stuff, when the guys get drunk, they just start mouthing off and saying silly stuff. Or, like this one guy, he had a friend who had the confederate flag up or whatever and this person came in...this Black person came in and got offended and told him to take it down and he was just like "why?" and bla, bla, bla. It's always this that, it's what I heard, but...nothing pertaining to anything.

When Shirley recalled hearing or observing stereotypes or discriminatory acts against Blacks, she down played them by insisting that they were innocent in nature. Although a lot of these things occurred at parties, they were still offensive and laden with racist undertones. Some White students may not realize how offensive some jokes or actions can be, while there are others who intentionally tell them because of the pain they may cause (Feagin 1992). This experience was ultimately not the only situation where Shirley recalled instances of stereotyping or discriminatory practices of Blacks. She consistently perceived no intentional harm incurred. The next student spoke of how stereotypes that are preexisting concerning Black women contribute to her interactions with classmates on a daily basis:

I think that the race and gender plays a huge part in just getting to know any of my classmates. Because when you meet people outside of your race, there are a lot of stereotypes that you have to confront. And you can

tell by the conversations that are being had, the way people are responding to something that you said...um, and really getting people to just look at you as a person, as opposed to a Black woman or a Black person, or a woman for that matter. Um, and most conversations stem from one of those things...if not all of them at the same time. And, like I said, that stereotype, "Oh, a Black woman, she must be real aggressive", you know. Um, somebody told me "okay, you're being real sarcastic today". I am? I...I really didn't think I was, but now I know I'm being looked at in different way. I know that certain comments that I say is gonna get analyzed on that level.

This is just one instance that this female student spoke of concerning her identity as a Black woman. On other occasions, she mentions hearing stereotypes pertaining to others that often occur on campus. Over the past couple of weeks, she has heard several stereotypes pertaining to Blacks that she shared with me. These comments came from other students on campus that are non-Black.

Um, comments have been made, as far as if there's a group of Black people congregating in one particular area, I've heard them say "oh, they must be having a religious rally", or if two Black males are walking together, "oh, they must be on the basketball team, or the track team". And those are the type. You want to say that there's no harm in that, but its stereotyping.

This student was able to see that these stereotypes have nothing to do with the individual, but are inaccurate observations and generalizations about Blacks in general. She did not see them as harmless announcements, but as inaccurate depictions or stereotypes.

Although the aforementioned student was more likely to see these encounters as stereotypes, again most students attending STU were more likely to see things of this

nature as jokes or that they only occur as fun. When asked about stereotypes or negative attitudes about Blacks on campus, this student had this to say.

Not really negative attitudes, but stereotypes go around like all day every day, pretty much. It just goes back and forth between people. Especially when it's just jokes or whatever. Well like...well like, Black people, you know...eat cornbread and drink Kool-Aid and all that fun stuff.

This particular student recalled these encounters as “fun” or “jokes” and did not see any harm in them. Other students attending this university were bombarded with ideas of athletic abilities and involvements or their ability to dance or entertain. Several students shared their encounters with this common assumption. Derrick shared a common assumption that he must confront quite often.

[Have you ever experienced any type or forms of stereotyping or negative attitudes towards Blacks or African-Americans on campus?]

Uh, yea. Mostly because I’m tall, I’m Black and most people think I’m gonna play basketball and actually, I had that happen today. I mean, it’s not like in a negative way, it’s like “Hey you should play basketball” and I’m like well I don’t, I’m a musician. So, um...they like to associate me being tall and Black, that you know, that I automatically have to play some kind of sport, which is not really a good assumption.

Another student shared an experience that was similar that happened with one of his female friends. Their ability to play sports or dance was the most common stereotype that occurred at this university. There were other instances where students mentioned things that were pertaining to their ability to succeed in school or in the classroom setting.

Generally speaking however, most pertained to their athletic abilities and their ability to perform or dance. Another student had this to say about an instance that recently happened to one of his female friends on campus:

Oh, yea. Recently, one of my friends like, she's a Black girl, right? And then, somebody she met, like asked her to be on the basketball team recently. And she found out it was because she was a Black girl, so they assumed...well, she's Black she has to know how to play, so see if she'll play with us on our team. So like that was an automatic assumption and stuff like that.

It is often assumed by observers that stereotypical comments are made with innocent or humorous intentions. Students at STU often mentioned hearing stereotypical language in common university settings on a daily basis. We see here a marked difference between students at STU and the HBCU concerning stereotypical language. Students exposed to a more intense racial environment such as those at the HBCU seemed more likely to understand the ramifications of stereotyping because they are immersed in an environment in which stereotypical thought poses an immediate threat.

Students at STU were less likely to interpret stereotypical language as a direct threat. Their responses suggest that being immersed in an environment in which racial boundaries are less defined provides a buffer from the potential pitfalls of stereotypical thought processes. Although most seemed unbothered by these inaccurate descriptions, there were some who found them offensive, unfounded, or unfriendly, however not to the degree that those at the HBCU perceive them to be.

5.4 Personal Experience

In going beyond the experience and scope of stereotypes, the students participating in this project not only experienced accounts of stereotypes, but also discrimination. When looking at the role of internalization and the things that are experienced, we can observe personal experiences as the next step in the construction of race. Students at both universities experienced blatant discrimination, sometimes on campus, but for those students attending the HBCU, the experiences occurred outside of the campus atmosphere. Many issues affecting Blacks are not specific to class, age, or gender. Most people who see a Black person in any setting are unable to surmise much about the individual other than his or her race (Feagin 1991). These encounters deserve mention as I believe them to be crucial in how we construct our ideas of race and/or culture.

Again, stereotypes occurred on campus and often in the classroom setting for students attending STU. Students attending the HBCU did not mention hearing stereotypes occur on campus. On the other hand, they had to deal with stereotypes that occurred in their lives once they left campus. Most of these occurred on their jobs or in their interactions with individuals who did not attend their university. When it comes to stereotyping, students did not know or recall any instances of hearing them while in the university setting, they were more likely to experience discrimination first hand. One male student attending the HBCU shared this experience with me.

On campus, no. But off, yes. I had just got a new car. I was leaving my girlfriends house at about midnight. A cop kept trailing me and he pulled out a bullhorn and start saying “Pull over.” He came to my passenger window and knocked. I did not have automatic windows, so I leaned over

to roll it down and he gripped his gun. He took out his flashlight and started looking in the car and asked if he was going to find marijuana. I said, "I don't smoke, my asthma pump is right there." He said "Don't get smart with me son." So again, he said "If I search your car, I won't find any marijuana." I said, "No sir, but I don't think you can just search my car." He said, "Hold on, I'm the law." I said, I need to call my parents. I reached for my cell phone and he pulled out his gun. I'm not down with bullets so I dropped it. He said don't you ever reach for your phone. I said, I want to call my parents. I don't know what I am being pulled over for. I called my parents and at this time, he still hasn't told me why he pulled me over. Finally, he said your light on your license plate is out. I looked and it was on. He said, "You have a nice day."

This student recalled this as a frightening experience. He did not understand the reasoning for being pulled over except that he is a Black male. On the part of the officer, the encounter began by stereotyping this young man, but soon escalated to an experience of discrimination. Blackness is like a uniform, especially in the company of strangers. It has a tendency to supersede an individual's other characteristics (Blauner 1972). Several students had stories to share with experiences of discrimination in the local town.

I work at a fast food restaurant up the road and we have people here that don't want me to fix their food or they want to watch you wash your hands and ask you outright if things are clean. I mean they do things on purpose like leave the whole table covered in trash and smoke cigarettes and stuff and this is a no smoking facility. Just blatant stuff that you know they wouldn't do somewhere else.

This is another male student that has had several encounters with people who reside in the town that borders the campus. This student admits that this type of treatment upsets him but he ultimately feels that there is nothing that he can do about it. He says that this just makes him understand how things "really are." It reiterates the idea and

understanding of “power and powerless.” Students in this town mentioned the comfort of being on campus as once they are off, things are very different. To these students, they feel this prepares them to handle things that they may be faced with once they join the workforce where the environment is not primarily Black. Another student shares a story that occurred a few years ago in their local town.

Like a few years ago, there was this White man running for some office in the city here and you know the majority of the students, we can carry the vote so they tried to say that we couldn’t vote here because most of us don’t live here all the time, so we tried to register to vote and they tried to tell us that we couldn’t vote and was just doing a lot of things to keep the students from voting. So as a student body, we had to march, like the march on Washington all those years ago, and it was 2003 or 2004. We had to march from our school, past Wal-Mart, to the courthouse. I think it was like 7 miles or something like that, I’m not really sure. We had the signs and we were singing, it just felt like we were in the 60’s (laughs), but we had to do that just so we could vote.

These were just a few of the experiences that students shared with me that occurred in their town. Unfortunately, these types of encounters were not uncommon for students attending this university. These are experiences that are incorporated in their ideas of being Black. On a similar note, there were some instances shared that occurred earlier in the lives of these students. Students participating in this project were able to recall occasions where they were discriminated against on the basis of skin color when they were growing up as well. The recollection of discrimination did not occur in childhood more often with students attending either university, but students attending the HBCU were more descriptive and explanatory of these instances. One student shared a high

school experience with me. He began by telling me about his high school and the program he was involved in.

It was all Black [my high school]. I was in a magnum program, that's like honors, so, and everyone else in my family did too. My mother stressed that, we couldn't just graduate, we had to be in a magnum program. And so, that's where there were other races of students. There weren't any other races in regular schooling, but my race. But in magnum, we were outnumbered. Maybe nine or ten percent of the program was Black

[What did you think about that?]

I just didn't really like that, but like, I just wanted to add my percent to the class. I knew that I could do it. It wasn't just hard like everybody thought. I feel like it's the parents fault. Not fault, but they, like my momma forced that. I mean students really didn't want more work, but the parents didn't force that.

[You said you really didn't like that, why did you not like that?]

Cause, it's like the way they treated us because of the predominate race in the class. We got treated like the predominate race in that class and you know you're going to treat that class differently. If the class was all Black, they would treat that class differently. You see all these Black people and you know that image that we have; we lazy, we just want to talk, we don't care. And then you got other races and they better, smarter and you gone treat them different. So they would treat us different (my class). I mean my class didn't get treated bad like that which is good, but you know it's different. I mean I would see my friends and I knew how they was getting treated bad, and I knew I wasn't getting the same treatment as them. So I feel like, if I'm getting good treatment at the same school, just different teachers, I mean, my teachers were not Black, but all the rest of the teachers in the school was Black, so it was like two schools in one. It was like divided, and I didn't like that at all. They divided us.

This student spoke about an example of what his high school was like. Although he attended a predominantly Black school, he understood his differential treatment. Not

only did he see it, he counted it as unfair. He saw this as a means of dividing the student body. He provides a synopsis not only of the poor treatment received by students not enrolled in the magnum program, but also mentions several stereotypical images of Blacks in the general population.

It is noteworthy that students attending STU did not recall experiences of discrimination occurring on or off campus. Perhaps being immersed in a more racially diverse environment, these students interpreted situations that those at the HBCU may have labeled discriminatory, as simple cases of misunderstandings or joking, or perhaps failed to recognize them as authentically racist. This suggests evidence that the external environment has a direct influence of the interpretation of the situation.

It is mentionable that the students who experienced these cases of differential treatment experienced it more than once and shared countless examples with me. Of the students that had these experiences, they were just amazed and disappointed that this sort of treatment and behavior is still in existence.

5.5 What is “Black and White?”

The next step in the process of understanding how race is socially constructed is to understand what these students see as being, in its most basic form, “Black and White.” One of the biggest obstacles faced by Black students in any environment is having their identity questioned. I heard the term or question, “What is acting White?” referenced by several Black students throughout the interview process. To have a better understanding of what these students mean or understand it to mean when they hear this phrase, I included questions in the interview guide that touches on this topic. Among Blacks, the

term “acting white” is used in reference to Blacks who use language or ways of speaking; display attitudes, behaviors, or preferences considered to be White cultural norms (Tyson, Castellino and Darity 2005). Most often, students hear this from other students who are Black. In this process, I began by asking students if they have ever been accused of “acting White.” Of these twenty participants, all but one student had been accused of this. In going one step farther, I inquired about what they perceived this saying to mean and why they feel they were accused of this behavior. Students had a lot to share in this area. Tammy, a student attending the HBCU says,

[Have you ever been accused of “acting white” by other Black students?]

Yes, all the time. All the time. “You talk like a white girl”, well sorry. I mean there’s no way for me to change that, or...that’s just how I talk. “You talk proper”. “Well, how do you talk ghetto?”

[So you think when they accuse you of that, it's primarily because of the way you talk.]

Um-hum.

[What is talking Black?]

I don’t know...like I can’t...I guess it’s like a different country accent, but I could never get it down.

This was the most common response students received when accused of “acting White.” To them, this accusation came from other students and most often these students were their Black peers. Some stated their unawareness that their behavior was considered

White or contradictory to what is seen as Black until they were informed by another Black person. Another student had this to share.

[Have you ever been accused of “acting white” by other black students?]

Oh, Lord. I’ve been called white because of the way I talk and because of the fact that I wanted to dress nice. They used to call me and my friends White girls, but to me, what is the definition of White? Is White being successful and talking nice? No. Because I think a lot of Blacks think that when you speak with good diction, and when you dress nice, and when you try to make something of yourself, you’re White.

[Why do you think that is?]

I think it is instilled when you are a child. I can say that when I was younger, my mother never really pushed the issue until it came up in my life. I think it is from childhood as far as how you think people are. Because I never thought that speaking nice was considered white until it was brought to my attention by some of my Black peers. Are we saying that we can’t talk or write? When I would get good grades, I was accused of thinking I was better. Well, that is not it; I just wanted to make good grades.

Students often expressed frustration concerning this matter. They felt that they were not trying to be something or someone different; they were just being who they are. Most of these students mentioned their parents and their part in this as their parents often instilled in them a desire to speak properly or dress in a certain way, but they did not see it as acting another race. The allegation of “acting White” implies a desire to be non-Black. This process in itself is another method of questioning an individual’s identity. Most of these students wanted to understand why this type of criticism is fluent in Black culture. One student went farther by speaking on how she was accused of “acting White” by a young lady that was barely a teenager. She says,

[Have you ever been accused of “acting White” by other Black students?]

Not at this school, but I did a summer program for at risk children and this girl was like Ms. Denise, why you talking like a White girl, you supposed to be ghetto, you Black... To me that's sad and I was telling her that that is not acting like a White girl, it is just speaking English.

It deserves mention that this experience or interaction occurred with a young lady that was already familiar with this saying. Even this individual knew that those words are attached to the way that “Blacks and Whites” speak phonetically. It foreshadows the hierarchical nature in society. It implies the nature of fitting into a category of being one or the other. For those participating in this project, the type of school did not make a difference. Again, the majority of the sample had been accused of this at one time or another. A student at STU mentions,

When I got here, I would hear, “Jason, you talk *so* white.” I was like, “I talk White? I can’t get an A in English class, but I talk White.”

[Who talked to you about talking ‘White’?]

Just some random Black person. I always wondered, so what’s Black?

This student ponders an interesting question; what is it to talk Black? The thing that these students are trying to understand is why speaking “proper” is attached to Whiteness. This claim questions their identity and how they identify with being Black and accepting of their culture. An HBCU student speaks about his experience with this accusation.

Yes. I have been accused because I speak proper. I've been told, "You speak like a White person." So then I said, "Well how do a White people speak?" I get criticized for speaking proper.

[What do you think about that?]

I think it's B.S. cause its like downing somebody for speaking with the proper etiquette. Its like bad is good. You know it's like we wanna come up with Ebonics and try to clarify our own language, but we're speaking White if we speak proper English. I'm not buying that.

[What do you think that says about Black people?]

In my opinion, we are more so enslaving ourselves like that by trying to make people think that every time they speak proper, you speaking White and if that's wrong its like enslaving the Black people to speak and act barbaric and not rise above. I mean its going to keep our race in one place we can't move up in the world.

This student sees this as a method of enslaving one another as Blacks. To put stipulations on what Black means insinuates that things beyond this idea are contrary to Blacks and Black culture. To sum up this idea, a student mentions,

[But what is it to talk Black, what do you think?]

To talk loud, to be obnoxious, that's the stereotype, to say nigga this, nigga that, I guess that is talking Black. That is the stereotype anyway. It is just saying that if to talk White is to talk proper, then I guess we are saying to talk Black is the opposite, to sound improper. So, what is talking Black? It's really, how do you sound Black?

Not only does the comment "acting White" question individual identities, it also questions the multiple dimensions of race. Speech is one aspect of Black identity, but the accusations of "acting White" denounces all other aspects of Black identity and culture. It causes division and misunderstanding within the culture. It causes confusion to the

individual being sanctioned for their behavior. When it comes to this term, there were no differences caused by environment. All students with the exception of one had experienced this accusation from another Black student in the university setting.

CHAPTER 6

INTERNALIZATION AND CONSTRUCTION

6.1 Media Influence

The media is another avenue that is mentioned when speaking on identity formation. I am examining the role of the media in two ways. How students perceive the media to contribute to their idea of what it means to be Black and a part of Black culture, and what role the media is believed to play in how Blacks are viewed by others. I include both as a way to examine how these students perceive media portrayals of Black culture to influence their lives, and to understand how these students perceive the media to contribute to the overall impression left on others in society. This form of experience is included as a means of incorporating an additional aspect that may contribute to how students not only identify with other Blacks, but construct their individual meaning of being Black. In this project, when the media was mentioned, it was asked if the students watched any “Black” shows or any programs specifically for Blacks. All of the participants mentioned watching shows designed for Black viewers. There were several shows that were a commonality for the majority of my student population. To take this one step farther, I asked students if they thought others had expectations of them based off the things that are shown or viewed on television. Finally, I inquired about the accuracy of Black portrayals on television. Meaning, I asked if students thought that

Blacks on television did an accurate job of personifying Black culture and/or the Black race. One student at STU commented eloquently when asked,

[Do you feel that people expect you to be a certain way based off things seen or portrayed on TV?]

I sure do. They want and expect me to be ‘grilled out.’ They expect me to have my pants down to my butt. You should go to my dorm. If I see anybody with their pants hanging, I tell them to pull up their pants.

[Do you think that Blacks on TV do a good job of personifying Black culture?]

Most people look at music videos. Just most people. I would say that every girl you meet is not going to be a video girl. That’s wrong. And not every Black man you see is going to be thugged out. But in a sense, I guess they do a good job because we end up wanting what we see in the videos, that’s what’s seen on TV. We do what they want.

Based off the things we see on the videos, we have people that are living in a shack, but has a Chrysler 3000 parked on the street. We got nice cars ‘sitting on dubs’ with screens cause that’s what we see on the videos. It just continues in this cycle, that’s what they expect of us and that’s what we expect for ourselves. That’s what we think it is to be Black. It’s not.

This student mentions how television portrayals go beyond the scope of entertainment.

He believes things that are seen on TV can influence our desires and provide a false sense of success. On these shows, or videos, it gives Blacks in general the desire to acquire material possessions. One student introduces another idea when speaking of the things seen on television and how Blacks are perceived a certain way based off these images by stating,

No. On mainstream TV you see the Black person that is on drugs or on the corner. My friends and I just talked about this. I never knew what perpetuating a cycle meant. But the things you see on TV aren't your typical Black people. Like on most of these shows, they don't show the typical Black person but we keep watching it and so they keep putting it on. When I say they, I mean the White folks in the corporations, they just keep putting it on. It just seems that the stupider they can make a Black person act sometimes, it seems like the better the show is because we're laughing, but it's not really portraying how we really are. I think we're entertained by it but at the same time, some people say we shouldn't be like that, but we watch it, so I don't know.

This student introduces the notion of perpetuating a cycle. Although this student conveyed these opinions with me, there were also other students who shared his sentiments. When it comes to the type of university these students were attending, students from both universities provided similar statements. Gender was not a factor in these opinions as well. Josie, commented similarly when she said,

[Do you watch a lot of Black shows?]

Um, typically I try not to.

[Why?]

Because I feel, in my opinion, I feel Black shows just perpetuate our own cycle ...it's as if it keeps the stereotypes going.

Most of these students felt that when Blacks as well as those who are non-Black view these shows they are provided with an unrealistic view of Blacks and Black culture. When speaking on the spectrum of media, Black shows, or shows primarily for Black audiences were not the only shows that were commented on. Exposure to the news may

lead to a cultivation effect, whereby viewers come to believe that the real world is similar. Whites are typically overrepresented in the news as victims and Blacks are overrepresented as perpetrators (Dixon and Linz 2000). News media and their portrayal were also seen negatively by Blacks. Denise, mentioned an array of things that disappoint her in the media when she shared her opinions with me openly. She adds another dynamic when she speaks about the possible influence the media or media culture may have on the younger generation of Blacks.

[Do you think that Blacks on TV do a good job of personifying Black culture?]

No! because its like you get your few little tidbits of Black people that get on TV and say that Black people have done this and Black people have done that for society, they show a positive side, but as far as media and the news, when they have something on TV about Black people, most of the time, is if they've robbed somebody, killed, or doing something crazy. Even when they show Black people in Africa, you only see them sitting outside in the wilderness not running businesses or things like that. And people look at that and say, "oh, Black people look crazy". Like in New Orleans with Katrina, they had all the Black people on there, babies were cussin', people acting crazy, tryin to shoot people and stuff. I think the media always portray us real negative, but there's still a couple people that try to show the positive every once in a while.

But we as Black people have that mentality sometimes. It's like with the whole hip-hop movement. I think music is very powerful. I don't think these rappers realize the impact they have or the power in music. While they are out for money and stuff. So, if sex sells, that's what they will talk about, if naked women on the video sells, that's what we see. I just don't think they understand the great impact that it has. A lot of the girls growing up are thinking in order to get a man with some money, I gotta be naked and shakin my butt. So they 13 and 14, they already having sex, they dressing real provocative and I think it's because they see it on TV. And if you listen to the songs, the songs say it all. You have some artists that try to put out some positive music, but it is like 2 or 3 as opposed to

50 or 60, and I think that if these hip-hop artists decided, hey, we gone put out some positive music, things would change like that. Because people would think it was cool.

There is the majority that feels as if media, Black shows and news presentations only depict a biased and stereotypical image of Blacks. Students spoke of the desire to see Blacks portrayed in a more positive image. As media can be seen as an agent of socialization and ultimately contribute to the internalization process of Black meaning, the seriousness of these portrayals become obvious. In mainstream society what is perceived through media as Black culture and inherently Black people is viewed as demeaning and can possibly be influential in a way unimaginable to some Blacks. These students spoke of the impact the media has on the possible perception of Black people and Black culture, by those who are not Black and the future Black leaders of the culture. Most felt that Blacks fall into the ‘trap’ of wanting and desiring things that are not important and ultimately unattainable by most Blacks. Generally, these students felt that Blacks were portrayed negatively in all media forms. What was upsetting to them is that most of the negative portrayals come from Blacks that are on these shows. Not only do they feel that these media portrayals are seen by other Blacks, they are also seen by those who are not Black. The depictions often facilitate negative images of Black culture as well as Blacks as individuals. These students often voiced opinions on how assumptions are rampant concerning their identity by race, as well as by gender.

On the other hand, there were some students who felt that media outlets did an accurate job of portraying Blacks and Black culture. It is not that they saw the media as

providing an accurate representation of Blacks, but one student at STU spoke of it this way:

[Do you think that Blacks on TV do a good job of portraying Blacks and Black culture?]

I've never thought, that's not how it is before, so I guess they're doing alright, but at the same time, you know, it's not 100% accurate either. You know, so it might not ... (laughing). It's kind of a "to each his own" thing, you know?

[Okay, but lets say we think about Black culture as a whole. With all of the things that you see and if you put it all together, do you feel, "I think that this is really is a pretty good snap shot of what Black culture and Black people are like? From the way that they speak, to the way that they dress, to the way that Blacks communicate. Just like a big, broad, general picture.]

(laughs) I'd say yes. Well, to a certain extent they do, it's like, you know, they get the Black majority I guess you could say. But like there's a lot of different...there's also other stuff they don't catch, that's not the stereotypical black thing, but you know, it's still like...I know like a lot my friends listen to jazz, and you know, you don't ever see that on BET...a bunch of jazz stuff. They don't do the hip-hop dress and everything like that, or wear the backwards hats with their rags on and stuff. You know, they just do their own thing.

[Do you think, like say for instance any network, does a very good job of capturing the other side of Black culture, as well?]

Not really, cause it's the majority of the stereotypes that you see are the hip hop Black culture, you know...Black people are all about rap music or into the running away from cop type things, and then that's the majority of what I see on TV, from my point.

[Do you think the rap music and running away from cops is an accurate depiction of Black culture.]

I would say that's a part of the Black culture, but...okay, lets back away from the whole "run away from the cop thing". The hip hop thing, yea...I

think yea, they catch a lot of that cause you know that is pretty much the majority.

This student maintains that although the media does not accurately represent his beliefs or the beliefs of his friends, it does a good job of representing the majority of Blacks.

Another student commented when asked about the accuracy of Blacks on television by saying it is an accurate depiction “for some Black people.” This particular student would not elaborate further on this issue. As I was interviewing one participant, she vividly gave an example of the things people see on television and just how far these ideas can go.

[Okay. Do you think that Blacks on TV do a good job of personifying Black culture?]

No, especially not on BET. You know, everybody there is like, of course everyone goes to predominantly Black colleges, but you know the people there are just like “la, la, la”, you know like all ghetto and loud. You know the BET videos, especially...you know...”shake your booty, bounce it up and down, bring those titties out”, you know, what is that telling these little kids, you know, just the other day, my friend she said...she has these two little boys, and she said, “Girl, tell me why Marcus was singing I’m in love with a stripper?”. And she was like, “boy, if you ever sing that song again...” Cause she like “sometimes in the car listens to the radio. Next it will be, “Oh, I want a grill just like Nellie. Nellie has one so let me go out and get a grill.” You know and it’s just basically saying, you know...the only thing you can really be is a rapper or a singer with whores, you know...or lets treat women wrong. You know, every woman is a whore, you know?

[Do you think that a lot of people kind of base Black culture off that?]

Definitely. I really do. Cause they’re like, “Oh girl” you know like...maybe if you’re at a party or whatever, you know. You know, if I’m with my girls and some guy just comes up behind me and wants to

dance with me, I'm like, "why don't come around first, tell me what your name is and ask if I want to dance with you, then maybe I want to dance with you" ...you know? Or you know, if you go to these white fraternity parties, they're like "girl, come on girl, shake that ass", you know, "bounce it up for me" ...and you're like...what (laughing)? You know, you think that's all I do? You know...I'm just like, you know what if I don't wanna dance, what if I can't dance...what does that tell me, you know...what does that say...am I not Black if I can't dance, you know? It's just so stereotypical, stuff...but...but I've heard many different versions of BET. I heard that BET was like...you know you hear about this rapper owning, like this small company or whatever...owns his own merchandise. Well, he only owns like a small portion of that merchandise, so I heard that, in actuality, it's these big, like corporate White men on top who are telling these people to keep on doing what they're doing because, that's just gonna give more negative light to the Black community and you know...and disrupt their focus on what they can really be. You know, so keep...if you keep on playing these rap videos, "bump that ass" or whatever, then that's all they're gonna be thinking about, they're not gonna be like, "Oh, well let me finish high school, let me get my education, let me continue on some more", you know. But, that's how I see it.

This student brings up several important issues when speaking on the influence of the media. First, she not only stereotypes the images of BET as pertaining to individuals who are likely to attend Black colleges, but she also cites a common assumption concerning Black women that has a tendency to become dangerous. The idea of the provocative and sexually deviant nature of Black women that are often displayed on music videos can have a dangerous consequence if perceived improperly. This is an important or salient aspect of the internalization process as not only Black women often perceive themselves in this manner; others often perceive them in this manner as well.

With the exception of the student who believed media catered to the majority, none of the others at either university had any positive comments about the media. Again, media plays a large part in how we view our identity, our culture, and ultimately our race.

These students, in general, spoke of the attraction to the ideas of things seen on TV. The importance of media influence is relayed in the perception of young Black males as “thugs or gangsters” or young Black women as being able to dance provocatively. What do these perceptions contribute to how Black men and women are viewed by mainstream society and ultimately how they perceive themselves as they often negotiate or facilitate these images?

6.2 Commonalities With Other Blacks

This section begins to examine the collective meaning of Blackness. We examined early agents of experience, the experiences of these students at their universities, and now we will look at how these processes are all internalized and given meaning. To begin, I examine the commonalities and/or discrepancies these students feel with other Blacks. This is not limited to the campus environment, but examines Blacks in general as a culture and community. In previous sections, students spoke of their friendships, their familial influence, the influence and presence of faculty members in the university setting, and media influence. In the beginning of this section, I look at what is common or not common among Black students in their setting. In the university setting, students attended two different types of universities. Half of these students attend a university that is considered to be predominantly White, and the other half attends a university that is considered predominantly Black. This is an important aspect of perceived commonalities as half of these students are the predominant race in their setting due to the racial makeup of their university. Those attending STU were a racial minority on campus, especially in the classroom. There are cases where students were able to perceive commonalities and

there are cases where students felt they did not have much in common with other Black students. During one of my first interviews, one student at STU shared this information with me.

[Well, do you feel that you have anything or have nothing in common with the other Black students in your classes?]

Um, I don't know. Sometimes when they have kids, or whatever...or if they have these extremely ghetto friends, you know, I can't really relate to that. I never had any...anything ghetto like they have in their life, or whatever. Um, I know they talk about financial aid. I'm not on financial aid, so my financial situation is different, so I...I feel like I can't really relate to them. My dad pays for my education. And for a lot of my friends, you know that's just, such a big deal, when you know, I grew up in a family and community, where your family you know, helps you out. When they say, you know "I don't talk to my dad or my parents are divorced" and stuff...that's just so odd to me. We talk about all that stuff, or I'm a baby-mama and I'm just like, "what happened, you know." I'm just like, things that make people, you stereotypically, you know, Black or White, I just....can't relate.

She admits that she does not share very many commonalities with some of her Black classmates. One area is that her parents are together and not divorced, the other is how her education is paid for. There are several students of all races that rely on financial aid to cover tuition and cost of living expenses incurred during their educational experience. Although this was the only student in the sample with parents that has the ability to cover these costs, all students admit to the necessity of the financial care of their parents in this venture. For these reasons, she was unable to see any commonalities with other Blacks in her classes. Many Black students may appear to be middle class in background, but

often they are the first generation to attend a White college, and they are less likely to have the resources of other students (Feagin 1992).

Of the students in this sample that attends STU, they admit that there are not many Blacks in their classes. In this setting, Blacks make up only a small portion of the class regardless of classroom size. This may be due to major or the level of the class they are enrolled in. It is also possible that this occurs simply because there are not many Blacks enrolled at this university. Normally, when understanding race, it is understood through the relationship students have to those students who do not share their race (Thompson 2001). In his project, I examine primarily what they have in common with those who share their race. This is important as it provides a means of understanding their identity in the process of recognizable commonalities with other Blacks. Another student mentions this,

[What do you feel you have in common or not in common with the Black students in your classes?]

Number one of course we're Black and we are all striving to be something. Years back we were considered nothing, working blue collar jobs and it's just awesome to see people, engineering people, computer science people. It's awesome to see that, to do something better. To strive to do better.

On a similar note, another student commented by saying,

Other than campus, I'm sure there are students who grew up like I grew up and I am sure there are those who didn't. No, I mean I have something in common with them. We all here for the same reason... To graduate, to get our education, get a degree, to be able to stand on our own.

This student, like many others was able to perceive commonalities by noting the desire to obtain a degree and get an education. He also mentions the possibilities of sharing a common background with some of the students in his classes although he does not know all of them personally.

I guess other than being Black, your outlook on life. I guess at this HBCU, we always knew that it is not considered a top university, like a Michigan State or anything. It is a good university. So, we know that we have to work and fight a little harder or try a little harder than everybody else because we are not out there in the class of school that the other ones are.

This student mentions the negative perception of others concerning the level of education he obtains while attending a Black university. He confronts this with an understanding that he has to work even harder to show that the education he receives is sufficient even in the eyes of those who may not perceive an education at a predominantly Black university to be as favorable as an education from a predominantly White university. He sees this as a commonality with other Black students; the necessity of having to work harder to prove the adequacy of their education, in addition to seeing the obvious commonality; their race.

I think we have a lot in common. Most of us come from middle or lower class families. Everybody is on the same page. Everybody is trying to make it. I can look around my classes and relate to the other students versus if I was around a lot of White students I couldn't really relate. At least that's the stereotype, that Whites are taken care of and they have these things all lined up and we struggling and everything. But I can't speak for any one person.

For students, they were able to understand that they share a common goal. They are in school to graduate, earn a degree, and contribute to society. A lot of these students understand their purpose for attending school; to try and do better, to become leaders and to become successful. Students often spoke of this with pride regardless of the institution. The type of institution students were attending did make a difference to a few of the students in this sample. Students attending the predominantly Black university had classes with primarily Black students and had a greater opportunity to interact with them on a daily basis. Students attending STU were less likely to have many Black classmates and therefore make a connection with them. As this occurred with only a few of the students in this sample, their comments are included. Some students at this institution admitted that they have not gotten to know their Black classmates, but also mentioned that they have not gotten to know many of the others as well. I asked Derrick, a male student attending STU about his possible commonalities with other Black students and he commented,

From what I've seen, I think we're...we all have one common goal, you know, coming here to get an education, but um, a lot of the Black students who I see in my classes, we haven't had conversations and things, so I wouldn't really know.

[Do you have an opinion about why you guys haven't had an opportunity to have a conversation yet?]

I guess, it's just, um...destiny or whatever, or maybe we're not supposed to talk to each other or not. I've had a couple of classes where um, where I had this kinda unknown named friend, we had a class together and he's a Black guy. He lives on campus so we have dinner occasionally. We hung

out last weekend, so...I guess he's one example of finding a friendship with Black students in classes and stuff like that.

[Okay. Do you feel that you have anything in common or not in common with the students in your classes that are not Black?]

Um...most of the classes that I'm taking are music classes, and so we have that in common, but um...in my other classes, um, some of them are social and some of them are not social. Some people like to talk and some people don't like to talk, so it kind of varies. But, um, for the most part...um, yea again, I haven't talked to a lot them...I don't know like the whole class, and so it would kind be hard to find out who they are and what they're all about.

With the exception of a few students, students often spoke as if there was an underlying commonality. If nothing else is common between them, they are Black and that is common. Students spoke as if this is something that is understood between individuals regardless of social class, classification, or background. Beyond this, the type of institution did not contribute to the perceived commonalities between Blacks. One student talks about his first day at his university several years ago.

When I first got to STU, I'm from Killeen, Texas, and there was a lot of African American or Black people that went to Killeen High School, I mean we had the most minority students in general, the Hispanics and Blacks. I never had a Black best friend, my best friends has always been of another race. My best friend now is of another race. In Killeen, it is a military town so everyone was so open minded. Well, when I first got here and I walked into the UC (the student union), it is like Whites were on one side and Blacks were on the other side. So, I kinda congregated with my Black people because I wasn't sitting over there cause I really don't know them, I was pretty sure I wasn't going to feel comfortable over there by myself being the only 'pepper in the salt', so I went to the pepper. When I first came here, I saw division, so I went with my people.

This student provides a depiction that although he did not know anyone, had never had a Black best friend, he still felt compelled to interact or congregate with other

Black students. This occurred because he understood that he would be able to relate to them on at least one level; their common race. It also puzzled this student that even in the college setting, students still segregate themselves. He perceived a definite division. Another student shared his sentiments when she said,

I know what it is like, if you walk into a room and it's like predominantly White, you're like, "Okay." But if you find that one Black person in the room, then you're like, "Oh, okay...things are looking up," you know.

Although students may not know one another on a personal level, they feel they can relate because they have race in common. It is an unspoken assumption to these students and provides a relational aspect in racial dynamics. One student explains enthusiastically her environment when she says, "Even though like, I don't talk like everyone else, or anything like that, I can still be myself. Everybody is so friendly here. Everybody is "You're just like me, hey!" Again, the students attending STU did not have many Black classmates. Even in this fact, those with Black classmates did not know of many commonalities as most often they did not interact with one another. It is important to mention the lack of communication that occurs between the students in the sample attending STU and their classmates. In this sample, these students did not seek out others who are like them to establish relationships.

6.3 Where Do We See The State of Black People

Students that participated in this project had a lot to share about Blacks as a race and culture and the relationships between Blacks in the United States. Students wanted to speak on how they perceived Blacks, their actions, their progress, and their relation to those who are non-Black as well as to those who are Black. We think of progress as success, and there were Black students who participated in this project who felt they had something to add pertaining to this area. There were no specific questions in the interview schedule concerning this; however, students added this information when expressing their ideas and thoughts. This issue is of extreme importance to the young men and women participating in this project and they spoke of this issue passionately. Some spoke of how Blacks were treated in the past as a way of understanding their future. One student had this to say:

I think as Black people we need to educate ourselves and want better for ourselves. Even if you look at yourself, I know I look at myself, like the way you were raised up, like the light skinned, dark skinned thing, like it's in our race and it can all take you back to slavery. Slaves, you had the light skinned house niggas and the field niggas and they put us against each other. And even when we were free, its like I'm light skinned, I'm better than you and it's like a lot of Black people have the crab mentality; if I'm not up, I don't want you to be up, they trying to pull you back down. I think it all stems from slavery and how the White people had our minds, they like shaped our minds. But I think it is possible to read up and get the knowledge so that we can finally break loose the chains on our minds. That's all, we just enslaved in our minds. We hear, there is no more racism, we don't have slavery, we not hanging anybody, but with Black people, I think it created self-esteem issues. Some think, "I'm dark skinned, well I'm not as good as she is." I think this is just because of how things were way back then. I think it's sad and I think we need to educate ourselves and when we become educated, we need to educate our brothers and sisters.

To me it's kinda sad that racism is still prevalent today and you think back to the founding of our university, which I think is 1876, right after the slaves were freed and a lot of slaves had to go right back to the plantation because they had no where else to go. But like the students here, just from slavery say "the white man this, the white man that" but sometimes I think it's true just simply because the white man enslaved us physically but after they let us go physically, they had our minds.....and people have passed it down from generation to generation and it's still here. Cause a man said (one of my professors), he taught us, that when the campus first started, you could walk around campus and hear people cussing and stuff, that was slave talk, that's how they talked to each other when they was slaves, they wasn't educated so they didn't know what else to say, but just cuss at each other, and he was like it's really sad that today you can still walk around campus and hear the same thing. So, the question is, have we even changed anything since then cause that was 1876 and this is 2006 so,

This student introduces an idea that she feels is still prevalent in Black culture presently.

Intraracial relations of this nature are not a new idea to Black culture and literature.

Initially, she uses the differences in our skin tones to bring up a conversation that thrives within the Black culture. She speaks about the lack of change in some areas of intra-group relations that are an after effect of slavery and of years ago. It is suggestible that not only do Blacks face opposition from individuals who are not Black, but also from individuals who are. She speaks of my complexion as well as her own. In the Black culture, skin tone is just a stratified method of differentiating individuals who are already in a sense, different. It is believed in the Black culture that individuals with lighter complexions have better opportunities than those considered "dark skinned" (Hill 2000).

This student also speaks of the "crab mentality." This insinuates the desire for those on top who has achieved success to attempt to help those who are less fortunate or have not yet obtained success, but the ones being helped are constantly grabbing, pulling, or

draining the resources of the ones helping. This can be understood through criticisms or denouncing them as Black or having an expectation out of their belief of obligation.

Well my opinion is that, I believe sometimes we put ourselves in situations. They say we are still in slavery, but in my opinion, I think we put ourselves there. Just a small example of this is when we take a road trip. We fought not to sit in the back of the bus, but that is the first place we go.

Students spoke of these ideas with enthusiasm yet confusion. They want to understand the issues that go beyond Black-White relations and understand the issues of primarily black relations. This student feels that some of the things that happened in history are being taken for granted or “not lived up to.” Another student mentions something that he says he thinks of often when he thinks of Blacks and their future.

I feel positive that there are more of us in universities. There are more of us trying to do something. Some of us are trying to go above and beyond. Is there enough of us in universities? No. I saw these statistics that says 55% of African American women are graduating college and their average GPA is a 3.0. African American males are at 47% and a 2.7... For a male that's alright, but for a woman to have a 3.0 is great. But then you have to realize that ya'll are going out into the White world and you're Black and now you're female and you have those things against you. Your GPA really doesn't matter anymore. Now they are looking at all this other stuff. I said that to say that you think you have overcome enough, but now you have to overcome more. I don't like that I supposedly have to be a thug and if I'm not a thug, then I'm acting White.

[In a sense, you have to be this way or the other?]

We don't see that there can be a middle. In society, there is Black and White. It has to be either you are this or you are that. I know there is a time and a place, so they have trouble labeling me. It's too grey. You can't look at a person and say this is what he is or that is what he is and it

creates a problem. Even we as Black people do the same things. You're either Black or something else if you act a certain way. This country is built on labels and there is no middle ground. Either you are this or you are that. I know there is a time and a place so I'm in the grey area and they have a problem with me so they have to put me in one category or another because that's all they know. It's because in the United States, we're built on labels. You are Black or White, straight or gay. If you are mixed, with Hispanic and Black or any two races, they still make you choose one. Cause you need to be labeled. There has to be a label they can put on you so that they know what category you are and that is just how it works in the United States.

This student speaks of the problem of labels. You have to be one way or the other. He speaks of this with undertones that not only do Blacks receive this treatment from Whites, but often treat each other in a like manner. He mentions that Blacks often see you as being one way, and if you are not, then you are "acting White." Also, he talked about the differences in educational attainment by gender within the Black race. He adds a fundamental point when he says that although you have succeeded in the academic world, not only will your race be a factor, but so will your gender.

In my idea of culture, I feel good about it. I mean family and stuff, but mainstream idea of Black culture, sometimes it disappoints me. Now it does, its like I said, young women feel like they have to be naked and stuff, and we are just seen so negative. Mainstream is what people tend to believe. They think we live in slums or ghettos when no one ever comes to your neighborhood to see how it really is. It just disappoints me. When you talk to older people and they talk about 'Black power' and how Blacks wanted to educate themselves and now, reading ain't cool, being educated, that's not cool, that's 'white'. Black people say, you acting white, but you can't really say you acting Black or you acting White, either they act 'proper' or they act 'hood.' You can't really say that she act black or she act white cause you have Black people who speak proper English, you have Black people that speak Ebonics, you have White people who speak Ebonics, White people that speak proper English.

It is important to this student to convey the importance of education and how it is perceived, in her opinion, negatively by some Blacks. She mentions that African Americans in the past believed in the importance of education and Black pride. She feels that the importance of education and Black pride is something that as a race, some Blacks are moving away from. One young man mentions,

Cause I mean the statistics out there about how many Black men are in jail and you know I think that hurtin our race because no other race is like that at the moment. I mean almost half of our men are in jail. And most of the black females are in college you know, but you know, a lot of people would criticize them for dating outside their race, but with almost half the men in jail right now, its like, you know, what are they supposed to do?

As a student mentioned previously, this student mentions the amount of African American women that are enrolling and graduating from college and the amount of African American males that are presently not attending college or possibly incarcerated. He believes this affects not only the future of African Americans, but also their possible male-female relationships. It also shows that as young adults, these Black students think beyond the boundaries of individuals. In other words it is not individualistic; they consider all those included or fall under the ‘label’ of Black.

Students also mentioned the lack of positive Black role models available as a reference to the Black community. When asked, “What person would you say is a positive role model in the Black community,” these students could not readily provide a visible example with the exception of their parents. One student commented, “I would say Condoleezza Rice, but nobody will listen to her because of who she is associated

with. Not a lot of Black people care for George Bush so they won't listen to her." The majority of these comments were introduced to me during the conclusion of the interview. With the exception of one of the excerpts, all comments were made by students attending the HBCU. I believe it is due to the extent they relate on a regular basis with others who are Black as most comments stemmed from issues pertaining to in-group relationships. Those at STU did not have the same opportunity to interact with others who are Black as often as those at the HBCU.

6.4 Do You Feel That Things Have Changed

During questioning about stereotypes and discrimination students were asked about their perception of change occurring in society since the generation of their parents. An overwhelming majority believed that things have changed but only from the aspect that discriminatory practices are portrayed in a fundamentally different manner. It is admitted that discrimination does not exist to the extent that it did in the sixties, but even through the eyes or perceptions of these students, it is still around and felt in their interactions.

No, I think some things have changed. To me, I think its more of the visible changes, like we can see the black people go to school with White people, we can see this, we can see that, but as far as the internal emotions and the things that people are being taught, I think it's pretty much still the same, its just not where you can see it. I believe it's hidden. It's hidden racism.

Discrimination and stereotyping are occurring in different forms to this student and the majority of others in this sample. Most often, it is not as blatant, although blatant

discriminatory acts still persist. The majority of students perceived racist acts presently to be more clandestine. Another student reiterates his sentiments when she says,

Well, it is still here, it is in different forms. It is mediated through stereotypes. It is really hidden. Sometimes I think it is worse when it is hidden.

Hidden or subtle racism is portrayed in a different manner. It is behind the scenes and continues to undermine Black progress. One student often interacts with people who do not attend his black university and deals with discrimination and stereotypes and says they are a regular occurrence. He believes,

I think they're different because Black people more so stood up for themselves, but I don't think things have changed. I mean I think its still in the back of, I will not say all White people, because all of them don't think that way, but some White people its going to be racism to a certain extent. I just don't think it is a blunt as it was then. I mean we aren't being hanged, lynched or they not draggin us from, well they are still dragging us from trucks, but you know, its not as bad as before, but it is still here. I see it all the time.

Not all students experienced things as often as the young man that spoke previously, but things happen to them that they perceive to be a form of discrimination. They understand that it is not often outright, although that occurs, but it is something they see as subtle and unfortunately still in existence.

It's changed just because it's not so blatant, its subtle. It is subtle racism. You can't get lynched anymore, you can sit anywhere you want, but there is subtle racism. Some things I will see. Like we will go to buy something and "Susie" will use a credit card and won't get carded, but I get carded. So I don't understand, you won't card her, but you will card me. It's subtle things like that.

Another student mentions that the differences that exist between past and present are the methods utilized by some to discriminate against Blacks or minorities in general. Josie, a senior at STU talks about the different methods used to discriminate.

Um, I don't think they're different. I don't think they're better. I would actually say that it's worse. And the reason I say that is because the...the...the breeding ground for racism has changed. But...okay, the breeding ground has changed and that's what makes it different. You have laws in place that stifle the Black community. Those things changed, those laws changed, but now you have a breeding ground of racism and we're not fighting it. But, uh...I don't know if things have changed...maybe, I think things have gotten worse.

This student went on to provide an example of how she believes things as simple as the zoning of schools is tainted with racism. She mentions her disbelief in the disappearance of racism and perceives that the state of race relations is not moving forward as some believe. Instead, she feels they are digressing in several ways. Another student agrees with her ideas and adds,

I think so, yea. Like I know compared to back in the days where, like you know blacks couldn't...weren't allowed to do certain things and stuff, but I think now they're just attacking Black people at a different level, by, um, I don't know, not giving them the opportunities and stuff. Like, I know

that, uh, school districts, like Fort Worth, compared to Dallas. Fort Worth, well you know, in the rich part of town, you know they have, the best schools and all this kind of stuff and the best education. Also, you know if you go to Dallas, you know like for instance, Oak Cliff, if you go to certain parts of Oak Cliff, of course they're ghetto, but other parts are not that ghetto, but everybody just says Oak Cliff is ghetto you know, but then, or some places in Fort Worth, it's just like a prissy White places. You notice that there's this strange stereotypes that they put...Oh, all these Black people live there. It's bad. And one person got shot and now, "Oh it's bad", you know. One person got shot in the White neighborhood and White people be like "Oh, it's just natural...(laughs)". So, I...I don't know, I think with the media and stuff, maybe...it's getting worse in a certain angle, I just don't know what it is really.

Students shared their beliefs concerning the changes in racism and discrimination.

Unfortunately, these students do not perceive all of the changes in this area to be positive.

There were no distinct differences in gender, social class, or age when examining this idea. Some of these students experienced discrimination or stereotyping first hand while others had not. Even those who had no personal experience with blatant discrimination still felt that things had not ultimately changed for the better. On the other hand, there are a few students in this sample that believed that things have changed and racism has subsided. Several students had this to say,

Definitely. I think things have gotten a lot better. I don't think that it's a valid excuse that...to say that because I'm Black, I can't get this job or go to this school...I don't think that's a good excuse for things today. It's kind of like, the gate is wide open. If you want to do something, you control that...you control your own destiny. To reaffirm my opinion, I think it's gotten a lot better. I don't think it's fully where it needs to be, but I think that it's gotten a lot better since my parents were younger.

[Like what are some of the ways that you think it still needs to improve?]

I think the overall, like perception of different racial groups...not just with Blacks or Whites, but what about Hispanics, you know, or Asians. Like some of the stereotypes...all of the stereotyping has got to go. Because there are so many different types of individuals that you can't generalize one category of people. So that's gotta go.

This student believes that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed regardless of race if you work hard enough. He does not see or understand the excuse of discrimination in present society. He is not alone in this idea. Another male student commented and conveyed his beliefs when he says,

Like Black people have been granted more rights. I think we're kind of accepted more in society as being equals and such.

The majority of students participating saw in behavior, mainly discrimination and racism, as changing in a manner that continues to perpetuate differentiation. The three students that felt things were considerably better had no previous experiences of discrimination, to their knowledge. This could lend perspective to their ideas of equality in race relations. None of the students attending the HBCU perceived things to be better when speaking of race relations in society. Again, it could be a product of the environment which they occupy as well as some of the issues learned and discussed on campus. When it comes to the relations between racial groups in present society, by understanding discriminatory practices allows an understanding of systematic methods to continue racism.

6.3 What is Black Culture?

In continuing the process of identity formation and ultimately what it means to be Black and the process of constructing this idea, it is necessary to understand the meaning of Black culture. This is a necessary step in the process of understanding what it is to be Black as it lends to a collective idea of something shared. Culture in the context of this paper emphasizes a collective ideology of ideas perceived to be shared with an entire community. Black culture in essence symbolizes something that is specific to this group of people. Without providing a technical or academic definition of this term, I asked participants to define Black culture in their own words. It is seen as something bigger than individuals, but signifies a culmination of things understood to be Black. A lot of these ideas were common beyond the scope of school attended, background, or gender. I comprised the most common responses to signify the ‘definition of Black culture’ through the eyes of Black students.

We are a culture that is goal driven, strong minded and able to see the bigger picture in life instead of what is laid out on the table. We are able to see between the lines and despite all the obstacles we still persevere as a people and as a culture.

Perseverance is a characteristic that this student and others attribute to individuals who are Black. He feels that in spite of everything endured by Blacks in the past, as a culture, they continue to move forward in a positive direction while keeping their past as a memory and motivation to move in a positive direction.

I think Black culture is kinda mostly like the hip-hop culture. But now hip-hop has spread to all cultures. But I think it originated as a way to express ourselves and stuff. It has just changed. Just like the family setting, that was Black culture as well having a family.

[What's your personal definition, like to you?]

Religion, I think religion is a big part of Black culture altogether. Family, church, music.

Relaying ideas about Hip-Hop and music were used as common descriptions of Black culture throughout the interviews. Religious activities were a common characteristic in describing Black culture as well. One student says that church has always been a large part of her life as well as her family and friends.

Black culture..? Faith based.. I really don't know anyone who doesn't go to church or weren't forced to go to church, so religion, unique, different, like rap music to me, that's just awesome. You put somebody on the spot like that and they can just spit a story. Black people are talented, Black people are beautiful, Black people and Black culture are just awesome.

Tammy provides a culmination of the ideas of religion, certain music, and pride in her race and culture. She enthusiastically shared her idea of Black culture and its meaning to her. There were several students who saw Black culture in an analogous fashion.

Devonte provides another dimension of Black culture when he states,

Black culture is soulful and soul food. It's down to earth. It represents bonding and togetherness when it counts. We will try to fight each other everyday, but if someone from the outside comes in then we all together at that time.

[What do you mean by soulful?]

It's like at home, it's close to you. Like big momma. It is spirited. We are fighters.

The importance of extended family and family gatherings are important to this student as well as many others. The previous student also mentions that although as a race, Blacks don't always agree or get along, but when it counts, they stick together for the common good of the race and culture. Another student posits,

Black culture is about, I think, about rhythm. Not relating to music, but rhythm like more of the energy that is associated with our culture. Like when we have birthday parties, we do everything "Big." We want to have a great time. Basically, a lot of energy. Everything we do promotes energy.

His enthusiastic depiction of Black culture was embellished with laughter and explanation. His voice announced excitement when speaking of his culture. He goes on to state that he is very proud of his heritage and the energy he believes underlies Blacks and Black culture.

Man, Black culture is our beliefs, (man, what a deep question). Our culture is our religious beliefs, our history and our past, our roots from all the way back to Africa to where we are now. How well we are doing now and our struggles in the past and everything in between. Everything that we went through, everything we accomplished. How we have moved up in the world as a race verses other races..... That's Black culture to me. This student found this question to inspire deep thought. It is not that he had no idea of Black culture, it is something that he admits he doesn't think of on a regular basis. This lends to the idea of taking these ideas and internalizing experiences past and present and

incorporating them into his identity. This coincides with the idea that experiences in interactions contribute to the formation of identity. When thinking of the depth of the question, another student elaborates and sums up all of the comments by saying,

Wow. Um, I would have to say, it's historical. Its...it's...its all things that most people haven't seen, in the sense that the stories...we come from a culture that is all about story telling. Its all about lineage and families, and very close-knit, and its not about...it... it's the gathering.....it's the gathering of the group. Black culture isn't the music, per se, but the people that gather around to hear it. And it's not necessarily the food, although its good, but it's the people you gather with to eat it. The stories is not, "Ooh, girl let me tell you what happened", its comfort food. Its...it's your energy to get through the next week. Black culture is not about a Dashiki or an afro, its that camaraderie that you get with us, whether its blood related or not, because our kinship and faith off of, we family because we live on the same block. We family because we classmates. We're family because we work together and I saw you in the hallway and we speak. That's what we do. That's Black culture. Its, "ooh, are you okay? Are you okay today, cause that, that same smile when I saw you the other day, you not smiling the same". That's Black culture.

These students expressed ideas of perseverance, history, stories, music and gathering or togetherness. As these things were expressed, these students saw or understood the collective nature behind them. Black culture in this sense, signifies the coming together of people to share their commonalities, their history, and their legacy. Black culture corresponds with the idea of struggle, yet success. It proposes that in all things, there are some things believed to be theirs. Although there are other cultures or groups in the U.S that may share these beliefs, traditions, or some of these features, these students perceived them to be indicative of Blacks and Black culture. Despite the fact that

students participating were of no relation to one another, their ideas of Black culture were similar. It coincides with that unspoken commonality shared between them. Of course, the past and traditions dominate their descriptions, but it is how that past, those traditions, and those experiences become a fundamental aspect of who they are and what Black culture signifies.

When going through this information, there were similar responses. The most common were listed above. Most students spoke about church on Sundays and gathering with family. It speaks of the importance of not only immediate, but extended family. They spoke of a common understanding that exists with Blacks. One student said, “We may fight each other, but we will also fight for each other.” It speaks of long standing traditions, rich oral histories and taking pride in who you are.

6.6 The Meaning of Black

We often do not think of what it means to be something; what it means to be a certain gender, social class, or race. It is not something that we call to our minds on a daily basis. When attempting to understand the idea of what it means to be Black, I undertook this project as a means of understanding its variation or fluidity across contexts or environments. The idea of being Black means something to all individuals, but what does it truly mean if everyone defines or identifies it differently. It goes beyond the aspect of culture as culture is seen as collective, involving more group dynamics. Being Black appears to be more individually specific in terms of how the individual constructs his or her meaning of being Black. Being Black for these students’ means being responsible. I use that term as it is one often used in describing the meaning of

Blackness. It is to be responsible for not only themselves, but their race, their families, and their immediate communities. One student explains ‘being Black’ as,

Um...its responsibility. Its understanding that...I...I have my family on my shoulders...because it's not just about me. Being Black is not...it's not a color. It...its not, uh, a race “check one”. You know, it's not that. It's being responsible for my community. And that means in my actions, in everything that I do, in being an example.

Again, this student reiterates the idea of responsibility. The act of succeeding goes far beyond her actions. She believes that she is responsible for setting an example; of showing others that being Black goes far beyond the category that she is placed in. As Blacks, obtaining an education is not just an individual attainment but also involves family and community. Education is a group achievement that incurs a group obligation (Banks 1995). Another student describes what it means to be Black when she says,

Being Black is something that a lot of people take for granted. To me, we are a chosen race. I think we are the race that is supposed to be exemplary in all that we do, even though we fail to realize that. God has given us so many attributes that he hasn't given other people. I mean, we're not only emotion strong, but a lot of Blacks are able to endure a lot of the trials that we have had come our way and still keep going. I think that we have strong willpower. I know of students here, their parents didn't go to school or don't even care that they go but they found it within themselves to keep going and get a degree. I think that is what a lot of Black people have. To me we are a strong race. We have strong values that are instilled from the time we are smaller. We know a lot about life.

Alyse speaks about the past of Blacks and the attribute of endurance she believes being Black has given her. She claims the existence of willpower in describing what being

Black personally means to her. She enlists the ideas of strength to describe determination and values.

Being Black. I am a strong believer in that you can't fully understand and appreciate what you have and where you are going unless you know or are fully aware about where you came from and what your people, the Black people in the past have done in life. What Black means to me, is doing whatever I can to ensure that other Blacks achieve. That's what being Black means. I think a lot of Blacks are in for the moment are in for now; are in for themselves. I think that is wack. It's about advancement. It is about advancing our culture.

To be Black means to be in touch with history and the past while allowing this to influence your future. In touch means not holding grudges or anger, but allowing that to penetrate their understanding of who they are. For this student, it is about advancement. This advancement can be obtained through educational achievement. To him, it is understanding the importance of setting an example for future generations.

To me, being Black means to be proud. Just a sense of pride because just like every race we have something to look back on. African Americans had slavery; Mexican Americans have the Alamo and the Spanish - American war to identify themselves with. Just being Black is being proud. No one has gone through as much as we have gone through as a culture, as a race, as a whole. No one has gone through that. I am *so* proud to be Black. I wouldn't want it any other way. I can't explain it in words. That's why I came to this HBCU because no matter what walk of life you came from, what you don't have, what you have... We all have one common factor and that's that we're Black.

Again, this student reiterates the fact that being Black is a commonality between the other students attending her university. She speaks of the rich history shared by African Americans regardless of their common or uncommon past or present lifestyle.

There are so many people who have done civil rights things. They tried to change it for us. Black signifies to me the need to keep that change going. Don't let it stop. When people try to make the path better for you, you need to keep it straight and not fall into stereotypes. So many people fought to get you out of that. To be Black means that we have to keep a steady pace, moving forward to the mark of the high calling (that's from the bible...laughs). That's what being Black means to me. That's why I'm in school. I'm not in school to make it. We need to go further and even when we are in school, we need people to encourage us to go further.

To summarize or place all of these comments in context, Being Black is to be familiar with the past, incorporating it into daily life, and ensuring a successful future. There appeared to be an overwhelming sense of responsibility for those that participated in this project. They understood and recalled the necessity of continuing their education, doing their best, and being optimistic for the future. None of the students participating in this project mentioned race in the form of skin color when speaking on what being Black means although some mentioned this is something that is shared even when there are no other commonalities. These students were positive about their futures as young black adults. When these students spoke of their meaning of Blackness, regardless of institution, background, or any other demographic characteristics, all students described their meaning of being Black in similar manners. It did not vary according to context; their ideas were constant. It is to keep moving forward, set an example, and do

something to be proud of. It was not described as negative, but described as unique and promising.

6.7 The Construction of ‘Black’

It is one thing to understand what it means to be Black, but it is also important to understand how this is lived on a daily basis. Being Black is not something that you can choose from one day to the next, it is something that is always with you. Being Black often introduces the person before they are actually met. It supercedes all interactions. It is one thing to incorporate their distinct meanings of Blackness, but how is this manifested in everyday life?

To have a better understanding of what it means to be Black, it is necessary to extend this idea one more step. To be Black is one thing, but to portray it is another. I asked students about the incorporation of their idea of Blackness in their everyday lives and interactions with others. Students most often cited their education is one area in which they portray their idea of being Black. It is to set an example, not only for themselves, but for their families and at the end of the day, their community.

Um, I try to just carry myself in a...kind of all about the image you know. Like, try to be sure that I carry myself in a manner that I would be proud of and my parents would be proud of because I don't just represent, um the Black culture, I represent my family, I represent STU, I represent ROTC, and my religion, and so...that kind of incorporates all of those things together. So, yea...when I do things, I'm careful of what I say and how I say it. Try to stay out of trouble and things like that.

Another student mentions the fact that she knows the Black race is often perceived negatively. Even if it has a negative connotation, she still remains positive in all of her actions. The portrayal of being Black is to provide a positive example through actions and decisions. Being Black is carried out by having pride in their heritage and pride in themselves as well as their race.

I think I portray it in a positive way because like I said, a lot of people don't think very positive about Black people and I feel like I'm an asset to the Black race and I represent it very well. I'm a student, I want to be a teacher, I want to help other Black people come up, so, I think for younger people looking at me, someone is always watching, so I stay mindful of that just cause you never know. Someone may look at you and say, man, I want to do that.

Several students mentioned getting actively involved through mentorship programs or tutoring. It is portrayed by showing young Blacks that there are opportunities that exist that may not be shown in the media or taught through family encounters. It is about helping those that may be unable to help themselves for whatever reason or circumstance.

Well, I think I portray it one way. Well, I am a tutor, so I help out one on one. What I mean is that some of us have certain situations, you know you are trying to get somewhere in life and sometimes it is not because you didn't apply yourself. Sometimes it is just situations that may come. I try to make it for them or help them anyway, you help them regardless. I think that has a lot to do with helping the advancement.

Although some of these students may have experienced hardship in the past or may continue to suffer hardships, they portray their idea of being Black by not falling victim

to expectations of mainstream society. While keeping in the forefront of his mind the things that occur in his daily life and in his past, John says he portrays his ‘Blackness,’

By not becoming a victim of the streets and going to school. By doing the right thing. I have not dropped out. I am here to get my paper. That in itself is me living up to being Black because like I said, once I make it I can’t forget where I came from and how far I came.

The majority of the students interviewed in this project concurred the same message. Being Black is to be different, but utilizing that difference as a means of strength and perseverance. Even though things may be hard; for some on campus with their interactions with other students and faculty, and others in surrounding towns, it is important to take pride in how far Blacks as a race, culture and community have come despite these obstacles. One student says that she portrays her idea of being Black “By being compassionate. It’s to not really judge people because I know I’m constantly being judged.” It is understanding that you don’t succeed just for yourself, you succeed for your ancestors, your family, and for your future.

What it means to be Black did not vary according to location. It does however deserve mention that several of the students at STU could not readily provide a definition of what being Black means to them. It was a question that often received the response of “I don’t know.” There could be several reasons for this response. It is possible that of the students who could not respond, their early removal from things ‘Black’ prevents them from providing an answer to this question. Meaning, these students were more

likely to reside in neighborhoods where there were not many other minority families, or attend schools where they continued to be a racial minority. Also, the lack of parental or familial influence pertaining to issues of race could be a factor in this. On the other hand, students attending the HBCU had no problems answering this question. It is possible this is due to their location and their daily interactions with other Blacks.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

In U.S. society, there are still systematic and fundamental ways of differentiating individuals on the basis of ascribed characteristics. This coincides with the existence of the hierarchical and categorical nature that still persists in most avenues of our daily lives. We see this manifested on every occasion that we are asked to classify ourselves by providing a description of who we are. The interesting question is what do these classifications in turn mean to us and how do we get those meanings? Being Black in mainstream society has different meanings. It means, through the names or synonyms often given to Blacks that being of this race is often considered negative in its connotation. It is a form of continuing a systematic racist approach to understanding things Black and a way to promote oppression of those who occupy this category. To continually suggest the necessity of assimilating into these “mainstream” ideas is to denounce the things that are unique to Blacks.

When examining how race is socially constructed at various institutions of higher education, this project focused on twenty African American students currently enrolled at two colleges in Texas. I examined a large university that is considered predominantly white and one HBCU. The data was collected using in-depth interviews.

While utilizing the perspective of social construction, I examined how race and racial identities are constructed and maintained in these two separate environments, and in addition, to understand its similarities and variations according to context. In this work, I sought to answer the question, “What happens when Black is White?” This means, how does the meaning of Blackness vary when Blacks are the racial majority, not minority in a certain context? Social construction provides a significant understanding of this question as it posits that we are shaped by the environment which we occupy. We as individuals continuously produce and reproduce our society.

This idea was examined through early experiences which provided an understanding of how these students arrived at their current locations. Concepts examined in this section ranged from parental and familial influence, influence of early neighborhoods and schooling, to ideas of appropriate behaviors and actions in society.

Next, I explored the significance of experience in their settings and how these experiences influence their ideas of race and racial identity. This section examined students’ relationships to faculty, peers, and their experiences with discrimination and stereotyping. Finally, I examined how all these ideas are internalized and constructed in a manner suitable to the students. In this, these students discussed their meaning of Black culture as well as their personal definitions of what being Black signifies to them.

To answer the question concerning how race is constructed will be examined in two ways. First, while examining the meaning of Blackness for students attending STU, there were several ideas that deserve mention. When examining their early experiences, students at this university specifically mentioned the necessity of diversity in their

everyday lives and interactions. To them, diversity signified the intention of making friends with students of other races as well as specifically denouncing race as an important determinant in certain aspects of their lives. For the majority of these students, hearing or receiving information from family members concerning issues of race did not take place often. When conversations of this nature took place, they were likely to disagree with their parents or family members concerning the existence of discriminatory practices. They were more likely to live in neighborhoods and attend schools where Whites were the majority.

At their current university, these students heard stereotypes concerning Blacks on a regular basis. Most often, they mentioned that it was jokes or not intended to be harsh, cruel, or taken seriously. In this setting, students were not likely to encounter Black faculty or a significant amount of Black peers. Peer relationships were primarily preexisting before students entered the university. Most students, while attending this university did not form lasting friendships. Also, they did not perceive any relationships with faculty outside the spectrum of academics. Again, this may be due to university size.

Finally, when it comes to how they construct their race, students had a collective idea of what it means to be Black. There were ideas of a shared sense of responsibility to their families, to their ancestors, and to the Black community. To be Black signifies strength to these students. It is mentionable that there were a few students at this location who did not answer the question pertaining to their personal meaning of being Black.

Students attending the HBCU throughout the project had similar ideas, experiences, and definitions of being Black. Environmental factors in this context were quite different. While on campus, students had lasting friendships, relationships with faculty, and a collective sense of unity to one another. Off campus, these students were likely to experience blatant acts of discrimination and racism. These things contribute to their overwhelming sense of collectiveness. These students saw being Black as being strong, unique, responsible, and maintaining a sense of community. Students in this sample were likely to share common factors such as early experiences, experience at school, and ideas of being Black.

This project also places emphasis on the racial boundaries often set in society. Even with the idea of social construction, it becomes obvious that Black students construct meaning according to the context they occupy. All students still feel the need to have two alternate identities. On campus, for STU students, they had to behave in a manner they saw as appropriate according to that context. In other words, they were able to define Blackness and Black culture, what it means to them, but allowed their idea of their racial identity to be portrayed in a different manner; a manner they saw appropriate for their context. They understood that things often associated with Blacks were sometimes considered inappropriate. They admit it is appropriate to be ‘true’ when they were around others who share their race.

HBCU students were able to be themselves on campus. To them, being in a predominantly Black environment allowed their interactions to be consistent with how they saw themselves as young Black adults. When they left campus, they felt it

appropriate to alter their racial identity. In this environment, things associated with Black were perceived as inappropriate. Collectively all students understood the contextual constraints when developing ideas on race.

The construction of race does vary according to context. Although Black as defined by these students had similar meanings, how it is manifested had significant differences. When Black is considered the racial majority, students felt a sense of collectivity. In this context, they did not feel they had to alter their identity to suit what is considered mainstream. They were likely to carry their idea of what it means to be Black and these ideas were often reinforced or reproduced through peer and faculty relationships. Although they may not know one another, they always felt they could relate on several levels. When Black is the minority, as in larger society, it is altered to mean something that is seen as acceptable by the culture that dominates the environment.

7.1 Implications For Future Research

There are several avenues for future research in this area. One area is to examine a larger sample of African American students. As this sample contained only twenty students, the results are not generalizable to all Black students attending these universities or to Black students in general. This study also took place in the Deep South, so expanding the region to encompass other views would be a necessary step.

Another dynamic in this study would be to examine Black students attending HBCU's and the differences of those students. Undeniably, there are class differences that may be examined to understand how Black students attending Black universities construct their meaning of Blackness. There were several other dynamics that may be

examined regarding intra-racial relations with Black students. Not only class differences, but possibly expansions to better understand gendered differences as well.

APPENDIX A
CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

This Informed Consent will explain about being a research subject in an experiment. It is important that you read this material carefully and then decide if you wish to be a volunteer.

PURPOSE: My name is Louwanda Evans, and I am a graduate student conducting face-to-face interviews as a part of the requirements for my graduate thesis at The University of Texas at Arlington. The purpose of this research study is to provide an understanding of how race is socially defined and constructed in various contexts. This study also serves the purpose of providing sociology with a broader knowledge of what race means to individuals in society. If published, this project will assist in the area of racial stratification.

DURATION: During this process, I will interview approximately twenty students. This interview will take approximately one hour and thirty minutes to complete. This interview will also be recorded and used as data for my final project.

PROCEDURES: The procedures, which will involve you as a research subject, include sitting down face to face and answering questions in a verbal format. These procedures are non invasive. The interview will be tape recorded.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS: There are no known possible risks and/or discomforts to you by being involved in this research project.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS: The possible benefit of participating in this research project is that you are helping to increase and contribute to the advancement of sociological knowledge pertaining to racial/ethnic stratification.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES/TREATMENTS: There are no alternative procedures available to you if you elect not to participate in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. A copy of the records from this study will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the sociology office for at least three (3) years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a subject. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the UTA IRB, the FDA, and personnel particular to this research (individual or department) have access to the study records. Your records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above.

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS: If you have any questions, problems or research-related problems at any time, you may call Louwanda Evans at 817-272-2661, or Ben Agger at

817-272-2640. You may call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board at 817-272-1235 for any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION: Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or quit at any time by informing me or contacting Ben Agger at 817-272-2640.

By signing below, you confirm that you have read or had this document read to you. You will be given a signed copy of this informed consent document. You have been and will continue to be given the chance to ask questions and to discuss your participation with the investigator.

You freely and voluntarily choose to be in this research project.

PRINCIPLE INVESTIGATOR: _____ DATE: _____
SIGNATURE OF VOLUNTEER: _____ DATE: _____

APPENDIX B

FACE SHEET

Face Sheet

Age_____

Sex_____

Race/ethnicity_____

Contact Information:

Address:

City_____ State_____ Zip_____

Telephone #_____

Interview #_____

Coding Information_____

Date_____

Time Started_____

Time Finished_____

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW GUIDE

ID# _____

General Questions:

1. What is your major/minor at the present time?
2. At the present time, what is your classification? How long have you been at this school?*
3. Are you full time or part time?
4. Have you attended any other colleges? Tell me about them if so.
5. Was this school your first choice? What were/are some of the contributing factors that influenced your decision to enroll at this university? Why did you choose this university? (probe)*
6. Do you live on campus or campus apartments?*
7. Why did you choose to live on campus? What type of factors helped you to make this decision?
8. Are the majority of students in your dorm or complex around the same classification as you?*
9. Where are you from?*
10. Do you stay on campus or do you go home on the weekends? Whatever you do, what are some of the reasons you choose to stay or leave on weekends?

11. If you stay on campus during the weekends, what are some of the things that you do while you are here?

Campus Atmosphere:

12. In making your decision to attend this particular university, was the racial makeup of the student body a factor? Why/Why not?

13. Tell me about some of your classes. What is your general opinion about the atmosphere. Meaning, do you feel the atmosphere is conducive to racial equality? If any discussions about race or culture are taking place, do you feel comfortable talking out? Can you give me some examples of this? (probe)

14. Are there many Blacks in your classes? How does this make you feel?

15. Do you feel that it is important to have other students in your classes that are similar to you in age, gender, race? Tell me more about why you feel this way.

16. Do you or have you gotten to know any of the students in your classes?

a. If so, tell me about them.

17. Do you feel comfortable speaking out or asking questions in class? Do you feel that you can share experiences and opinions with others while in class? (probe)

18. How do you identify with the other students in your classes? Can you share some examples with me? What, if any, do you perceive your relationship to be with other students?

19. Do you ever feel that your race or gender is a factor in how you relate to others around you? Can you tell me more about this?

20. What do you feel you have in common or not in common with the Black students in your classes? Please explain.
21. Do you feel that you have anything in common or not in common with the students in your classes that are not Black? Please explain.
22. When you speak out in class, do you ever feel judged by other students for what you are saying? Which students do you feel judged by? (probe)
23. Tell me about some of your professors. Do you have a relationship with any of them?
24. Do you feel that your professors are there for you if you need them? Can you give me some examples?
25. In your opinion, do you feel that your race or gender is ever a factor in how well you relate to your professors? Can you tell me more about that?
26. Are you involved in any organizations on campus?
 - a. If any, what are they?
 - b. How and why did you choose this particular organization?
 - c. What are your feelings about this organization in how Blacks are represented?
27. Do you feel that there are enough organizations for Blacks to be involved in on your campus?
28. Are there any social gatherings, parties, socials for Blacks on campus?
29. Do you feel that Blacks are properly represented on campus? Tell me more about why you feel this way.

Influential Factors:

30. When you were growing up, who was your primary caregiver(s)?
31. When you were growing up, did [mention caregiver] ever talk or discuss financial matters with you? In your opinion, what do you think was your social class?
32. What kind of work do your (parents or caregiver) do? How long have they done this type of work?
33. Did they go to college? Where did they attend? What degrees' did they receive, if any?
34. Are you still under the financial care of your parents or caregiver?
35. What was your neighborhood like growing up? Was it mixed racially or primarily white or black? How did you feel about that?*
36. What was your schools like growing up? Were they primarily mixed? *
37. Did (aforementioned person or persons) ever talk about what being Black means to them?
 - a. What kind of things do they say?
38. Do you agree with the things that they said about being Black?
 - a. What aspects do you agree or disagree with? (probe)
39. Tell me about the majority of your friends. Are they primarily women or men? Are the majority of your friends Black? Is that important to you? Why, why not?
40. Have you met a lot of your friends on campus?
41. How did you meet them?

42. Do you and your friends ever talk about racial issues? What kind of things do they say?

43. What do you do in your free time? What are some of the things that you like to do?

44. Where do you hang out? With whom do you hang out with?

Construction:

45. Have you ever experienced any forms of discrimination, stereotyping or negative attitudes toward blacks on this campus? (probe)

a. How does this make you feel?

45. When it comes to race, do you feel that things have changed? Meaning when it comes to discrimination or stereotyping, do you feel that things are different or better than, say, when your parents were growing up? (probe)

46. Do you ever feel that you are treated differently on this campus? (probe)

a. How are you treated differently?

b. Why do you think this is?

c. Who do you feel treats you different? Professors, students?

d. How do you deal with this? What do you do? Why do you do this?

47. When it comes to being Black, do you feel it is difficult at this school? (probe)

a. Why, why not? Can you tell me more?

48. Have you ever been accused of “acting white” by other black students?*

49. Tell me about some of your favorite T.V shows.

a. Do you watch a lot of black shows?* What are they?

- b. Do you feel that people expect you to be a certain way based off things seen or portrayed on TV?*
50. Do you think that blacks on TV do a good job of personifying black culture?
(probe)*
51. When you think of what it means to be Black, what person would you say personifies this?
- a. Why, or what about this person makes you feel this way about them?
52. In your opinion, can you tell me in detail, what being Black means to you? What type of things do you think have contributed to or influenced your ideas about this?
53. If I asked you to give me a personal definition of black culture, what would it be?
54. We talked earlier about what being Black means to you. How do you think you portray your ideas?
55. When it comes to this campus, do you feel that you can comfortably be yourself?
(probe)
56. How do you feel about Black culture? What aspects, if any, do you feel you carry with you at all times? Please explain.

Thank you for participating in this interview. I appreciate you time and participation. Is there anything that you would like to add or say?

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Louwanda Evans is currently a student at The University of Texas at Arlington in Arlington, Texas. She earned her undergraduate degree in Sociology in May 2004 and will have earned her Master of Arts in Sociology in May 2006. Her research interests are Race/Ethnicity and Racial Stratification. Her future plans are to attend Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas to pursue her PhD in Sociology.