

THE TIES THAT BLIND: PERPETUATION OF RACIAL
COMFORT AND DISCOMFORT AT A
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

By

DOUGLAS BLAIR PRICE

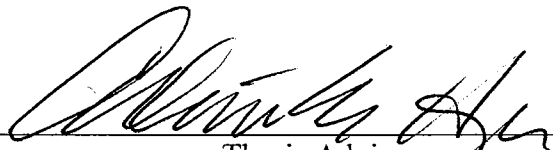
Bachelor of Science
University of Wyoming
Laramie, Wyoming
1985

Master of Arts
University of Tulsa
Tulsa, Oklahoma
1989

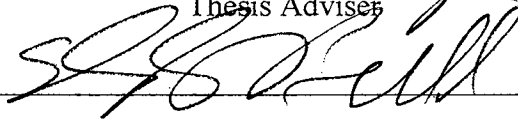
Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for
the Degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
December, 2002

THE TIES THAT BLIND: PERPETUATION OF RACIAL
COMFORT AND DISCOMFORT AT A
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

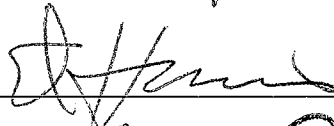
Thesis Approved:



Thesis Adviser



Kelly Ward



Timothy A. Pettit

Dean of the Graduate College

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to acknowledge several persons. I am grateful to Dr. Adrienne Hyle. Without her critical thought and insight, this work would not have been a sharpened reality. Thank you Dr. Hyle for your time and effort that I might express myself through your guidance, wisdom, and patience.

I thank Dr. Kelly Ward who invited me to co-present at an A.S.H.E conference session with Nadine Cohodas and others. These opportunities are rare, learning-centered, and unforgotten. I also wish to acknowledge Dr. Kay Bull and Dr. Ed Harris. Both served on my dissertation committee and added wisdom to the process.

I wish to express thank to Mr. Helmer & Mrs. Fran Sorenson for the 2000-2001 Helmer and Frances Sorenson Scholarship for \$600 and Dr. Robert and Mrs. Maxine Kamm for the 2001-2002 Robert B. and Maxine Kamm Distinguished Graduate Fellowship Scholarship for \$2,200. The extension of your generosity enabled me to continue my graduate studies in the College of Education and it undoubtedly made a difference in my educational pursuits and dreams.

A good work comes with sacrifice. I dedicate this work to two persons which, without their continued support, guidance and love, this work would not have come to completion – my wife, Laurie Price, and my son, Blair Price. May both of you see the

time spent away from you over the past four years expressed on the pages of this dissertation. And to those who brought me into this world and have been a constant support – thanks Mom and Dad.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. DESIGN OF THE STUDY	1
Statement of Problem	4
Purpose of the Study	6
Conceptual/Theoretical Frameworks	7
Perpetuation Theory	8
Strength of Ties Theory	9
Methods	11
Researcher	13
Data Needs and Sources	14
Data Collection	16
Data Analysis	18
Research Criteria	19
Significance of the Study	22
Theory	22
Research	22
Practice	23
Summary	23
Reporting	24
II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	25
Race and Higher Education	25
Racial Comfort and Discomfort in Higher Education	32
Strength of Ties and Perpetuation Theory	41
Racial Comfort, Strength of Ties, and Perpetuation Theory	53
Summary	56
III. DATA PRESENTATION	57
Overview of the College	58
Participant Demographics	59
Prior Connections	59
Connections on Campus	61

Connecting Locations	68
The Classroom	68
Learning Labs and Community Seating Areas	71
Student Organizations	73
Mutual Goals and Curriculum	77
Curbed Connections	79
“You Come to Leave”	79
Residential Proximity and Affluence	82
White Critical Mass vs. Black Minority Mass	86
Absence of Dialogue	91
Comfort	101
Black Discomfort	102
White Student’s Perception of Black Student’s Discomfort	105
Invisibility of White Discomfort	109
What is Being Done – Solutions	110
Summary	113
 IV. ANALYSIS OF THE DATA	 114
Analytical Lenses	114
Segregated Experiences and Strong Ties	117
White Students	118
Black Students	123
The Black Group and White Individuals	128
Weak Ties	130
Classroom Connections	134
The Researcher and Weak Ties	140
Micro-Macro Social Context & the Strength of Ties	141
Symbolic Interactionism	143
Summary	144
 V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND COMMENTARY	 145
Summary of the Study	146
Problem of Study	146
Purpose and Research Objectives	147
Data Needs and Sources	147
Data Collection Strategies	148
Data Analysis and Interpretation	148

Summary of the Findings	148
White Critical Mass	150
Small Minority of Black Students	150
“You Come to Leave” Culture	152
Age	152
Conclusions	153
Implications	155
Theory	156
Research	157
Practice	157
Recommendations	158
Informing Stakeholders	158
Forming a Multi-Racial Group	159
Breadth of Design	160
Linking Theory to Practical Change	161
Commentary	168
The Researcher as a Bridge Between White and Black Students	172
REFERENCES	175
APPENDIXES	185
APPENDIX A – SUBJECT’S AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE AND INFORMED CONSENT	186
APPENDIX B – IRB APPROVAL	188
APPENDIX C – INTERVIEW PROTOCOL & DEMOGRAPHICS SURVEY	190

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. A is black and B is white (Current State of Absent Inter-Racial Ties)	162
2. A and B are both black <u>or</u> both white (Intra-Racial Group Ties)	163
3. A is black and B is white (Weak Ties Inter-Racial Relationships)	165
4. C is black and F is white (Weak Tie Inter-Racial Relationship)	166

CHAPTER I

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

In late January of 2001, I felt compelled to study the racial chasm I had just crossed. A white male, I garnered a glimpse of the way black people could *possibly* see white people. I began to see race and society through a different lens – a lens not of my construction or creation but a lens adopted from black persons who co-existed in black and white worlds. I simply asked a black professor of sociology what the nature of black and white race relations were at a predominantly white community college where I worked. Thinking all was racially at rest, I was positively mistaken. This professor, without hesitation, referenced the notion of racial “comfort” and its obvious absence, at least to her, at this institution. Sarason’s (1996) reflections on the problem of change came to my mind:

To change one’s way of thinking... for the serious purpose of discovering new questions and problems is even more difficult, because one tends not to want to believe that one’s investigative territory can be mapped rather differently and that new “lands” can be discovered by others whose perspective is different. It can be both strange and upsetting to go through most of one’s life believing that two parallel lines will not meet in space, and then discover that on the basis of certain assumptions... two parallel lines will meet in space. It is strange because one set of assumptions is not right and the other wrong. It is upsetting because one is

forced to recognize that there are productive ways other than one's own way of looking at a particular setting or set of problems. (p. 119 – 120)

Race-related issues are not unknown to the community college. A whole body of research supports the need for heightened awareness about diversity and racism on the American community college campus (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 1993, 1995; Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000). While experts in the field recognize the ideals for diversity on college campuses, there is a paucity of research at the community college level that addresses the interaction of students across racial lines. Shaw, Valadez, and Rhoads (1999) indicate that education researchers tend to ignore community colleges and “our knowledge of the inner workings of community colleges remains rudimentary, in large part due to the macro-level, often quantitative analyses that have dominated research on these institutions” (p. 2).

Community colleges are complex institutions with diverse student populations (Cohen, 1996; Shaw, Valadez, & Rhoads, 1999). However, “community colleges have been criticized for failing to acknowledge or adapt to the diversity in their student populations, resulting in stubbornly low transfer rates and consistently high dropout rates” (Shaw, Valadez, & Rhoads, 1999, p. 3). Knowing that the community college “has from its very origins at the turn of the century reflected both the egalitarian promise of the world's first modern democracy and the constraints of its dynamic capitalistic economy” (Brint & Karabel, 1989, p. 6), it is unfortunate that retention rates for black students in higher education continue to be less than the rates for white students (Perna, 2002). Black community college transfer students, for

example, are not being accepted into highly ranked universities (“News & Views,” 1996).

The community college is often the only access alternative to higher education: *“the choice is not between the community college and a senior residential institution; it is between the community and nothing”* (Cohen, 1996, p. 55, emphasis original). Moreover, students who come from economically disadvantaged areas of a community are academically disadvantaged and are less likely to possess a learned foundation upon which to build college level academic skills (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Due to location, costs, and open admission requirements the community college attract black students (Opp, 2001). Thus, community colleges play an important role in upward mobility for black students.

White students’ higher success rates and transfer rates juxtaposed against lower success and transfer rates for black students, postures black students to be ghettoized at the community college level. This ghettoization at community colleges problematizes higher education and perpetuates social inequities. Shaw, Rhoads, & Valadez (1999) captures this reality:

Community colleges are positioned to play a critical role in the process of upward mobility in American society. While higher education traditionally has been the realm of the white and middle class, over the past 30 years the poor, the working-class, and ethnic and racial minorities have enjoyed increased access to postsecondary education, largely through the doors of community colleges. Despite the “open-door” accessibility of these institutions, the question of

whether community colleges enhance the social mobility of working-class and minority students remains an open one. (p. 1)

Brint & Karabel (1989) believe community colleges stratified students along class lines through their transfer and vocational educational programs. Lower socioeconomic groups' dreams are diverted from transfer aspirations to more practical, vocational training. Cohen (1996) believes that community colleges, through their bifurcated mission, teaching and social service, "enhance inequality" (p. 444). These two functions contradict each other, thus stratifying students. The teaching function serves to elevate those who are opportunistic towards upward mobility. Whereas the social service function takes from the teaching component. Cohen argues, "some combination should be recognized, because the community colleges should not function as social welfare agencies to the detriment of their teaching and learning core" (p. 444).

Thus, the community college's complexity, misunderstanding at the individual level, inherent democratic mission, and continued manifestation of racism, combine to provide a rich, dynamic context for study.

Statement of Problem

The American Association of Community Colleges 1995 report recognized that institutional research, policies, and practices fail to reach the heart of the problem – racism. In the spring 2001 semester, I conducted some preliminary investigative interviews with black individuals on one campus of a large, predominantly white, multi-campus community college. For anonymity purposes, the campus was renamed Spruce; the other campuses were renamed Maple, Norwood, and Willow. Through

the preliminary interviews at the Spruce campus, diminished comfort levels were revealed.

I discovered that discomfort among black students at the Spruce campus was not a new issue. In fact, in 1993, the institution's student newspaper ran an article that discussed the inauguration of a new student organization – the African American Student Association (A.A.S.A.). Increasing comfort levels for African Americans at the campus was the goal of the organization (Vail, 1993).

Thus, it became clear that over this nine-year period from 1993 to 2002, the reality of uncomfortable race relations continued among black community college students at the Spruce campus. In 1997, the institution required attendance of all employees at a diversity workshop. Despite this institutional diversity initiative and the forming of the African American Student Association, discomfort among black students continued at the Spruce campus.

In 1997, the national profile of community colleges indicated enrollment to be 35.2% minority, with black student enrollment being 11.1% (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999). The 2000 Census data reflected a similar proportion of African Americans in the United States as well as the state and city in which the study was conducted (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). This similarity of national and local student demographics differed, however, with respect to the black student population at the site of the study. In 2002, there was only a 5% presence of black students at the Spruce campus.

Thus, the lengthy period of discomfort coupled with the percentages of black and white students informed the need to investigate what factors perpetuate racial

discomfort among black students. Something preempted the development of a comfort level for black students, despite the college's mission to support a "learning environment conducive to the development of the student's potential" (p. 1, College Catalog, 2001).

Through Granovetter's (1973) Strength of Ties and Braddock's (1980) Perpetuation Theory, I speculate that the invisibility of racial comfort and discomfort at the campus is brought from the community and perpetuated at the campus through the strong and weak ties formed and perpetuated among its students. These two theoretical lenses are used to understand racial comfort and discomfort at the campus.

The real issues focus around seeing what is invisible. To the white student there is little or no racial unrest, yet to the black student there is covert and overt racism in action. Desegregation resulting from *Brown vs. Board of Education* (Olivas, 1997) increased access opportunities for students of color into higher education, especially at community colleges (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Shaw, Valadez, & Rhoads, 1999). Nonetheless, at this particular community college campus, social mechanisms continued to exist that perpetuated racial comfort and discomfort.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the invisibility of racial comfort and discomfort at a predominantly white community college campus through the lenses of Strength of Ties (Granovetter, 1973) and Perpetuation Theory (Braddock, 1980). This study investigates the impact of ties formed by black and white students to understand how these ties perpetuate racial comfort and discomfort at a

predominantly white community college campus. Specifically, the following objectives will be met:

1. Describe the comfort and discomfort of race relations among black and white students that was perpetuated through the formation and maintenance of strong and weak ties by black and white students.
2. Analyze ties using Strength of Ties and Perpetuation Theory to understand their impact on comfort and discomfort at the campus.
3. Speculate on the impact these ties may have on future efforts to increase comfort levels at the campus and to describe other realities.
4. Assess the utility of Strength of Ties and Perpetuation Theory as theoretical lenses to understand comfort and discomfort at this community college campus.

Conceptual/Theoretical Frameworks

Crotty (1998) advocates having an epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods that relate to and serve as foundational components supporting a research project. Constructionism is the epistemological foundation for this study. In this context, multiple realities exist (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and “meaning is not discovered, but constructed” (Crotty, 1998, p. 9). Constructionism thus informs my theoretical perspective which is symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969).

Symbolic interactionism rests ... on three simple premises. The first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.... The second premise is that the meaning of such things is

derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters. (p. 2)

Through this perspective, I construct the perception of black and white students and their interaction on campus and the meaning it holds for them in order to understand comfort and discomfort along racial lines. Through Granovetter's (1973) Strength of Ties and Braddock's (1980) Perpetuation Theory, I examine the ties students form and perpetuate on campus.

Thus, under the pretense that people construct their reality and therefore multiple realities exist, participants and the researcher shape the reality of the findings.

Through case study methodology, participants revealed information that informed the problem posed in this study. The problem resided among the students at the campus. Thus, the researcher's ability to identify and understand the presence and absence of strong and weak ties at the campus was critical to the interpretation of black and white social contexts.

Perpetuation Theory

Perpetuation Theory (Braddock, 1980) is the lens through which I viewed students' entrance to the institution with social networks already in place.

Perpetuation Theory is "a micro-macro sociological theory of racial segregation" (Braddock, 1980, p. 532). Economic equality for blacks and whites is not solely predicated upon academic achievement. The mechanism of school desegregation

must “break the cycle of racial segregation that leaves blacks and whites a world apart” (Wells & Crain, 1994, p. 533).

Perpetuation Theory has been traditionally linked to the study of black students who enter a dominant white higher education culture. Black students exposed to integrated settings in primary and secondary education better assimilate, accommodate, and negotiate subsequent inter-racial experiences (Braddock, 1980). Perpetuation Theory posits that segregation tends to repeat itself “across the stages of the life cycle and across institutions when individuals have not had sustained experiences in desegregated settings earlier in life” (McPartland & Braddock, 1981, p. 149). Braddock and McPartland focus on individual agents and how they adjust their behaviors to accommodate these constraints thus perpetuating segregating behaviors. Exposure to integrated settings changes this behavior and helps black individuals obtain greater inclusion in society (Dawkins & Braddock, 1994).

Strength of Ties Theory

Granovetter’s (1973) Strength of Ties provides a lens through which I viewed interpersonal relationships at the campus. Ties are inter-personal links between individuals and the:

strength of a tie is a (probably linear) combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie. (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1361)

Like Perpetuation Theory, Strength of Ties theory links “micro and macro levels of sociological theory” (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1360). Granovetter argues that “small-

scale interaction becomes translated into large-scale patterns, and that these, in turn, feed back into small groups” (p. 1360). In this study, the micro level is the student. The macro level is the black and white student groups.

Like Perpetuation Theory, Strength of Ties is not a theory targeted to a particular race, gender, or class. Granovetter (1983) argues for the general application of the usefulness of the theory, stating, “there is no special reason why such an argument should apply only to lower socioeconomic groups; it should be equally persuasive for any set of people whose outlook is unusually provincial as the result of homogeneous contacts” (p. 205).

Granovetter (1973) believes strong ties perpetuate solidarity within a group. Subsequently, groups who form strong ties within their groups but form few ties with other groups are more likely to feel isolated. Coser (1975) indicates that through strong ties, “everybody knows fairly well why people behave in a certain way. Little effort has to be made to gauge the intention of the other person, nor is much reflection needed to determine one’s own response” (p. 254).

Granovetter (1973) suggests as more weak ties form between groups, inter-group cohesion and communication increase. More specifically, Granovetter (1983) states, “ties serve crucial functions in linking otherwise unconnected segments of a network” (p. 217). Alternatively, “individuals with few weak ties will be deprived of information from distant parts of the social system and will be confined to the provincial news and views of their close friends” (Granovetter, 1983, p. 202).

Coupled together, Perpetuation Theory and Strength of Ties account for interpersonal interaction and its impact on broader social contexts. Both also provide

micro-macro theoretical propositions. Similar to Wells and Crain (1994), I link Perpetuation Theory and Strength of Ties to produce a macro-micro sociological analysis of the perpetuation of strong ties that could perpetuate an absence of informal networks at the campus among black and white students.

Thus, through Granovetter's (1973) Strength of Ties and Braddock's (1980) Perpetuation Theory, I examine the ties students form and perpetuate on campus. Through the perceptions of black and white students, their interaction on campus, and the meaning it holds for them, I construct an explanation for the comfort and discomfort along racial lines at the Spruce campus.

Methods

The case study serves as the methodology for this study. Stake (1995) identifies three levels of the case study: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. The intrinsic case study presents itself to the researcher and is studied in its own right. The instrumental level is functional in seeking to understand a problem in a larger context. The collective case study coordinates the findings of several case studies related to the problem of study in order to increase transferability. Stake (1995, p. 4) asserts, "the more the intrinsic interest in the case, the more we will restrain our curiosities and special interests and the more we will try to discern and pursue issues critical to the case."

The intrinsic case study provides the methodological focus for this study. The problem presented itself through the voice of a college employee. Upon further investigation and preliminary study, students revealed racial comfort and discomfort

issues. The instrumental level of case study is used in a secondary manner in order to speculate on the impact of the case on the local community as well as an expression of the community on the case itself.

The advantages of the case study include “*the primary vehicle for emic inquiry*”, “*an effective vehicle for demonstrating the interplay between inquirer and respondents*”, and “*the ‘thick description’ so necessary for judgements of transferability*” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 359, emphasis original). Lincoln and Guba tout the case study as running tandem with naturalistic inquiry. They state, “the case study represents an unparalleled means for communicating contextual information that is grounded in the particular setting that was studied” (p. 360).

Four guiding activities prepared me for this naturalistic study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). First, I maintained contact with the campus through my employment at this college. Second, I garnered informed consent from all of my interviewees (see Appendix A for Subject’s Agreement to Participate and Informed Consent). I strongly emphasized conditions for confidentiality. In addition, I gained administrative support for the study by communicating my interest in racial issues and racial reconciliation. Third, through the above activities, I garnered a sense of trust. I was open and honest about this research project from its inception through its completion. Fourth, I developed a small number of black and white gatekeepers that served as informants. As mentioned in Lincoln and Guba (1985), some gatekeepers should not serve as informants due to agendas or revenge motives. I observed caution and avoided this issue.

Researcher

I, the researcher, have worked in higher education at the community college level for 13 years. I served in student support service roles and presently serve in an academic leadership role. I observed over these years the need for students to confront any issues related to the learning process. Using the college's student code book as a guideline, students, faculty and administrators can follow steps to reconcile academic or non-academic issues. However, when it comes to reconciling racial conflict and tension, there are no guidelines or policy books to follow.

Blinded by my inclusion in a predominantly white student, staff, faculty and administrative setting, I was unaware of racial discomfort issues. I thought all students were comfortable. Through recent personal training and development, I became more aware of the persistence and perpetuation of racism in higher education and the need for racial reconciliation at the national, state, and local levels. This led to increased awareness of racial discomfort issues at the campus. I sought to understand covert and embedded social mechanisms that could account for the present state of race relations at the campus. Furthermore, I speculated that racial discomfort will be perpetuated if attempts to change embedded mechanisms are not undertaken. Finally, I presented a prescriptive model to engage the institution in change.

More specifically, I found a new depth of awareness and understanding of black students through increased interaction and dialogue. I dialogued with those who, by a predominantly white society, are deemed different. Black students' individuality was the essence of my new understanding and awareness. I crossed racial borders for this

research project. I observed extreme sensitivity when I talked with each participant to build credibility and trust among all participants. I found that informed consent coupled with multiple contacts with the participants served as valuable tools that fostered trust and allowed the sharing of culturally relevant black and white race-related realities. In a community college that “believes in the growth and worth of the person as an individual and as a member of society” (College Catalog, 2001, p. 1), a depth of inter-racial dialogue is warranted.

The institution will need to decide to what degree it will implement practices that foster a sense of inclusiveness of all racial groups at this community college campus. In other words, does this institution wish to be just a college or a college with community. Gallego (1996) admonished the community college movement to understand:

As America becomes more culturally diverse and it becomes even more important to develop greater understanding, sensitivity, and tolerance toward others, the answer for community colleges has to be this: A community college campus, from its symbols to its structures to its curriculum and character, must represent and demonstrate an appreciation for the diversity in our society.

(Conclusion section, para. 1)

Data Needs and Sources

The target population for this study is black and white students. In protecting human participants, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was required for this research study (see Appendix B for IRB Approval). The campus is nested in a

predominantly white area of the city. As will be identified in Chapter III, 17 black and 19 white students were interviewed. These students represent both genders, traditional and non-traditional age students, full-time and part-time status. In addition, students are either transfer majors or technical and occupational majors. Purposive sampling is the sampling technique employed in the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) summarize this technique:

Each successive unit [in my case students] can be chosen to extend information already obtained, to obtain other information that contrasts with it, or to fill in gaps in the information obtained so far. It does not matter where the investigator begins in the sampling process (from a practical point of view, the first unit is often a gatekeeper or someone nominated by the gatekeeper), but successive units are selected in accord with the need to extend, test and fill information.... In purposeful sampling the size of the sample is determined by informational considerations. If the purpose is to maximize information, then sampling is terminated when no new information is forthcoming from newly sampled units; thus redundancy is the primary criterion. (p. 201-202)

This study relies on the use of socially constructed racial categories in order to study inter-racial relationships. I conducted this research with the assumption there are black and white individuals. Nevertheless, social science has not been able to ascertain black and white (Cameron & Wycoff, 1998). In this study, "race" is used because it is the best terminology I have available to explore and write about race issues. Tatum (1999) asserts:

The language we use to categorize one another racially is imperfect. These categories are still evolving as the current debate over Census classifications indicates. The original creation of racial categories was in the service of oppression.... Yet it is difficult to talk about what is essentially a flawed and problematic social construct without using language that is itself problematic. We have to be able to talk about it in order to change it. So this is the language I choose. (p. 17)

To determine participant's race, I asked the participants to racially self identify. My data sources' racial identities are a product of social construction. Thus, through the existence of race as a self-identified reality, race is a reality subject to investigation. Therefore, race is explored as one factor accounting for racial comfort and discomfort as it could separate students simply based on the stereotypes of persons with a different skin color.

Data Collection

The primary instrument for data collection was me as the researcher. Naturalistic inquiry relies very heavily on the human being as the primary research instrument (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Three data collection methods were used in this study. First, in the context of studying ties and the inherent meaning of ties for black and white students, I used semi-structured interviews to gather insight into racial comfort and discomfort (see Appendix C for the Interview Protocol and Demographics Survey). Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that the structured interview is best when the researcher is aware of what is not known and seeks to make this known.

Granovetter (1973) asserts, "Most sociometric tests ask people who they like best or would prefer to do something with, rather than with whom they actually spend time" (p. 1376). In my study, I asked the participants, "who do you hang around with?" Students appeared honest when saying they hung out with members of their own race group and found comfort in those relationships.

I audio-taped the interviews and transcribed verbatim participant's words. The questions were designed not to be race specific. I reviewed the questions with black and white professional employees at the institution to verify the questions as race neutral. I asked the same questions to all participants. In addition to interviewing students, I conducted two focus groups. Each group had black and white students present. Focus groups allowed additional triangulation of data sets, thus increasing the credibility of the findings.

Observation served as the second method of data collection. Unlike reconstructing the nature of experience through interviews, observation allows for the assimilation of the here and now into the collected data pool (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As a non-participant, I observed several sites on campus. These sites included academic advisement, registration, job placement, library, academic learning labs, the student center, and community seating areas.

The African American Student Association (A.A.S.A.) student organization served as an opportunity for participant observation. This organization was open to all students but primarily attracted black students. Participant observation provided additional data with which to triangulate other data sets. Thus, I could more easily account for discrepancies from multiple data sets (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The third method of data collection was the investigation of institutional documents. The documents included the institution's newspaper, catalog, and student activity programming flyers. The availability, stability, richness and nonreactive nature of these items added additional credibility to the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed through the theoretical lenses of Granovetter's (1973) Strength of Ties and Braddock's (1980) Perpetuation Theory. These theories served as analytical lenses in this study in an effort to explain, in part, racial comfort and discomfort among black and white students at the Spruce campus. For the purpose of this analysis, discomfort is operationalized as exclusion and alienation; comfort is operationalized as inclusion and connection. The analysis focused on segregated experiences *and* strong ties, weak ties, and micro-macro social context *and* the strength of ties.

Perpetuation Theory (Braddock, 1980) is the lens through which I viewed students' entrance to the institution with social networks already in place. Granovetter's (1973) Strength of Ties theory is the lens through which I viewed interpersonal relationships at the campus. The four criterion accounting for tie strength [a combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy, and the reciprocal services] were applied to the interview data. From this, strong and weak ties were revealed. Through qualitative methodologies, the strength of ties was inferred through the triangulation of data sets. Braddock's (1980) Perpetuation

Theory serves as a theoretical lens to analyze students' racial ideologies and prior inter-racial exposure and how these realities impact the formation of weak and strong ties on campus.

Commensurate with the micro-macro levels of sociological analysis inherent to these two theoretical lenses, the data was analyzed at these two levels. In this study, the micro level is the student to student relationship. The macro level is black and white racial groups.

In the context of naturalistic inquiry, Lincoln and Guba (1985) wrote, "Data are... the *constructions* offered by or in the sources; data analysis leads to a *reconstruction* of those constructions" (p. 332). This notion blends with the epistemological foundation of this study. The process of data analysis "is essentially a synthetic one, in which the constructions that have emerged ... are reconstructed into meaningful wholes" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 333). Thus, the data analysis ran concurrently throughout the study.

Research Criteria

Inherent to naturalistic inquiry is the notion of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study reconstructed the realities posed by the participants and these realities were credibly reflected in meaningful results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The conditions of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were met thus establishing trustworthiness of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility. Lincoln and Guba (1985) offer the following techniques that establish credibility in a study: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and

triangulation. I spent time on campus and became familiar with its environment and surroundings. In addition, I spent time throughout the study developing relationships with black and white individuals on the campus. I was open and honest about race-related dialogue and racial reconciliation with participants in the study. To augment credibility, I employed member checking and peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transferability. Transferability of the findings of this study are threatened by the greater community setting in which the study took place. The community in which the study took place is wrought with racial tension. A community college that exists in a community that is not as laden with racial tension may express itself differently at its own community college. Therefore, caution needs to be exercised in assuming the findings of this study would be found across all community college contexts. In addition, the variance in the racial composition of faculty, staff and administration at other community colleges, served to threaten the transferability of the results of this study to other college sites.

As Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicated, it is “*not* the naturalist’s task to provide an *index* of transferability; it *is* his or her responsibility to provide the *data base* that makes transferability judgments possible on the part of potential appliers” (p. 316). In this study, the data base included students and their interactions, the campus environment, and relevant documents. From the description of this data, others can determine if the findings of this study transfer to their community college campus (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Dependability. In a naturalistic study, dependability is a measure of reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An assessment of dependability was conducted in order to achieve dependability. The study and its design were presented to professionals in higher education. The study was deemed to be accurate within its defined parameters, design, and theoretical frameworks. Noteworthy, however, is the constructionist nature of naturalistic inquiry and that the results of this study could vary in subsequent studies at other community colleges predicated on the participants and methodologies employed and the social and cultural contexts at those institutions.

Confirmability. Explicit in this study is the objectivity of the results. Scriven (1971) implied that objectivity is reached when intersubjective agreement is found among data sources. This notion guided this study as to the number of persons interviewed. As I sensed intersubjective agreement, I considered the data collection process complete.

Procedurally, this study achieved trustworthiness. I reconstructed the realities provided by the data sources through the case study methodology. The data needs and sources, data collection, data analysis, and qualitative inquiry research criteria were found to be in agreement and supported the purpose of the study.

As a naturalistic inquiry, this study relies on four assumptions as outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985). First, naturalistic inquiry operated as an overarching paradigm for the study. Second, I, the researcher, served as the primary instrument for investigation. Third, a design was conceived and articulated. Finally, I, the researcher, thoroughly understood the field site that was investigated.

Significance of the Study

A research study should inform three unique sources. These include educational theory, research, and practice. This study achieves these three criteria.

Theory

This study couples Strength of Ties (Granovetter, 1973) and Perpetuation Theory (Braddock, 1980) to examine racial comfort and discomfort at a community college. The uniqueness of the use of these two theoretical lenses applied to the study of higher education adds more depth to the literature and theory base. This study demonstrated these two theories are useful for studying social phenomenon in education settings by considering the impact of one-on-one relationships and how these dyadic relationships translate into larger scale behavior patterns. In addition, this study broadened Perpetuation Theory from a focus on African American and Latino students to Caucasian students.

Research

This study adds to the community college research literature base. This study illustrates the impact of a non-residential institution on social relationships. This study considers how race relations from the community are perpetuated locally through the community college. In particular, it studies how local racial ideologies enter the community college and impact social relationships on the campus. This study is particularly useful for communities whose racial demographics reflect a large, single race majority. More specifically, this study adds depth to community

college research base that focuses on age and race. This study provides data on which to construct a survey instrument useful in subsequent quantitative and qualitative research. Majority group norm based instruments do not accurately reflect the intentions of students of color (Schwitzer, 1999). Thus, an instrument rooted in the voice of black students, garnered through qualitative research methods, would be of practical significance.

Practice

This study informs educational practice, particularly at the site of this study. The multi-racial group concept presented in Chapter V, could serve as a point of origination for a richer network of weak ties. This multi-racial group could be a tool useful to other higher education institutions experiencing similar race-related issues. More broadly, this study informs the field of education calling for a continued practical focus on race and the community college.

Summary

This chapter outlined the design of the study which is to examine the invisibility of racial comfort and discomfort at a predominantly white community college campus through the lenses of Strength of Ties (Granovetter, 1973) and Perpetuation Theory (Braddock, 1980). The statement of the problem, purpose of the study, conceptual/theoretical framework, methods and procedures, and research criteria were explained.

Reporting

Chapter two reviews relevant literature to the problem in this study. Chapter three presents the data collected. Chapter four comprises an interpretation of the data. Chapter five will close this study with a summary, conclusions, implications, recommendations, and commentary.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In reviewing the literature related to race, racism, higher education, and society, I realized higher education and society are perpetrator and victim of racism's omnipresence in the United States. Neither was the sole culprit. Cause and effect was blurred. Together in subtle and sometimes invisible ways, higher education reproduced the very social inequalities that entered its doors.

This literature review includes three sections. First, race and higher education is explored. Second, racial comfort and discomfort in higher education is addressed. Third, racial comfort, Strength of Ties, and Perpetuation Theory literature is discussed. To conclude the literature review, I synthesized these two theories with race-related comfort research.

Race and Higher Education

Race and higher education intimately intertwined in the literature. Commencing in the colonies in 1636, institutions of higher education advanced into the 21st century. However, in the many trends identified in the contemporary era of higher education (i.e., 1976-1998), the omnipresence of racism was apparent (Cohen, 1998). In this contemporary era:

Racism persisted. Whether it was benign or pernicious, rationalized or unreasoned, displayed by whites or blacks, or people in or out of power, by any measure it continued. Laws were passed forbidding it in one context; it appeared in another. Practically every publication – tax law changes, welfare reform, the choice of school sites, student aid, the content of school textbooks, representation on governmental bodies, individual behavior, jobs gained, and promotions granted – was viewed with an eye to which of the several ethnic or racial groups appear to gain or lose benefits. (Cohen, 1998, p. 295)

The intersection of race and higher education in the literature was often an unpleasant spot. Race was often a factor to be considered in educational outcomes versus a reality in and of itself (Lewis, 2001). The tone of race and higher education literature connoted grave issues such as oppression and the marginalization of women and persons of color (Solomon, 1985). Cohodas' (1997) account of James Meredith's admission to Ole Miss in 1962 demonstrated a qualitative work that focused on the experiences of black and white persons and the price paid for racist thought and action. The prevalence of this seemingly dark tone in the literature reflected the past and present conditions of race relations in the United States and could serve as a harbinger for future conflict and controversy.

Cohen (1998) observed that "the foremost reason for reading the history of higher education is that it teaches appreciation for the power of tradition" (p. 1). Taking liberty with "tradition," higher education's experience in excluding historically marginalized groups from higher education (Berlak & Moyenda, 2001;

Cohodas, 1997; Solomon, 1985) could be construed as a tradition which continues to this day affirmed by the presence of Affirmative Action legislation.

Juxtaposing Cohen's quote against these other traditions, one is compelled to view higher education perpetuating racism not only within its own walls but perpetuating social, racial, and class stratification systems in the United States. Addressing the intersection of class and race, Henderson (1999) argued, "failure to understand the different social classes in black America, particularly the poor and the underclass, is tantamount to not understanding blacks or the reasons for their rage" (p. 81).

The literature was replete with studies that identified racism's presence in higher education and strategies to confront it. Gregory (2000) referenced a large body of literature that affirmed the presence of strained race relations in higher education. Moreover, higher education must institutionalize its diversity initiatives by embracing a desire to improve race relations, making systemic changes within the institution, and assessing diversity related initiatives.

Another body of literature (Cochran-Smith, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Lawrence & Tatum, 1997) addressed retooling teacher education to eradicate racist ideology from the curriculum. Chang (2002) looked at the discourse that preserved "race-conscious admissions practices" that "overlooks the importance of accounting for the evolution of diversity, thinking beyond admissions, recognizing transformative aims, and viewing learning more broadly" (p. 135-136).

Carter (1997) distinguished three levels of racism: individual, institutional, and cultural. Carter wrote:

The *individual racist* is one who has come to accept without question consciously or subconsciously the societal and in some cases family messages that Black people and people of color as a group are inferior to Whites because of physical (genotypical and phenotypical) traits.

Institutional racism consists of established laws, customs, and practices which systematically reflect and produce intentionally and unintentionally racial inequalities in American society.

Cultural racism is the conscious or subconscious conviction that White Euro-American cultural patterns and practices, as reflected in values, language, belief systems, interpersonal interaction styles, behavioral patterns, political, social roles, economics, music art, religious tenets, and so forth, are superior to those of other visible racial/ethnic groups (Asian, Black, Hispanic, Indian Americans).

(p. 200, emphasis added)

In addition to levels of racism, race and racism are considered social constructions (Cameron & Wycoff, 1998; Lopez, 2000; Omi & Winant, 1994; Tatum, 1999).

Socially constructed, race was a vehicle that perpetuated perceived differences among groups of people (Cameron & Wycoff, 1998). Deconstructing race and racism requires an examination and understanding of the social interactions that construct and perpetuate it.

Blumer's (1969) conceptual expansion of symbolic interactionism accounted for the meaning humans gain about each other through the process of social interaction. Blumer constructed six root images that account for the process, nature and meaning of interaction:

1. *nature of human society* – groups exist in action,
2. *nature of social interaction* – societies consist of individuals interacting with each other,
3. *nature of objects* – an object is a referent; can be physical, social, or abstract; the meaning of an object rests in the individual yet shaped by the interaction of others in relation to the object,
4. *human beings as acting organisms* – an individual can interact with him/herself,
5. *nature of human action* – one must interpret to act; not react to external stimuli,
6. *interlinkage of action* – most social action is predicated on recurrent patterns of joint action.

In this context of symbolic interactionism, skin color served as a pervasive, differentiating symbol. In 1806, for example, “three generations of enslaved women [grandmother, mother, and daughter] sued for freedom in Virginia on the ground that they descended from a free maternal ancestor” (Lopez, 2000, p. 163). However:

the fate of the women rode upon the complexion of their face, the texture of their hair, and the width of their nose. Each of these characteristics served to mark their race, and their race in the end determined whether they were free or enslaved. (Lopez, p. 164)

The three women were freed because “Hannah’s [the mother] hair was long and straight” (Lopez, p. 164). Physical features, especially skin color, continued to be a predominant symbol defining racial groups in American society. For example, Lopez (2000) stated, “These elements [skin color] stand in as markers widely interpreted to connote racial difference only in particular social contexts. The local setting in turn provides the field of struggle on which social actors make racially relevant choices” (p. 172). Henderson (1994) added, “We utilize race to provide clues about *who* a person is” (p. 59).

Moreover, race, socially and symbolically constructed by skin color, served as a heuristic or rule of thumb for daily living. “Race becomes ‘common sense’ – a way

of comprehending, explaining, and acting in the world” (Omni & Winant, 1994, p. 60). In this context, children were raised to view race as a salient feature of their daily life experience. Tatum (1999) suggested by the age of six years, a child’s skin color becomes a defining feature of one’s racial identity development.

In the United States, ethnicity is racialized (Jacobson, 1998). This held particularly true for black individuals where the focus was more on oppression and exploitation (Taylor, 1979). Steinhorn and Diggs-Brown (2000) suggested that skin color is racialized. Asians, for example, can be considered white or non-black. One drop of black blood makes one black (Parham, 1993). Persons of color are those who are not of European descent. Blacks are persons of color. However, not all persons of color are black. Despite the socially constructed nature of race, the United States government perpetuated racial identifiers through the census process which is complicated by one’s opportunity to self-identify in multiple ethnic categories (Cohen, 1998).

The community college is a fascinating institution that attracts persons from all class and races. Celebrating its 100th birthday, the community college is relatively new to the higher education scene. The community college provides a rich text for understanding social issues. Community colleges were laden with identity issues (Pedersen, 1998; Sidel, 1994), multiple missions (Cohen & Brawer, 1996), and perception as a continuance of high school (Reitano, 1989-90). In addition, the community college “draws primarily from the working class and trains students for working class jobs. Universities, on the other hand, draw from the middle class and train for middle class jobs” (Weis, 1985, p. 13). Moreover, the community college

attracts the majority of its student body from its surrounding community. The community college, in essence, is a microcosm of the larger community.

Due to location, cost, and open admission requirements, access to the community college is more readily available as compared to regional and comprehensive institutions. However, because of declining student of color retention rates (Zamani, 2000), fewer black students are likely to earn as many credit hours, complete a degree, or transfer to a university. Community colleges receive over 44% of United States undergraduate students and 46% of African American student enrollment (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 1995). In higher education, white students were more likely to complete their degrees than black students (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993). However, black and white students did not differentiate among career choices. It was the opportunity to aspire to the career that was differentiated (Delvecchio, McEwan, & McEwan, 2001).

Being networked in American culture, therefore, is an asset to occupational upward mobility (Granovetter, 1995). The question became, how are black and white students networked in American society after attending college? Contingent upon attendance at a university, versus a community college, this network may be shortchanged for black students. Considering that the majority of black students entered higher education through the community college, coupled with lower transfer rates to the university, plus higher dropout rates from the community college, compared to white students, black students were disadvantaged. This provided substantiating evidence to study the racial disconnect at the community college level that could subsequently lead to economic disparity across racial lines. Becker (1979)

acknowledged this impact of segregation on America's black youth who "have fewer informational resources because our social networks are so race-segregated" (p. 13).

Higher education reduced economic disparity among all racial groups (Cross, 1997; Lin, Ensel & Vaughn, 1981). Therefore, the ghettoization of black students in higher education through the community college could perpetuate income earning disparity in later years of a black student's life. Harvey (1998) acknowledged the critical role of higher education in society and asserted, "it is the college experience which ultimately separates the people who will be leaders from the people who will be led" (p. 21). Weis (1985) suggested schools, by creating their own cultures, perpetuated and reproduced a culture that sent students back into the society from which they came.

A focus on the embeddedness of social networks that perpetuate intra-group comfort and inter-group discomfort across racial lines versus a focus on the negative outcomes such as persistence rates, retention rates, matriculation data, graduate data, and A.C.T. scores, could inform educational practice and encourage systemic change in higher education. It is inevitable that a continued focus on negative outcomes could become a self-fulfilling prophecy. The challenge is to be pro-active in eradicating embedded social structures in higher education systems that lead to the perpetuation of economic disparity as well as inform institutional policy and practice.

Racial Comfort and Discomfort in Higher Education

In the United States, black and white persons, albeit equal, still self-segregate for a variety of reasons. Tatum (1999) argued black students will group together because they have similar issues (e.g. a shared history of oppression) around which to gather.

Similarly, Loo and Rolison (1986) indicated that students of color were likely to feel alienated in the larger education social community yet feel comfortable within their own racial group at the institution because “the values of the student’s subculture may not be entirely congruent with those of the larger campus community” (p. 60).

Steinhorn and Diggs-Brown (2000) believed integration to be illusory because:

there is no longer one clear, rigid, and legally defined color line, as existed under segregation, and because the racial comfort zone is much more elastic than at any other time in our nation’s history, we can maintain the illusion that society is integrating more than it is. But where integration truly matters – in our lives, homes, neighbor hoods, schools, and intimate relationships—white America still draws the line and will continue to do so in the years ahead. (p. 136)

Clearly, with the documented, continued presence of racism in society and higher education, Dubois’ (1903/1995) prophetic declaration of the “color line” as the arbiter of social relations for the 20th century carried forward into the 21st century.

Despite a national call to promote diversity (Harris, 1990), researchers saturated the literature with studies related to college student’s racial discomfort (Alford, 2000; Arredondo, 1999; Fisher & Hartmann, 1995; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Gregory, 2000; Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999; Suen, 1983). Racial discomfort experienced by students of color, especially black students, was prevalent despite national initiatives and desires to put diversity issues at the forefront of higher education (AACC, 1993, 1995; Harris, 1990). In particular, Fries-Britt & Turner (2001) found that at a predominantly white institution, successful “black students faced stereotypes that eroded their academic sense of self” (p. 420).

Black students found methods to cope with racism on college campuses.

Fordham (1988) described racelessness as a strategy whereby black students subordinate their racial identity to the majority-race identity. Similarly, Parham (1993) indicated, “the degree of psychological and even behavioral devastation experienced by African Americans will correspond directly to the degree that one includes Eurocentric values into ones life” (p. X). Ancis, Sedlacke, and Mohr (2000) found:

African American students consistently reported significantly more racial-ethnic conflict on campus; pressure to conform to stereotypes; less equitable treatment by faculty, staff and teaching assistants. White students reflected limited perceptions of racial-ethnic tensions and a university climate characterized by respect for diversity. (p. 180)

Finally, studies of black discomfort at predominantly white universities indicated a hesitancy of black students to connect with white students for fear of “being victimized by racial prejudice” (Fisher & Hartmann, 1995, p. 122).

Hallinan and Smith (1985) found that regardless of age, race, or class, any social setting in which there was a majority group, the minority group was likely to experience discomfort. However, the literature’s primary focus on students of color and their discomfort with race relations to the exclusion of the racial discomfort of white students racialized demographic data. This created an illusion that racial discomfort only resided with students of color. In the literature, white student’s racial discomfort typically manifested itself in overt racist acts. For example, Bartlett (2001) reported three separate blackface incidents at fraternity parties in November of

2001 – two at Auburn University and one at the University of Mississippi. D'Augelli (1993) found that 89% of black students at a university setting heard disparaging remarks on campus; nearly 50% heard these comments either often or frequently.

Solorzano (1997) suggested the importance to contextualize racism not as overt mechanisms such as stereotyped acts including drug and criminal involvement, but rather:

it is important to note that these outward or public stereotypes are usually not socially condoned and their use in the public discourse is rare. However, it is in the private discourse that they manifest themselves in more subtle ways. (p. 10)

Solorzano indicated a lack of research probing into these subtle mechanisms.

Similarly, Hoberman (2000) asserted, “As displays of overt racism have become socially unacceptable, indifference to the special stress black people experience has remained the adaptive strategy most whites employ to deal with persisting racial inequities” (p. 50).

The problematizing of race must emphasize people of color and white people. Accordingly, a new strand of literature emerged focusing on white racism and its underpinnings (Fine, Weis, Powell, & Wong, 1997). The intent of this emerging literature was not to detract from the black initiative to address racial inequality in higher education (Fine, 1997) but rather to illuminate the white side of the equation. Feagin and Sikes (1995) wrote:

One frustrating aspect of being black on a predominantly white campus is the chronic inability of many white faculty members and administrators to see black students as individuals rather than as representatives of their racial group, thereby

failing to give them the kind of academic and professional advice they are due as students. (p. 93)

Scheurich (1993) suggested that white's sense of individualism masked racial positionality. Scheurich suggested that the:

inequitable distribution of resources and power by social group, however, is concealed by middle- and upper-income White people's investment in the idea of individualism. In contrast, because of racism's grouping effect and the double consciousness it produces, people of color are not as seduced by the idea of individualism. People of color, through their social positioned experience, know that they are a racialized group rather than simply separate individuals. (p. 7)

White persons tended to exclude ethnicity from their consciousness (Perry, 2001). This exclusion of ethnicity coupled with acknowledgement of white students' sense of superiority over black students developed during the high school years, enters the doors of higher education (Harvey, 1998). When students of color enter an American higher education system, they enter a white race majority world and are confronted with accommodating this white culture (Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999). Carter (1997) wrote, "Whites, through various mechanisms, continue to this day to maintain racial divisions in the society" (pp. 198-199).

The literature called for cultural competence in response to racial and ethnic demographic shifts in America (Bensimon & Soto 1997). As the number of persons of color increases, the need for cultural competence will increase for citizens in the

21st century. Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, and Terenzini (1996) speculated that by 2030:

the white population of the United States will grow by about 25 percent.... The African-American population will increase by 68 percent, the Asian-American, Pacific Island American, and American Indian populations will grow by 79 percent, and the Latino or Hispanic population of the United States will leap by 187 percent.... By the year 2080, the United States of America may well be 24 percent Latino, 15 percent Asian American - more than half of the nation's population.... If the trends projected above represent the country's future demographic reality, then it is likely that future college graduates will be challenged by a society that is increasingly diverse in terms of race, culture, and values. It seems reasonable, therefore, to be concerned with identifying the ways in which American postsecondary institutions engender in students a greater openness to racial, cultural, and value diversity. (p. 174)

As color populations increase in proportion to white populations, white persons will require cultural knowledge about several racial and ethnic groups in order to socially navigate life's daily activities.

The cry for diversity is loud. Wilson (1999) wrote:

I have before me recent higher-education news from The Chronicle of Higher Education. Last week, it informs me, seventy students (equal numbers of whites and blacks) occupied the office of the president of the University of New Hampshire, refusing to leave until certain demands had been met. These demands included "a more than fourfold increase in the number of black

students, the recruitment of eighteen fulltime black faculty members by 2005, and the creation of a mandatory prejudice-reduction workshop for all students, faculty members, and staff members." Within days, UNH had capitulated. The workshops begin next fall. (p. 14)

However, resistance to diversity remained. Whitt (2001) found white undergraduate students vary on resistance to learning diversity issues. In addition, discussions about diversity and racism were comfortable providing they did not require changing the dominant race.

The literature revealed teacher education programs as places where race issues were perpetuated. Futrell (1999) found the number of minority students entering teacher preparation programs is diminishing. To aid in the attraction and retention of minority students, remedies would include recruitment, financial incentives, revised curriculum, and mentoring. Ladson-Billings (2000) suggested a need for more teacher education programs focusing on the needs of future African American teachers. This void perpetuated the use of mainstream or generic pedagogical approaches. Corbett (1995) indicated the need for white teachers to become increasingly aware of values of Native Americans, African Americans, Latinos and Asian Americans. McAllister and Irvine (2000) cited a body of research indicating the need for teachers to be aware of their own world views, deal with their own racism, educate themselves about the cultural backgrounds of their students, and view students through a variety of cultural lenses.

Nieto (2000) emphasized the necessity for making diversity a priority in teacher education programs in order to transform individuals to meet the demands of a

changing society. Durodoye (1999) revealed the ignorance of white students regarding published research by persons of color. Mainstream literature told society that persons such as Tiger Woods, Colin Powell, Oprah Winfrey or Michael Jordan are evidence of an accepting society regarding differences. Durodoye indicates when her counseling education students (mainly white) are asked if they are familiar with the works of Patricia Arredondo, William Cross, Janet Helms, Teresa LaFromboise, Frederick Leong, Thomas Parham, Derald Wing Sue and Clemmont Vontress, all people of color, the silence is stunning.

White student's apparent ignorance about persons of color impacted social relationships along racial lines. Perry (2001) suggested that white people have difficulties articulating the nature of white culture. Foeman (1999) suggested the lack of research emphasis on positive aspects of inter-racial relationships perpetuated a non-positive image of inter-racial relationships.

Issues of diversity have caught the attention of several higher education associations. These included the Association of American Universities, American Society for Higher Education, and the American Education Research Association. Regarding the American Council on Education (ACE), Massey (1999) wrote, "One of ACE's major focuses this year is about challenges - specifically about how higher education must take responsibility for helping society meet the myriad challenges we face as we approach the new millennium" (p. 14).

If higher education is to provide, in part, a remedy for the need for cultural competence, an issue worthy of consideration is to determine if the study of diversity issues in the classroom is beneficial to students (Alger, 1997). If higher education's

mission is to prepare individuals to be productive citizens in our society, then comfort with diversity should be highly prioritized. However, Alger warned against the bias in race-based diversity initiatives.

A common criticism of racebased diversity programs... is that race is used as a mere proxy for a particular perspective or point of view. According to this critique, a university seeking diversity assumes that individuals of particular races will bring with them certain perspectives due to their racial backgrounds. This assumption is patronizing and misguided, of course, because members of every racial group differ in their life experiences. (para. 5)

Alger's synthesis of diversity literature and higher education suggested that "direct student experience with racial diversity corresponds to increased cultural awareness and commitment to promoting racial understanding" (Diversity as Institutional Mission section, para. 5).

Through its curriculum, higher education attempted to prepare its student body to be equipped to understand, accept, and value diversity. The literature was replete with examples of programs and services aimed at increasing diversity-related education. Jay (2000) indicated the bridging of curriculum and community provided pragmatic experiences for students. Bramlett-Solomon and Liebler (1999) suggested the exploration of race-related theories through a journalism course before interviewing the public regarding race-related issues. In a similar vein, Valenzuela (1999) discussed a Diversity News Program in which journalism students wrote on diversity issues in higher education. Arredondo (1999) employed multicultural competencies to guide counselor education programming. McFalls (2001) referenced

a state-mandated course on diversity issues as part of the admissions requirements for the college of education at a large predominantly white public university. White students and students of color have annually attended the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education (N.C.O.R.E.). Whitt (2002) found that these experiences aided students' understanding of race and ethnic differences.

Teaching about racism can be challenging (Singleton, 1994). Locke and Kiselica (1999) indicated the difficulty of teaching about racism is due to the emotional nature associated with this issue. Cochran-Smith (2000) suggested the responsibility of teachers and teacher educators is:

to interrogate the racist assumptions that may be deeply embedded in our own courses and curricula, to our own complicity in maintaining existing systems of privilege and oppression, and to grapple with our own failure to produce the kinds of changes we advocate. (p. 158)

Nonetheless, the benefit of a social justice course was to open dialogue about racism (Henderson, 1999).

Strength of Ties and Perpetuation Theory

Ties are interpersonal links between individuals. Granovetter (1973) explained, “the strength of a tie is a (probably linear) combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie” (p. 1361).

Now considered a “classic” (Feld, 1998, p. 1166), Granovetter’s Strength of Ties theory provided a framework through which to view social relationships and the presence or absence of bridges formed (Friedkin, 1980; Granovetter, 1973, 1985,

1986, 1995; Rogers, 1983; Wells & Crain, 1994). Friedkin contended that Granovetter's theory "rests on the idea that bridges (or local bridges) between cohesive clusters are important channels of information flow and bases of intergroup cohesion," and that "networks often manifest a pattern of ties consisting of tight-knit clusters which are loosely coupled to each other; it is a pattern suggestive of local (intragroup) integration in combination with anomy of the whole" (p. 411).

Originally used by Durkheim as the concept of organic solidarity (Liu & Duff, 1972), "weak ties" were studied in Korte and Milgram's (1970) study on the small world phenomenon. A white person passing a booklet of information through a social network to a black person was more likely to be successfully completed when the white and black persons were similar in occupational status. Impeding the passing of information through this black and white network was the white person's "deficient knowledge of Negro social structure" (Korte & Milgram, 1970, p. 107). Granovetter (1973) in reviewing Korte and Milgram's study, learned that booklets that made it through channels were more likely to occur when the black person was identified as an acquaintance versus a friend. Subsequently, the acquaintance defined the weak tie and the friend defined a strong tie.

Other researchers have linked into strength of ties. Rogers (1983) considered heterophilous relationships as weak ties and homophilous relationships as strong ties. Moreover, Liu and Duff (1972) suggested heterophilous relationships increase the diffusion of information in a social network whereas homophilous relationships reproduce the same information and perpetuate redundancy of information exchange.

Granovetter (1973) related his theory to Newcomb's (1961) theory of cognitive balance such that when persons B and C like person A, that B and C are most likely to be similar in likes and dislikes.

Weak ties can take different forms including children linking families together in neighborhoods (Logan & Spitze, 1994) or high school counselors linking students with colleges and community resources across the country (Wells & Crain, 1994). Faculty can be critical bridges within an institution. Astin (1984) asserted student satisfaction increased with increased contact with faculty members. Nettles and Johnson (1987) found at the university level black men and women and white men and women viewed contact with the faculty as the most salient factor in their satisfaction with the institution.

Despite the large presence of ties related literature, the combination of Strength of Ties theory, the community college, and race relations was lacking in the research literature. An ERIC search produced only one study (Twombly & Moore, 1987) using Granovetter's (1973) theory in a community college context. However, weak ties have been used to understand the relationship between racial groups (Hansell, 1984; Karweit, Hansell, & Ricks, 1979; Korte & Milgram, 1970).

Hansell (1984) studied ties among race groups. Hansell concluded that an intentional intervention of cooperative activities between race groups created new ties. The new weak ties were formed within peer groups and between individuals of the race groups:

Once a new interracial relationship is formed, the new friend's friends become likely candidates for friendship as well. Thus a small number of new interracial

ties may greatly expand the potential pool friends of the opposite race, even possibly reaching beyond a single classroom. (p. 325)

Hansell, however, doubted, due to the density of black and white students already in the classroom, that the weak ties would less likely serve to bridge the racial groups.

Hansell suggested:

The importance of weak ties for improving intergroup relations may be greater in relatively sparse networks in which peer groups have clearly defined boundaries and are mutually isolated. It is reasonable to speculate that cooperative groups might be more effective in creating weak ties that bridge between black and white peer groups in junior and senior high schools, in which greater social distance, as well as physical and temporal distance, separates peer groups. In such a setting, the cooperative intervention might provide the first crucial weak ties between isolated peer groups and make intergroup communication and cooperation possible. (p. 326)

Rogers (1983) articulated the nature and importance of weak ties in establishing that strong ties are more prevalent among close friends. Rogers stated:

One's intimate friends are usually friends of each other's, forming a close-knit clique; such an ingrown system is an extremely poor net in which to catch new information from one's environment. Much more useful as a channel for gaining such information are an individual's more distant acquaintances; they are more likely to possess information that the individual does not already possess, such as about a new job or about an innovation [or about racial information]. Weak ties connect an individual's small clique of intimate friends with another distant

clique; as such, it is the weak ties that provide interconnectedness to a total system. The weak ties are often bridging links connecting two or more cliques. If these weak ties were somehow removed from a system, the result would be an unconnected set of separate cliques. So even though the weak ties are not a frequent path for the flow of communication, the information that does flow through them plays a crucial role for individuals and for the system. (p. 297)

Subbing racial information for innovation in the above quote, demonstrates how racial information can be contained within race groups through strong ties.

Community colleges are large networks with many subgroups, including black and white student groups. In such a large network, weak ties:

permit a level of structural cohesion to be attained in large networks that could not be attained on the basis of strong ties alone. Granovetter suggests that strong ties tend to fall within these groups. Hence, it may be the weak ties that tend to integrate the different groups occurring in a network. (Friedkin, 1980, p. 420)

For Rogers (1983), “the weak-versus-strong-ties dimension is more correctly and precisely called communication proximity defined previously as the degree to which two individuals in a network have personal communication networks that overlap” and “weak ties are low in communication proximity” and “low-proximity weak ties are often heterophilous” (p. 297-298).

Granovetter (1973) suggested that as more weak ties are formed between groups, inter-group cohesion and communication increase. “Weak ties... are seen as indispensable to individual’s opportunities and to their integration into communities” Granovetter, 1973, p. 1378). However, groups who formed strong ties within their

groups and formed few ties with other groups were more likely to feel isolated. Similarly, Coser (1975) indicated that through strong ties “everybody knows fairly well why people behave in a certain way. Little effort has to be made to gauge the intention of the other person” (p. 56). Likewise, Blau (1974) observed “that strong ingroup bonds restrain individual freedom and mobility, and they sustain rigidity and bigotry” (p. 623). Similarly, “strong ties, breeding local cohesion, lead to overall fragmentation” (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1378). Finally, Blau observed “individuals become integrated members of groups through processes of recurrent social interaction and communication” (p.620).

Slavin (1979) indicated that the intentional effort to have students of different racial backgrounds work together is more effective than simply talking about racial conflict. This resembled the notion of superordinate goals that are met through cooperative efforts between two separate homogeneous groups (Brehm & Kassin, 1996). In addition, this notion paralleled the contact-hypothesis that “under certain conditions, direct contact between members of rival groups will reduce stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination” (Brehm & Kassin, 1996, p. 155). Braddock (1980) couched the contact-hypothesis in racial terms, “that exposure to interracial contact under certain specified conditions produces generally positive changes in intergroup attitudes and interaction patterns” (p. 179). Four conditions must be present for contact to render itself effective. The groups must be of equal status, promote personal interactions, engage in cooperative activities, and be supported by social norms (Brehm & Kassin, 1996).

Despite diversity training initiatives, race issues in higher education remain.

Diversity training and awareness could be strengthened if individuals from different race groups established weak ties. Karweit, Hansell, & Ricks (1979) stated:

More weak contacts [ties] in a network increase the bridges between groups, and produce greater cohesion and communication between groups. Highly cohesive peer groups in a network with few weak contacts [ties], and consequently few bridges, are likely to be polarized and mutually isolated. (p. 20)

Moreover, Karweit et al. suggested that strong ties are not necessarily the way to connect students from different racial groups:

The dyadic view implies that peer socialization to different values occurs only through close friendship ties. However, other peer relationships – such as admiration for someone quite different from oneself – may be more important socialization sources than close friendships.... A more realistic and sensitive result, given existing cultural diversity, would be to foster diversity without conflict and isolation. Thus an alternative, perhaps more desirable peer structure would be one in which diverse cultures can exchange information and support without necessarily becoming more similar. (p. 19)

Granovetter (1986) echoed this, adding “a related difficulty with the use of strong cross-race ties as a success criterion is that blacks who become close friends with whites may do so at the expense of their ties to other blacks” (p. 87). As an alternative, Granovetter stated, “stable acquaintanceship ties between blacks and whites may be less likely to generate this outcome and thus be more valuable as actual intergroup links” (p. 87). In addition, Granovetter (1983) stated, “the strategy

of encouraging bridging weak ties... could have the effect not only of linking culturally different groups but of reducing student alienation and increasing social solidarity” (p. 220). Friedkin (1980) advised it is “weak ties that tend to integrate the different groups occurring in a network” (p. 420).

In the context of cross-cultural research, weak ties between non-white and white researchers was implicitly referenced when Mio and Iwamasa (1993) said, that “within the context of present-day intellectual pursuit, ethnic-minority researchers need allies among majority-culture researchers to convince the profession as a whole of the value of the area” (p. 208). Similarly, this was seen in a 1995 survey of 800 academics (720 were black) regarding issues affecting blacks in higher education (Cross, 1996). In that survey, the question “do you think American book and journal publishers treat black-authored manuscripts with an unbiased style?” met with an 86.8% “NO” response (p. 77).

Clearly, the literature base on ties justified the use of Granovetter’s (1973) Strength of Ties theory as a framework to examine the social relationships within and between racial groups (Korte & Milgram, 1970; Rogers, 1983; Wells & Crain, 1994). In addition, Perpetuation Theory (Braddock, 1980) and its literature base justified Perpetuation Theory’s use to investigate the problem in this study. This theory suggested that “segregation tends to be perpetuated across stages of the life cycle and across institutions when individuals have not had sustained experiences in desegregated settings earlier in life” (McPartland & Braddock, 1981, p. 149). Moreover, black students who enter a dominant white higher education culture having been exposed to integrated settings in primary and secondary education will better

assimilate, accommodate, and negotiate the experience (Braddock, 1980). This made sense in light of “it has been shown that those from earlier segregated school settings are more likely at later stages in their lives to be in segregated colleges and segregated work groups” (McPartland, & Braddock, 1981, p. 149). Alternatively, desegregation efforts helped African Americans obtain greater inclusion in society (Dawkins & Braddock, 1994). Implicit in this reasoning is Perpetuation Theory’s application to any racial group. This was consistent with Granovetter’s (1983) revisited notion of ties:

There is no special reason why such an argument [strength of ties theory] should apply only to lower socioeconomic groups; it should be equally persuasive for any set of people whose outlook is unusually provincial as the result of homogeneous contacts. (p. 205)

Wells and Crain (1994) expanded Braddock’s (1980) theory by coupling Perpetuation Theory with Granovetter’s (1973) Strength of Ties. Wells and Crain added, “African Americans... lack access to informal networks that provide information about, and entrance to, desegregated institutions and employment” (p. 533). Inherent in this argument is the preparedness for black persons to negotiate desegregated social contexts and the affront presented by a dominant racial group.

Tinto (1987) claimed that academic preparedness was the culprit for black students not succeeding in college when compared to white students. However, social factors, are critical to understanding why black students are not as academically prepared as their white peers. Granovetter (1986) in studying desegregation research, asserted, “academic achievement and later socioeconomic

success, school social structure plays an important mediating role” (p. 82). For example, Yonezwa, Wells, & Serna, (2002), found the social mechanisms undergirding academic underpreparedness included tracking and ability grouping. In common education this rendered segregated classrooms that placed African American and Latino children in classes not as academically rigorous as Caucasian and Asian students. This rendered African American and Latino children underprepared to tackle the rigors of higher education. Furthermore, among 10 schools that ridded themselves of tracking and ability grouping, students in lower tracks “when left to their own devices, they chose familiar spaces with familiar faces, resegregating themselves along the same lines and labels” (Yonezwa, Wells, & Serna, 2002, p. 51).

In this study:

students with leveled aspirations rarely chose higher courses because educators and their peers had told them for many years where they did and did not belong within the hierarchical spaces of their schools. Over time, the students’ recognition that they occupy a low-status place becomes central to their habitus. (p. 52)

Similarly, high-track students:

and their parents operated from powerful places in the local hierarchy to reinforce existing educational inequities and garner the best teachers and courses. Their actions ensured that the choice-based policies that some educators had hope would assist low-track students in moving up the tracking hierarchy instead protected high-track students’ elite classes. (p. 53)

Even in elite preparatory boarding schools, “the prep school ‘rite of passage’ for African American students can be an arduous journey with a number of potential pitfalls, contradictory road signs, and possible wrong directions” (Cookson & Persell, 1991, p. 220).

Granovetter (1986) indicated little research on the social networks of children *outside* of the school context. Feld (1998) observed, however, that children are more likely to have increased inter-racial interaction at schools and that “potential for interracial contact within schools is likely to be a main determinant of the overall interracial connectivity of the system” (p. 1167). Striking a balance between these two positions, Granovetter argued:

though it may account for a quantitatively small part of the day, time spent out of classrooms in school is opportunity for spontaneous, unsupervised social interaction among children and may thus be more important for shaping social relations than what happens in the classroom. (p. 83)

Braddock and McPartland (1988) suggested that desegregation initiatives are most effective if started in primary grades and that for blacks, school desegregation is positively related to employment desegregation. Linking, desegregation research, upward mobility, and weak ties, Granovetter (1986) stated:

School desegregation studies frequently show that cross-racial ties formed are not very strong. But even such weak ties may significantly affect later economic success. Because employers at all levels of work prefer to recruit by word-of-mouth, typically using recommendations of current employees, segregation of

friendship and acquaintance means that workplaces that start out all white will remain so. (p.102-103)

In a broader context, Braddock (1978) observed that the dominant white higher education system perpetuated the subordination of black institutions due to their dependence on white institutions thus perpetuating racial and economic inequity.

Similarly, Portes, and Wilson (1976) indicated:

Blacks are able to move upward in the system primarily through individual self-reliance and ambition; White, while being able to use this same channel for mobility, have at their disposal an additional set of institutional “machinery” which can, in effect, carry them along to higher levels of attainment, net of positive subjective orientations. (p. 430)

Brint & Karabel (1986) suggested, “For many Americans, hopes of a ‘better life’ crumble in the face of obstacles; consigned to low-status jobs, they nonetheless find fulfillment in the private sphere of family and friends” (p. 7). Braddock & McPartland (1989) found that “Black young adults who attended majority Black high schools are less likely to have White work associates than are their counterparts from majority White high schools, although the latter are somewhat less likely to hold white-collar jobs” (p. 274).

Regarding weak ties, Wells and Crain (1994), argued:

people on the bottom of the social structure, including African-American students from low-income families, have more to gain than white and wealthy students from the use of weak ties because these ties will invariable link them to

more affluent and better connected people, whereas strong ties usually connect them to family and close friends, who are also poor. (p. 534)

Similarly, Lin (1990) suggested “the advantage of using weaker ties over the use of stronger ties decreases as the position of origin approaches the top of the hierarchy” (p. 251). Shrum and Cheek (1987) found group membership in primary grades increased through grade six and then declined but the number of liaisons continued to increase. This line of research indicated how white persons were racially empowered through a dominant white hierarchy.

In the literature, Perpetuation Theory typically associated itself with minority groups. This study expanded perpetuation theory to encompass white students. Predominantly white schools served as feeder schools for the campus in this study. Predominantly white schools promoted and perpetuated a color-blind ideology that perpetuated racial inequities (Lewis, 2001; Lewis, Chesler, & Forman, 2000). “Understanding how White students develop their racial subjectives and understandings is crucial to understanding future possibilities for greater racial equity in the United States” (Lewis, 2001, p. 782). Accordingly, Bensimon & Soto (1997) suggested, “it is imperative... that a white student understand the reasons why color-blindness does not signify the absence of discrimination to a black student” (p. 44).

Racial Comfort, Strength of Ties, and Perpetuation Theory

Society, in general, is uncomfortable with race (Henderson, 1999). Dialogue about race occurred on college campuses in social justice courses or teacher preparation courses but the dialogue was uncomfortable for both white and black

faculty and students (Cross, 1993; Harvey, 1998). Faculty (i.e. teachers, instructors, professors) are the primary point persons who communicate race-related information, either overtly or tacitly, to America's students. There is resistance to race-related information that manifests itself even in courses designed to instruct future teachers about race (Cross, 1993).

Blending Strength of Ties and Perpetuation Theory, it appeared racial comfort and discomfort emanated from an embedded social network. White people are not well networked with black people and subsequently feel uncomfortable due to unfamiliarity and lack of contact with black persons (Korte & Milgram, 1970).

Harvey (1998) acknowledged:

most African Americans and whites have relatively little contact with one another. Colleges and universities should seize the opportunity to engage their students, the best and the brightest of both races, in the kind of constructive conversation that might improve the future of racial interactions. (p. 22)

Black persons live in white and black worlds (Parham, 1993; Weis, 1985). This bifurcated experience comes into higher education and confronts the institution. Even in the academy, tenured African American women negotiated their careers through bicultural competence (Alfred, 2001).

As it relates to racial comfort and discomfort, higher education is precariously positioned to be a change agent or a perpetuator of the status quo. The choice is deconstructing racial discomfort and reconstructing positive race relations through increased understanding and awareness of others who differ racially or a perpetuating of the racial tension that enters its doors. If education is critical to a democracy,

higher education needs to evaluate its roll in perpetuating race-related inequities. Racial discomfort, if perpetuated at the community college level, has the potential to carry this discomfort right back into society. That which seeks to make all persons equal may just sustain the opposite.

Ancis et al. (2000) indicated constructing racial comfort in the new millenium in higher education will be challenging. McGhee (1983) indicated racial discrimination in American society continued to be the factor that perpetuated strong ties within the black community.

The literature indicated that racial integration at the university campus was a requisite for improved inter-personal relations through assimilation into the campus culture. However, as seen in the above literature review, desegregation and integration initiatives do not always achieve their intended purpose in relationship to increasing comfort levels of students of color on predominantly white university and college campuses.

Weak ties could bridge ethnic and racial groups maintaining the ethnic integrity of all. To close this literature review, McGhee (1983) summarized the heart of the issue:

Racism is the great leveller [sic]. For no matter how wealthy blacks become or how much they contribute to their community or how strong their character, the reality is that they are still black and perceived by many as inferior, and no amount of individual education or income can overcome that fact.... If and when race and racial discrimination are no longer perceived by blacks to be a major problems, then we may begin to see genuine and deep divisions within the black

community similar to those within other ethnic and racial groups. Until then, however, race will continue to be the tie that binds. (pp. 33-34)

This quote simultaneously demonstrated the power of strong *and* weak ties.

However, as seen in this quotation, strong ties perpetuate the solidarity that is in response to racial discrimination, whereas, as seen in the literature review above, weak ties help bridge racial groups together such that resource obtainment might be enhanced, equality might be obtained, and ethnicity embraced.

Race-related conversation and race-related research must focus on higher education in perpetuating racism in America and attempt to reconcile racial differences through increased awareness of the role race plays on college campuses. Harvey (1998) recognized that “unless racism is scrutinized in an analytical fashion in the relatively safe environments of colleges and universities, its unlikely that the problem can be confronted successfully in other settings” (p. 22).

Summary

This literature review contextualized the need to analyze the ties formed among black and white students at a community college campus. Race and higher education were explored. Racial comfort and discomfort literature in higher education was addressed. Strength of Ties and Perpetuation Theory literature was discussed. To conclude the literature review, I synthesized these two theories and racial comfort and discomfort research.

CHAPTER III

DATA PRESENTATION

The voice of the students in this study spoke quite clearly. I attempted to capture the “word on the street” about this community college campus regarding racial comfort issues among and between black and white students. Therefore, in the vein of a postpositivistic approach, the data captured the essence of the existence of multiple views of reality.

The classroom was the focal point of the majority of interaction for students. Juxtaposed against this claim was that the participants overwhelmingly identified “you come to leave” as the campus student culture. The ensuing inter-personal relationships at the campus nestled among these two factors provided the substance for this chapter. In addition to an initial overview of the college, student, community, and participant demographics, the data reveal five themes: prior connections, connections on campus, connecting locations, curbed connections, and comfort. Although these themes are not mutually exclusive, they are deserving of individual presentation and attention. The data came from semi-structured interviews, focus groups, participant observation, non-participant observation, and review of select institutional documents.

Overview of the College

Southwest Community College is a multi-campus, non-residential community college. Its four campuses (Spruce, Norwood, Maple and Willow) are geographically located to provide access for students from the entire community. A downtown metropolitan area and areas in the north, south and west regions of the community provided the general locations for the campuses. The northern portion of the community had a more concentrated presence of blacks and the southern portion of the community had a more concentrated presence of whites. Over the past 20 years, African American households have shifted toward the southern parts of the community. However, there has been no rise in the number of whites in the northern portion of the community.

On average, the distance between campuses was 15 miles. During the spring semester, 2002, 75.76% of the students attended only one campus and 24.24% attended more than one campus. Students touted proximity to one's home as the most common reason for attending a particular campus. Students told me they would have remained at the campus closest to their home had the courses they needed been offered there.

All campuses offered general education curriculum with unique technical and occupational programs at each site. Campus learning support services included computer, math, and writing labs, admissions and registration, advisement, career planning, financial aid, and student activities programming. The institution offered an open admissions policy with specific curricular related requirements for English,

math, reading and science courses. Some technical occupational programs had additional entry requirements such as grade point average.

Participant Demographics

The focus of the study was the southern most of the four campuses – the Spruce campus. Given community demographics, it comes as no surprise then that in the spring 2002 semester, the Spruce campus had a 5% presence of black students with a total enrollment of 6,928. Thirty-six individuals were interviewed in this study. This included 17 black students and 19 white students. Twenty students were in the traditional student age group with ages ranging from 18 to 21 years. Sixteen students were in the non-traditional student age group with ages ranging from 22 to 46 years. There were 25 female and 11 male participants. The majority of students were full time, with seven students being part-time. Of the 36 students, 28 were transfer majors, four were technical and occupational majors, and four were undecided. One half of the participants were enrolled only in daytime classes and one half were enrolled in both day and evening classes. One third of the participants indicated some involvement with a student organization or campus activity. Approximately half of the students have lived outside of the local area. The average number of years lived in the community is 16. I believe these participants offer a representation of the students at the Spruce campus.

Prior Connections

Prior relationships formed at local area high schools provided a pivotal point for social networks on the campus. Both black and white students reported relationships

formed in high school carried forward to the college campus and stayed in tact at the campus. Students reported who you tend to “hang around” with at college paralleled the racial identity of those persons with whom you grew up.

Most students concurred that a strong presence of cliques existed at the campus.

As to why, a black student reported:

Before they get here they went to high school together...come to school in groups...they don't want to come to school all by themselves. They say, “okay—we are going to go to Southwest Community College and try to get into the same classes.”

Another black student observed:

I notice in class that a lot of kids know each other. So if you see groups like that [i.e. black or white] a lot of times they might have known each other, come from the same city (i.e. high school) or something like that and they'll sit together and that's like the 4 girls in my math class – they all graduated together from high school so they all sit in the same group.

A white student added, “I think most of it is with friends. They get to know someone and really click with that group. I see little cliques that go off everywhere, so nothing's really changed with that.” Another white student said:

I see a lot of cliques around. Maybe they are coming from [a local suburb] out here. I'm used to cliques but I am one who reaches out to other people. I don't like to stay in one group. I do see other people who like to open up to a lot of people at this campus but a lot of people have grown up with this people or

they've met 'em and they stick with those groups...and it depends on what they believe in or what they do. I think they stick together.

Another white student claimed, "everybody knows each other or knows each other cause they either went to high school together. Most of my relationships have been formed previously from high school." Extending this thought, another white student observed, "Well, people who have gone to high school together – they come here and their relationships go further." A black student observed, "it's a lot different than high school cause everyone was just talking and friendly with each other. It seems like here that everyone stays to themselves and do what they need to do and leave." Another black student said, "I don't meet too many friends on this campus except for those I might have already known. Met some but it's not like we hang out after school."

These cliques curbed opportunities for forming new relationships on campus. Participants, regardless of race or age, acknowledged the presence of cliques and how these carried over from local high schools and how these groups impacted the campus.

Connections on Campus

Students reported the presence of peer groups from their high schools that sustained the perception that the campus was an extension of the high school. For one student, the hallways brought back memories of the hallways at her high school. For students who grew up near the Spruce campus and attended nearby high schools, the campus experience was not new "because a lot of people I graduated with go to this campus," said a black student.

A white student mentioned that all of the people he “hangs around” with are white people and “all my friends and acquaintances have been pretty much white people, but once again the numbers are so offset that it’s kinda’ hard to meet anybody else.”

A white student commented, “the campus seems more like homogeneous – like a lot of people come from the same kind of background, the same area.” A black student said, “that’s what you see walking around - specifically those sets. African Americans are with the African Americans, whites are with the whites.” A white student added, “I can’t really tell you a time when I see a black and a white person walking down the hall just joking around and everything.”

Regarding interaction between black and white students, a black student said, “When I see it, it’s probably in class... sittin’ next to ‘em....but once the class is over, they’ll go their way and the other group the other way.” When asked for additional explanation, the student added:

They probably just met ‘em through the class... so that’s probably where they are comfortable at... you know, in the classroom. And when they leave class, somebody’s probably already waitin’ on ‘em that they’ve know for awhile so they go hang out with them cause it’s more comfortable hanging out with them rather than with someone they just met.

Regarding activities designed to bring black and white students together, a black student said:

good question... (long pause)... “that purposively makes the point of bringing them together [student clarified the question]?” Nothing, nothing that I know of.

For instance, this is Black history month. But I can guarantee you almost every black history program each campus will have there will be only be blacks there..... and so I really can't think of any.

A white student commented:

I tend to think that no matter what we try to do to encourage inter-mixing, that you're always going to see a little bit of that just because of that comfort zone, hey you're like me, I'm like you, you got something in common already.

A black student suggested "crossing the line [i.e. the color line]," inhibited the formation of relationships across racial lines. This held true with white students.

White students reported a desire to maintain primary contact with members of their own racial group, when they had time to interact with others. White cliques clearly curbed relationships from forming across racial lines. When asked about the racial identify of friends on campus, a white student indicated that 6 of her 7 friends on campus were white and one was black. The following dialogue then occurred:

Student: You sit around people in class that is the majority I have around me except that one black girl I sit by in class everyday.

Researcher: do you interact outside of class with that person?

Student: no.... not really... it's just mainly just school. I mean if I saw her outside of school, definitely I'd say hi, other than that, no.

Researcher: so just meet in class and when class is over.... (pause)

Student: we kinda' go our separate ways....

A black student made this same observation:

the campus is a little bit more a... (pause)... separate. You can tell by the way things are set up that each race or class of people really do stick to themselves and that there's not a lot of intermingling except for within organization activities which is brought together.

Clearly, a whole group of students, both black and white, explained student interactions on an individual's choice to interact or not interact with others. A white student said:

it depends on the individual. If they say, "you know what, nobody's talked to me today"....why is that... but if people open up to them...say, "how ya' doing," just go off and talking to people....they're like, "I like that you know a lot of people talk to me," I feel good about myself....and they won't want to go hide because no one will talk to them.

Similarly, a black student reported:

I see a few black people that interact with white people also. Sometimes I see them to themselves you know. I guess it just depends on the person. I guess it's all according to what you prefer to hang around with or what you're used to.... cause I see you know them hanging with each other and I see them interacting... so... I see both.

A white student added, "I think it is more individual than a big group thing. I think it's just what that person thinks." "If you want to meet someone you go sit by them, if you don't you don't sit there... it all depends on if you want to meet people," said another white, traditional-aged student. And another white student said that:

if there are blacks that can interact with whites and can feel comfortable, then they're comfort level will be really high. I think it just depends on their personality and how their past has been and what they've experienced with whites.

Both white and black students reported that *both* white and black students were either predominantly segregated *or* blended by choice. Age appeared to be a delineating factor that explained this paradox. Black and white traditional-aged students provided a micro level explanation for interpersonal interaction between black and white students rendering the individual as the arbiter of comfort on campus. Although these students perceived the individual as the mitigating factor for students navigating social contexts on campus, they were aware that non-traditional aged students were raised in a different social context. A traditional-aged white student observed:

I think my generation is more open minded. The older generation were raised to go separate ways. We [young people] didn't grow up in that time period so we weren't really there to experience what was going on between the races.

Grandparents, they talked about it. I've grown up giving my own opinion and thinking the way I want to think and just having my own personality and not living as somebody else - chose what I believe in.

Non-traditional aged students offered a macro level of explanation for a racial disconnect on campus. They were more aware of a group phenomenon and how race appeared to manifest itself in social contexts. A non-traditional aged black student shared:

if you've always been taught that separate is equal, you don't want to immerse yourself in a society that has been typically Caucasian. So it is a very severe and diverse thing because as African Americans and as Caucasians we were never taught to be individuals, we've always been taught to be a unit.

Non-traditional aged students expressed more awareness of race relations and provided a greater historical context to the issues. Older non-traditional aged black students recalled experiences with racial discrimination in their high school years and how they assimilated this into their college experience. A non-traditional aged black student recalled:

I don't like people sittin' behind me. I sit in the back where I can see everybody. I do that in most every class. It's been my habit since high school. It's just more comfortable. I try not to pay much attention to what's going on, what people are doing – I can't explain that, it's just more comfortable. I feel like if someone has a negative attitude towards me, I don't have to worry about they're writing behind me – if you sit behind them, then they don't see you. It's a habit since middle school. Because stuff that goes on between kids – so I got in the habit.

Similarly, a non-traditional aged white student reported:

I started in '72 [Maple Campus] and took my first college class and when I started whites literally walked down the middle of the hall and the blacks walked on the side of the hall. Not figuratively, I mean literally. If I came up to a door and a black man was getting ready to go in the door he would either pull the door open and wait for me to go in or would stand back and wait for me to go in.... would not walk in front of me, would not happen.... and probably a good thing

because 30 years ago I wasn't near as opened minded and I'll admit that. It's a lot better now than it was. But I'll be the first one to admit that there's still problems.

Still, 30 years later at the Spruce campus, the disconnect existed as evidenced by a bi-racial couple's [black male, white female] experience of the campus' acceptance of their bi-racial relationship. The husband, representing the couple, recognized:

age group wise it's really noticeable at Spruce. The first class I have taken with my wife... she is white... we'll hold hands, whatever... and everybody knows we are married because he [the teacher] made a big deal about it the first day in class. We've got some older people in there...and this has been typical of my whole life....that the older people will look at you and you can see that they just really are distasteful with it and they would really rather not see you together with her – with the opposite race. I think generations now are not that bad ... it's like whatever you know. But they still say stupid comments. I guess it's a certain group of people.

In summary, the data revealed white cliques came from predominantly white high schools near the campus. Student connections on campus were divided along racial lines. Explanations for the disconnect varied by age. To explain this, traditional aged students offered an individualistic explanation and non-traditional aged students offered a group perspective to account for the racial divide.

Connecting Locations

Several locations on campus provided places for students to be together. These included: the classroom, learning labs and community seating areas, student organizations, and mutual goals and curriculum. Each of these locations is described below.

The Classroom

The classroom emerged as the place that fostered a sense of community for students at this non-residential, community college campus. “The classroom is the main thing that brings blacks and whites together,” a white student said. Regarding relationship formation, another white student said, “I think most of it would be in the classroom because especially somebody who you sit next to, or in front of you, or aside of you, that’s where you form the relationship.”

A white student illustrated the importance of the classroom for connecting people in the following:

Learning to respect other people’s opinion about something and the interaction is that you learn that and you see something a different than you normally wouldn’t see it... you don’t have a little sheltered mind...and you don’t have your opinion as just what you believe and whenever someone expresses their opinion... yea, you might get a little upset ... but if you hear what they have to say you can discuss it with them... that’s what I mean by interaction... you can discuss what you think, and what they think, and how like you can compromise or whatever.

Another white student added:

I think it depends on the classroom environment, if your teachers want you to interact with other students and try to do more group work. A lot of teachers make the students' stand up and introduce themselves, and then if you see someone outside of the classroom I have a tendency of talking to that student that I have in class and we just talk or if they ask me about that assignment that they did, or if they were not here, and they see someone they know that's in their class, they will ask [the student] what's going on.

And another white student said:

whenever teachers do group things because a lot of times when you're in a classroom setting just like in a lunch room, you would sit with those with your status, or class or whatever, then when the teacher does group activities, then she mixes everyone up, and she forces you to talk to people on the other side of the classroom, that's helpful. Just whenever you do something outside the classroom, if you were to go to the computer lab, cafeteria, or library, or something, if you happen to be at a computer that's next to someone else of a different race you ask questions about computers. There's been situations like that.

Waiting for the classroom door to be unlocked by the instructor allowed time in the hallway for students to visit briefly and become better acquainted. Time before class, either taken in the hallway or right before the class had begun, was reported as a prime opportunity to connect and become better acquainted with other students. In these situations, conversation was focused more on learning related issues such as homework and test preparation. Conversations with other students outside of the

classroom predominantly occurred near the classroom door or adjacent to vending machines.

Participants consistently reported being pleased with the quality of instruction at the institution. A white student articulated, “Teachers are willing to help, it’s better interaction, it’s a smaller classroom. I like group discussions. You learn to respect other’s opinions.” Participants reported more positive experiences in those courses where the faculty member engaged students in discussion. Courses such as sociology, psychology, history, and economics afforded students the opportunity to express themselves which lead to greater familiarity with others in the classroom.

Accordingly, a white student referenced a faculty member who:

is good at finding something that people agree on....or even something that people disagree on.... they [peers] talk about it after class or whatever, they meet each other. Finding common ground is a big step in that and a lot of times you know the teacher can be the bridge between the people that wouldn’t otherwise talk, just by bringing up discussion. Now I like one of the teachers I was talking about when he takes roll he asks “tell me today instead of saying ‘here’ say your favorite place to eat in town, or what you like to do after school or what you do on the weekends” or whatever and then you find people who have a lot in common interests and common ground or uncommon ground.

Participants consistently indicated faculty members were instrumental in bridging students together more so than any other employee group at the college. Students reported spending more time in the classroom while on campus than any other area of the college. In comparing the university classroom environment to the community

college, a white student reported, “the teacher/student ratio is a lot bigger [at a university]... if I have any questions I felt comfortable asking my teacher here.”

Students who previously attended a regional or comprehensive university touted the increased interaction with the instructors at this community college.

Learning Labs and Community Seating Areas

Learning support centers such as the library and computer labs served as common gathering places where students could be around other students on campus. However, participants reported student cliques or groups predominated these areas. They did not serve to reduce the separation of social relationships formed on campus. A white student said, “I don’t think Southwest Community College’s comfort level is that high with black students because you would see more interaction in the library.”

Several community seating areas existed at the campus. These areas included comfortable furniture to accommodate four to eight students. Students used these seating areas primarily during peak class schedule times which were mornings and early evenings. Students indicated they used these seating areas for class preparation time spent either in small groups or individually. The campus’ physical layout was geographically spread out and it segregated student support service areas from classrooms.

Connecting two classroom buildings was an area called the “loft.” It had furniture and tables to accommodate approximately 40 persons. A white student said, “At the campus they have these little nooks that students can go and sit and I really like the loft. There are a lot of students there and they seem to enjoy it. I like it up

there.” Another white student said, “The only place I know inside that you can sit down... the most frequent area is the loft... every time I go up there, there are people sittin’ there.” Regarding race, a white student said:

I rarely see the race issue.... blacks/whites... I see a lot of them just work here quiet together. If a black person, this sounds kinda bad, if they’re sitting by themselves, they’re just sitting by themselves but I sit by myself a lot...so... I see a lot.... You have the younger kids - a lot of them sit together.

Regarding race, a black student said, “there’s not a lot of ‘em (blacks) in one spot. Maybe a couple will be in the loft and a few in the computer room working on the computer.”

For many students the loft was the place to study and meet friends which were typically from local area high schools. Regarding student groupings in the “loft,” a black student observed, “I guess just hang out with whoever they knew in high school or before. But I don’t see people just walking around talking to each other.” A white student commented, “I’ve noticed a lot of people if they come from the same high school tend to stick with each other.”

The student activities center was used but was not touted as a place where students hang out. If students were in these areas they tended to be there for planned and organized student activities. In a few instances students referenced recreation opportunities in the student activities area such as ping-pong, pool, video games and watching the big screen television. The student activities center housed a big screen television with an adjacent seating area for about 10 students. It was common to see two or three students sitting watching television. The interaction of students in this

area was minimal. Generally, in all of the community seating areas, students reported seeing other students keeping to themselves, and focused on their preparations for class.

Student Organizations

Students involved in student organizations took the time to attend group meetings. The students who participated in student organizations reported a greater sense of connection with other students and a greater sense of community. However, they reported limited participation by the majority of students in college-sponsored events and activities. Students who attended student organization sponsored activities were primarily those who planned the event. Nonetheless, these students reported feeling much more a part of the institution and student body.

This was similar to those students who spent the majority of their day on campus. These students were either members of student organizations or had a course schedule that was spread out over the day. These students reported more contacts with fellow students and claimed a sense of inclusion at the campus. A white student voiced, "I'll be here all day and interact with different people. I do study a lot of the time. The difference is interaction. I see different people throughout the day. I sit in different places every week." Another white student who spent a lot of time on campus claimed, "I like this campus just a lot, it's been really friendly here. I've liked all my professors. It's been a really friendly environment. I like it here - I don't want to leave."

The African American Student Association (A.A.S.A.) was one student organization unique to the campus. It was the only predominantly black group setting that could be observed on campus. The A.A.S.A. group offered black students the only formal opportunity to gather on campus. This student organization was formed 1993 to increase the comfort level for African Americans at the Spruce campus. In my several visits to A.A.S.A. meetings, students appeared to enjoy themselves. A.A.S.A. afforded African Americans an opportunity for support. The organization had two black advisors. In the context of a 5% black student population coupled with an equally low percentage of black faculty and student support staff, black students reported a need to be around students with similar skin color or as one black student said, “who look like yourself.” This student organization provided an opportunity for interaction on campus with persons of the same race.

The A.A.S.A., albeit a support to African American Students, also served to segregate black and white students on campus. The A.A.S.A. bylaws allowed all students to participate in the organization. However, no white student I interviewed had ever attended a meeting but they were aware of its existence. While white students touted the perceived benefits for black students in attending A.A.S.A. meetings, they never articulated, or even suggested, the benefit to attend themselves.

Black students found comfort with the A.A.S.A., but white students held a different perspective as captured in the following:

I think it's awesome. I think all their life, at one point or another, they've either been shunned or an outcast because of their race and yes it is good for them to form an alliance. If they do allow whites in there I think it would be a good idea

because they could get someone else's opinion who wasn't black and who hasn't been in that situation. But I think it is awesome for them because they can feel like they can have a sense of security because they are around people they know, 'cause they might feel intimidated around whites for some reason, some might. And I think it's just an awesome thing for them to do. I don't have a problem with it.

Regarding black students and the A.A.S.A., a white student commented:

I think they are trying to establish organizations so they will feel more comfortable here. Their comfort zone isn't people who are the same race as them. That's probably why you do see blacks sitting together or that association or organization coming up. If I were an African American it would depend on my mindset how comfortable I felt around whites. I think if I was a minority somewhere I probably wouldn't be as comfortable because I would feel intimidated. They probably are comfortable here because it's probably not as a huge school, but would feel more comfortable if there were more people like them here because they can associate with them more....if there are blacks that can interact with whites and can feel comfortable, then they're comfort level will be really high. I think it just depends on their personality and how their past has been and what they've experienced with whites.

When asked if A.A.S.A. could be divisive on campus, a white student commented:

I don't see it as a divisive thing. More like to get a little more support to the African American person; just because with our background, it's not always the best; pretty much to help them out, I guess to help them locate other people; and I

guess it would be a way to help them stay in touch with their culture, and I guess for support.

Alternatively, a white student who heard of the organization but had never attended or knew anyone who had, commented:

if they're having that group then how can we ever come together. If they are just going to sit around and say this is all the crap that happened to us. But if you talk about how this group can influence society now in a better way.

Similarly, another white student expressed:

I did see that African American Associate Club. It struck me as a self-segregating thing because of my previous experience. Never going to get along, or see people as they are if you keep on making that distinction. Yes, you are Black, you are White, Asian, India. If you keep telling people what they are, they are going to go to similar people.

Alternatively, a black student added:

I don't see it as a divisive thing. More like to get a little more support to the African American person. Just because with our background, it's not always the best – pretty much to help them out. I guess to help them locate other people. I guess it would be a way to help them stay in touch with their culture, and I guess for support.

In an attempt to bring white and black students together, efforts by three black students backfired when they attempted to recruit students, both white and black, to come visit an A.A.S.A. meeting. These black students reported:

It's like a race to see who can get the most recruits right.... to get to come to the [A.A.S.A.] meeting. My friends and I see this one guy [white] and I said "excuse me sir", the guy keeps walking... "sir, excuse me sir, brother, friend, sir" the guy never looks back, not even late for class, he's just walking, he's carrying his Pepsi all tight, and he's steppin. Out he's walkin' a lot faster now and I'm like... started laughin'... the guy just tenses up and takes off.... I mean almost into a run... I mean because you [the white person] won't say nothing... I don't understand.... Were you scared, I just don't get it. I feel safe here. If you approach me, I would, a white person approach me, okay what do you want... at least "what do you want"... you could be ignorant and say "look, I'm late for class, I honor what your talking about but look I need to go to class, I'm here to go to school" – I'd respect that... you know... you wouldn't even look his way, you wouldn't say anything, totally just... wasn't even that... did not acknowledge him at all.

Mutual Goals and Curriculum

Students reported connecting with other students a few days prior to the start of classes in order to solve a problem. These connections crossed racial lines. Black and white students reported that a mutual focus or a common problem helped bring them closer together. A black student shared:

when I first got here, I was runnin' around trying to get my I.D. and stuff like that... and I ran into this young white guy, he had to be like 18 years old, he was just fumbling around, going through the same thing I was going through, just

fumbling around school trying to figure out what we had to do and .. uh.. we were trying to figure out where the bookstore was... I asked a this lady where the bookstore was and he over heard the conversation and we walked together and we were kickin' it, like we had known each other forever,... like where do you gotta' to go next, what you got, what you got, we kinda' worked through it together and I had fun with him. But he wasn't from here either – he was from Texas or something like that... I don't know ... people from here just don't ... no one reaches out for you.... It's like if you're not from here there's no reason for me to talk to you.

Difficult classes brought students together along racial lines. Regarding where on campus students are likely to form new relationships, a white student said, “Probably just in the classroom. Because it's easier to talk to people when you're facing the same thing, like homework.” Collaborative learning activities such as group projects increased comfort and interaction within in classroom. Classes such as sociology lent well towards this type of format whereas others such as math did not. This held true for students in science courses who tended to take science courses together. A white student reported:

I have a lot of science classes, you usually have the same people in those classes, it's kinda like a common bond. Classroom does bring group together and you can just find different people. Any classroom, you could walk into the classroom and not know anyone but by the end of the semester. You need to communicate with different people in the class.

Students in technical occupational programs (e.g. nursing) appeared to have camaraderie with fellow students. Students attributed this to the sequential fashion of the curriculum. Students took a similar sequence of classes in order to obtain a degree. A black student mentioned:

we find out we was all in the nursing program and we take different nursing classes together and we have a study group that is made up of a young and middle age women and they are of black and white race – African American and Caucasian race.

Students working together on course related projects believed that it brought them together and allowed them to learn about each other.

Curbed Connections

Mutual goals on campus and in the curriculum clearly brought students together on the campus. However, the interviews revealed student interaction was complex and contextually defined by many variables. These variables do not account for all realities behind the social interaction of students on campus, but they provided sufficient understanding of social relationships and the barriers they produced at the campus. Each is explained below. In this section, Spruce and Norwood are referenced in order to present the data.

“You Come to Leave”

“You come to leave” most commonly described this campus. Students consistently reported that they showed up for class, attended class, and then left the campus. Student’s reported many factors that led to the creation of this “culture.”

The absence of dormitories fed the “you come to leave” culture. Students frequently referenced the absence of dormitories as a critical missing element of the college experience.

Students also reported having multiple responsibilities outside of the educational experience. Work was the most common responsibility students reported that kept them from staying on campus after class had been dismissed. Students typically “hung around” for a few minutes after class but then “had to go to work.” In addition, issues such as sharing a car, arranging for child care, working and going to school full time, and traveling to other campuses to accommodate course needs, were reported as major issues impacting student’s lives at this institution.

Some students did take time to arrive early to visit the library to study and prepare for class, study for an exam, or check their email account. A black student said, “I just come, go to my classes, spend a lot of time in library checking computer, E-mail, checking out books.”

Student’s experiences told a story more about the acquisition of learning or the importance of the academic experience than on forming acquaintances or friendships. A white student articulated, “I think the nice thing about Southwest Community College is at least most of the people I run into are more serious about their studies.” “Southwest Community College’s focus is a lot more professional education than it is social”, a white student said. “You have a job,” said one black student, “and you don’t have the free time to be able to have that luxury of making friends.”

Although students attended the institution to earn college credits, not all students were serious students. A black student reported:

I don't have a problem asking teachers questions, or being in the discussion. But a lot of other students, they don't want to talk. You kind of get the look like just shut up and let us get out of here early. I don't think people want to get as much as they can out of the classes. They want to do a bare minimum.

Participants compared the community college to the university. A white student reflected on her university experience and indicated the university had "different campuses, different locations that you don't have to drive to, you can walk to, just everything's right there, all the people are right there, in one location, there's dorms and all... just different stuff." A different white student explained that the community college is "more personal and the classroom sizes are smaller." Another white student said, regarding this community college, "Honestly, it's convenient but it's a drag. My first year I went to a private school. It had the whole college atmosphere, I could come and go, I lived in the dorm. I had that type of thing going on." A black student explained, "I guess cause it's a junior college and people are just here to do what they need to do and just go home... probably if it was a bigger university people would interact more because you have to live with those people."

Traditional-aged students (i.e. 18 – 21 years old) viewed this community college as an extension of high school. A traditional-aged white student said, "it's like an extension of high school. Lots of people I that I went to school with go to this school. It's just like the 13th grade." Another traditional-aged white student indicated, "My classes are like extensions of high school classes but the conversations in college are more intellectual, mature conversations. You don't have the stupid jock in the back of the classroom."

Non-traditional aged students appeared less concerned with “the college experience.” Their concerns focused more on professional and personal development. A white student commented, “the experience started off with me being somewhat ostracized from all the students.” A black student added, “I see a lot of people that really don’t know what they’re doing as far as where they are going in their careers.” Another black student, who came to this college a bit apprehensive said, regarding the college experience, it was “very exciting, interesting, so much knowledge. I’m in my mid 40’s so it was scary last semester, but I couldn’t wait to come back to class.”

Residential Proximity and Affluence

A black student observed, “It’s kind of known that if you are black you either go to Maple or Norwood campus if you want to feel comfortable. It’s kinda’ like an unwritten rule.” The student added, “I have never heard anything about Spruce but the campus name is never brought up when you talk to other blacks and what campuses they go to.” Both black and white students expressed hesitancy going to the “other side” of the city. Black students told me many black persons simply have no desire to go to the southern portion of the community and that many white students have no desire to go into the northern part of the city.

The limited racial mix in the southern portion of the community was reflected at the Spruce campus. Students who attended the Norwood campus felt the Spruce campus was an extension of the southern part of the community and that its associated affluence carried over into the social context on campus. At the Norwood

campus, racial and directional diversity expressed itself in the student population. A black student said, “there’s no majority [at the Norwood campus] so if there’s no majority, you won’t feel left out.” Comfort was found in the consistent overestimation of the 13% black population at the Norwood campus. Both white and black students consistently overestimated the black population to be 40 – 50%. Black and white students attributed the overestimation due to the campus’ close proximity to a predominantly black area of the community. At Norwood, a black student commented:

I know there’s a lot of people that I know that haven’t been to this campus. They’re like ‘I don’t want to go to this campus cause all the people from the North side will be there. Some people just want to go to different area, they don’t want to be in this area, cause they feel like it’s bad people in the area, but I don’t think so.

At the Spruce campus, however, the small percentage of African Americans at the Spruce campus was consistently and accurately identified as 5%. This substantiated the perception the southern area of the community is predominantly white. As compared to the Spruce campus, the Norwood campus, with its increased percentage of black students (13% vs. 5%) coupled with an overall smaller number of students increased comfort levels for black *and* white students. Proximity was a big issue and symbolic for many. Black and white students reported that the city’s segregation expressed itself at the campus.

In addition to location, students at both sites articulated affluence as a mitigating factor for attending the Spruce or Norwood campus. A black student said:

I think that has a lot to do financially like a lot of people in Spruce are better off than some people over here so you can't relate to somebody who's not in your, I guess, class you know, they [white students] can ask daddy for a million, I can ask daddy for \$10. So I don't think its as much a racial problem, as it is financially. You couldn't relate.

In a similar sentiment, a white student said, "it's a preppy school [campus], they're a bunch of little rich kids. Probably the majority is the upper echelon. They're snotty and snobby." Comfort was clearly expressed in economic or financial terms for students. A white student recalled:

most of the kids [black and white] who go to Spruce grew up out there. And maybe this is a bias on my part, but I think that a lot of the kids who grew up out there are from a lot of the same backgrounds compared to Norwood which collects greater diversity levels of socioeconomic status. I know there are diverse backgrounds out there and diverse education and stuff but a lot of them are the same. You see a lot of people coming in and they're wearing nice clothes and they got cell phones and they drive nice cars. Because, I mean South [name of city] has money. There's no doubt about that and that's fine, it's a nice place.

Alternatively, a black student attending the Spruce campus felt comfortable in the southern portion of the community because he grew up in that part of town. There existed a belief in the community that the north side of the community was bad and the south side was not bad. Students, however, who attended the Norwood campus from any region of the city commented on the comfortable and professional feeling that campus held for its students. Alternatively, students who attended the Norwood

campus who were familiar with the Spruce campus sensed “snobbery” at the Spruce campus.

Comfort and discomfort were not only related to the familiar (i.e. attending a campus near one’s home) but to the unfamiliar. Students who lived in the northern portion of the community reported more positive comments about the Spruce campus than students in the southern portion of the community reported about the Norwood campus. Spruce students reported the perception of the Norwood campus as being located in or near a “bad part of town” as a reality which kept students in the southern portion of the city from attending that campus. Contrary to this observation is the reporting of comfort at the Norwood campus by both white and black students. A black student illustrated the polarization of the northern and southern portions of the city:

One of the comments I heard last semester of students complaining at Spruce because Norwood has some things Spruce doesn’t have. Students couldn’t understand why Norwood had it [a fitness center] and Spruce didn’t have it. Why did the people on the north side have it and we over here....we’re better....we don’t have it. Again...just one of those things I learn to overlook, but it was there.

Clearly, both black and white students experienced varying levels of comfort on the campuses. Both black and white students preferred being with students like themselves. Race was a more salient issue contingent upon the student’s race. Black students’ comfort was grounded by operating in a black and a white world. White students’ discomfort was grounded in uncertainty of how to talk to or act around

black students and in a critical mass of whiteness. White students expressed concern that not interacting with black students implied a racist attitude towards black students. In the context of the “you come to leave” culture, students did focus more on learning and subordinated the need for relationships yet still manifested a disconnect between black and white racial groups.

White Critical Mass vs. Black Minority Mass

Regarding the large white majority presence at the Spruce campus, a white student shared:

I think it could prevent other relations from forming. It may seem like they're kind of an outcast. In my opinion a lot of ethnic backgrounds consider themselves white. The only ones that aren't that are the African Americans.

A white student, referencing two student workers on campus, said:

They must be strong, I don't know (laughter)... they must not be as worried about how other people perceived their race or whatever. But I think that the majority of people [black] who would potentially want to come to this school – if they were to come here one semester and see that 5% of the people are like them and that the whole 95% of them are just a bunch of white kids....you know... then... they're going to be like this school is terrible. The black people that I know, they need what comes with other black people. They are so outgoing. I work with a whole bunch of them. I just love listening to their conversations.

Regarding the 5% black population and its link to a lower comfort level, a white student believed there was a connection:

just because I think there are not very many of them... and I'm sure that makes them feel uncomfortable, they shouldn't, I don't see the students around here being racist or anything and there's not a major population I think that there should be more.... I'm sure if we went to the Norwood or Maple campus it would be way different, but around here it's kinda weird.

The small percentage of African Americans was an issue at the campus. A large white-majority was juxtaposed against this small percentage of black students rendered black students invisible. A white student captured this with the following comment:

a lot of times it's like because the minority is such the minority out there that sometimes it kinda' gets overlooked. They just kind of blend into the surroundings and people tend not to be as aware of 'em... I mean they are aware, but not as much because of the decreased interaction.

Similarly, another white student said, "It doesn't seem like when there are people of other races around – that's it just like they're in a group and the other people are in a group. It seems like when they're there (other races) they're in together, all mixed up."

Regarding the impact of race relations on black students at the campus, a white student speculated, "They probably try, huge amount of black people, or whatever other race, that come here go to one semester, maybe even after a couple of days and

realize what it is like and say screw this, ‘let’s get out of here’, I’m sure there’s probably a lot.”

Black students reported discomfort issues but consistently commented that they had grown accustomed to subtle behaviors that separated them from white students. For example, a black student indicated how she was seen first as black and then as American. Another black student said:

if you’ve always been taught that separate is equal, you don’t want to immerse yourself in a society that has been typically Caucasian. So it is a very severe and diverse thing because as African Americans and as Caucasians we were never taught to be individuals, we’ve always been taught to be a unit.

It was common for only one or two black students to be in a classroom of 20 students. Although black students reported being “used to” this environment, for some it was quite disconcerting. A black student reported:

The breaks were terrible. I was by myself. Either I’d stay where I was seated or go to the bathroom. In that class [political science] it really, really bothered me. I think it’s cause I didn’t know why and it might be because I was withdrawn. I didn’t talk to people very much in that class at all and I didn’t participate very much. I think it was a little bit of both. Partly I put out that message.... “stay back”...(long pause)... and partly some people in that class really didn’t associate with black people. Like the guy [white] next to me. I had missed lecture one day. The teacher told me to get the notes from somebody else. I talked to him (i.e. the white student) and said, “Can I get yesterday’s notes from you” and he just looked at me like... I could tell he didn’t want to give them to

me ... he didn't know what to say, and I was like "never mind," I didn't give him a chance to... He was looking at me like... almost like all African American's cheat if I could cheat off this paper, I don't know.

Even though black and white students were in the same classrooms, black students functioned in black and white worlds. A black student said, "I spend a great amount of time in contact with other people, other races." At the campus, a black student was among a group of 337 black students out of 6,928 total students. Black and white students viewed this small percentage of African Americans as a reality they were used to. With this sparse black population, black students were positioned either to remain alone, find solace in the A.A.S.A., or interact with white students or an extremely small population of other racial groups. Coupled with this was a very small presence of black faculty at the Spruce campus. These conditions placed black students in an awkward position. A white student speculated:

I would hate to be a black student at Spruce at Southwest Community College. The educational opportunities are the same which is what you're paying for but the general attitude of the campuses is not the same. I felt discrimination, what I considered to be age discrimination. And I saw what I like to call passive discrimination. Nothing was said; nothing was obvious; nobody got up and pushed anybody; or told them they couldn't sit somewhere; but when a black person... one black gentlemen that I saw, probably 22 or 23 years old, had dreadlock hair things; and uh...different; he looked different; he looked nice and clean but he just looked different... he could walk between two tables that were full of white students and the conversation would never even cease. I saw the

guy several times say “how ya’ doin’” – no response... I mean he wasn’t even there, he didn’t even exist in their minds.

I asked, “he was invisible?” and the student continued:

just totally invisible, yea...I didn’t get the feeling they were being mean to him – it’s just the way they were raised. They were not being rude; they were not trying to be mean... just simply didn’t exist in their [Spruce students’] social economic bracket.

In addition to an awkward position on campus, black students reported intra-racial issues that diminished comfort. A black student articulated:

But when you get to the point and you are in higher education and they demand you think for yourself... to give your own opinions... and break away from the stereotypical of what you know to be true... and be differently... then it creates an inner war with you because, you got 18 or 19 years of set foundation of who are supposed to be or who you thought you were suppose to be.... And you’ve only got 3 to 4 years of someone telling you who you should be, where you gonna’ go withWhich one is the stronger one, it’s like it’s an absolute war. Therefore I can understand because blacks have such a strong bond with their family connection, with their society connection, and things like that.... therefore, they’re dragged back into where they say that they should be... their place... because if they break away and become something different then they become a different part of society and therefore they don’t fit in with whites, they don’t fit in with blacks...they have to create their own place... and sometimes

they don't know their..... if you don't know your own identity from the beginning you can't allow your identity to grow into who you need to be.

Similarly, another black student identified:

a gap within black community. Some stay in same communities like [northern part of the city] and not want to have anything to do with whites and then there's some spread out—got into the rest of the world, mixed in—division between them (blacks) don't like each other, called a “sell out” before because I was talking to a white girl and a black girl liked me. Happened in high school, if you don't act like a black person is supposed to act, that causes division.

Similarly, black students reported conflict due to the small percentage of African Americans present at the campus and feeling compelled to represent their race. A black student reflected:

in the classroom sometimes I feel I have to do really, really well just because you're the only one (black) in there. Everyone tends to place the entire race on you. Always want to make sure you're representing race as well as possible, I always try to be as much as I can – feel like I'm competing against everyone, causes a lot of unnecessary stress—just me. Kind of uncomfortable.

Black students were intimidated by the large majority white presence on campus.

Absence of Dialogue

Interaction between black and white students was minimal and superficial in nature. Regarding the interaction of black and white students, a black student said, “I see it every once and awhile.” A white student said:

The only place I've seen people hanging out is in these halls. They aren't really interacting with each other in races, just in their own segregated parts, and then a few times at lunch, there's a few people that hang out there at tables and stuff.

It's just in the hallways and at lunch.

The data revealed an invisible disconnect between black and white students.

Connecting activities aimed directly at opening dialogue about race were absent on the campus.

The need for additional mechanisms to bridge students together emerged in the data collection. A white student reported:

I see that as who they associate with they probably don't know each other so they don't associate with each other. I'm sure if introduced they might talk to each other or hang out, but since they don't they might just go ahead and segregate to people they know.

Similarly, another white student observed:

I just see white kids in there [game room – large high ceiling student area] playing pool. It just seems there are boundaries that African Americans won't go to or they stick to the sides while we do our thing or something like that.

Although black and white students reported taking initiative in approaching other students of different races, a white student reported:

If a common person knew both of them and then go over, start a conversation, talking to one and know a person in other group, they would be like "well what do you think about this?" and just kind of bring them into the conversation and introduce all of them together – would help out a lot.

Similarly, another white student reported:

it's just finding that common ground. Finding something that people agree on.

Or even something that people disagree on. Finding common ground is a big step in that and a lot of times you know the teacher can be the bridge between the people that wouldn't otherwise talk, just by bringing up discussion.

At the same time another white student reported, "I wish I did see more activity in terms of eating together, playing games, playing pool and stuff." A black student stated, "If you don't got something in common with a person something that a person can obtain from your presence then there's no point of your being around." A white student suggested having discussions in class:

like a little discussion everyday where people can get to know each other more and more, likes/dislikes, opinions, and so on and so forth, and that kind of breaks the ice. It's hard sometimes to break the ice no matter who it is whether it's someone my same sex, my same race, or someone completely different because it's still kind of hard to break the ice. Once you do, people can intermingle better but it is hard to break the ice.

This comment rang so true. A black student offered some sobering words:

I don't think we'll [black and white] ever really connect. Especially in this country. It's so obvious the difference. My black skin, your white skin, to not think about that concept. Then you got stereotypes. It doesn't go away. That's just built into our mindset. I don't think it will ever absolutely change, just have to adapt to it somehow and accept. Obviously no connection cause none of us

knows what it's like to be the other race and never will, so all you can do is learn from what you know.

Herein lay the essence for the need for increased awareness and understanding. Race-related ignorance abounded on the campus. In rare instances, inter-racial dialogue bridged students but more common it segregated black and white students.

The data revealed a state of ignorance among white students on how to approach persons of a different race, especially black students. This held particularly true at the Spruce campus in the context of a large majority of white students. Dialogue did occur but it was surface in nature, lacking a depth of understanding and appreciation of black students. White students were concerned that not talking to a black student would send a message that white students were racist.

Both white and black students articulated the lack of dialogue between white and black students. A black student said:

I have noticed the biggest hindrance is that people either do not know how to get to know people and just have relationships. That's going to be the bottom line - that a lot of people do not know how to open themselves up to be able to communicate with another person - and anybody whether they're black, white, Asian, West Indian, whatever, they want to be understood that's human nature... but if another person doesn't take the time to ask this person "who are you?" "what's your story?" "what do you like to do?" then you'll remain segregated because fear is the greatest thing of prejudice... simply that you don't know who they are and what they are about... but if you take the time to ask, and get to know the person, then it eliminates over 90% of the fear and the hesitation.

Similarly, a white student reported:

I can see people maybe separating themselves just because they [black and white students] don't know how to act around each other. I think, if I didn't feel comfortable, I'd probably separate myself, because sometimes I just don't know how to act, some people, they talk differently so they can fit better, get liked better.

Along the same line, a black student said:

sometimes when you come in contact with African Americans they may be still a little bit more hesitant because they don't know who you are, what you expect of them. And because we've been so defined by such different ways....they might just be held back at first until they get to know who you are, what you want and don't want, what you act like ...so they may, kinda' put it out there but be hesitant at the same time. Caucasians, a lot times they're just like whatever....., they either like you or don't like you.

It was rare in the interview process for students to articulate a deeper level of the dialogue disconnect by race. However, a black student related the experience of black and white dialogue:

You'd have to have a good foundation before you can go deep down. I don't really think you can do that up here. You'd have to have more time... you know....just the weight room and class that's not probably going to cut it.

Another black student validated this observation:

it just seems like the blacks want to stay with the blacks and the whites want to be with the whites and the only thing that is a common interest is the class itself.

You really won't see them talking to each other outside of that. It's just basically what you think of this class, or how are you studying or something like that...kinda' just surface talk I would call it.

White students were hesitant in establishing a depth of contact with black students. A white student stated, "I am open to meeting people of a different race but I'm not sure they're [black students'] comfortable. Are they open to being friends with a white person?" White students revealed that black students were "quiet" at the campus. A white student said, "I've noticed that most of the African American's in my classroom are real quiet, don't talk very much. They're real quiet, I'd say." Another white student said, "I get the feeling that they don't want to reach out to people who are not like them..... you just have to go talk to them [black people]." This was corroborated by a black student who believed that black students at the Spruce campus were timid. A white student provided a rationale for the quietness of black students:

Interviewer: Why is he [a black student] quiet?

White student: Doesn't feel he can talk to anybody, because he couldn't really relate to anybody, because when he is surrounded by a bunch of girls they talk about things that happen, and the mall and gets shut out that way...but it may because he is a quiet person, or it may because he doesn't have any one to talk to.

Although some white students perceived black students as "quiet" on campus, other white students reported black students as more outspoken about certain issues. Issues typically referenced inequalities that black students held the opinion that they are racially inferior to whites and that this was not the case. "I think a lot of times

people try to hold grudges when they can push past those then they could really get to know each other better”, articulated one white student. Another white student said, “I think it just comes right down to the people [white people/person] as far as like just kind of opening up and saying come on over let’s play a game or something. I don’t know if they [black students] would respond that well.”

Personal ignorance of how to act with others different than oneself emerged as a theme. One white student reported:

for some people, they just don’t know what that person is going to be like and they have a little more comfort being with a white person because they are the same color and they just haven’t heard as much about the white race and feel more comfortable about it. It’s how comfortable a person feels I believe. Or some people might even be shy and not know how to approach someone. It’s all about how you feel and how much an effort you want to take to meet somebody new who is not necessarily white if you want to expand your mind and have different opportunities then I think you should.

The barrier to having friendships with black and white people was captured by the following white student:

the whole theme is comfort. It’s the fear of the unknown like for some people they... the fear of the unknown because I feel more comfortable being around a white person because a black person would then have been stereotyped as somebody who might do this or might do that. Today’s society is full of stereotypes for blacks and whites and everybody.

Unclaimed responsibility for initiated dialogue about race emerged as a theme in the data. Black and white students indicated that the individual is responsible for initiating dialogue with others. However, faculty typically initiated dialogue about race in social science courses. However, dialogue about race segregated black and white students. A white student reported:

the only thing I have found that really drives people apart is when something is brought up that has specifically to do with race. As far as between like blacks and whites... we start talking about the differences in cultures or how whites have oppressed blacks or blacks have fought back or whatever you want to call it, I think that tends to sep... [was going to say separate] to create a larger division between the two. What I've found is really creating a larger division is talking about the conflict or past conflicts or stuff that is in disagreement between the two races.

Neither white nor black student claimed responsibility for initiating inter-racial dialogue. A black student reported, "it's just a weird dynamic here. I've often wondered. It's a point where they're [black and white students] afraid to get to know each other. So I don't know if really anybody initiates the dialogue of it. They're just comfortable not talking to each other." A white student affirmed this:

I just think in my situation if I was around a bunch of black people, then I really wouldn't go up to somebody and just initiate a conversation. If one of them comes up and talk to me that would be great, I'd sit there and talk their ear off... but I don't I would go up and initiate a conversation just cause of the intimidation factor.

Another white student added, “I think they [white people] are afraid of upsetting someone instead of interacting.” The data revealed a disconnect along racial lines yet white students frequently reported that it is time to leave the past in the past (referring to racial inequalities), learn from the past, and move on.

A barrier identified by black students not identified by white students was captured by a black student who shared, “What I think is there is going to be some division because people perceive what the other race is. Until they cross that line and get to know the person instead of the African American label, there’s a gap.”

Similarly, a white student observed:

you can try and try but there’s still only so much you can do to a point.... It’s gotta’ be kind of intrinsic. You know if you want to get out and meet other people and intermingle, you got to want to do it and a lot of people I think have hang-ups about stuff... you know stereotypes are just rampant nowa’ days. I think that’s part of the big problem is that people have all these pre-conceived notions about other people and it’s hard to get past those.

The absence of deeper inter-racial dialogue was masked by the presence of “outgoing” black and white students. Some participants self-identified as students who initiated dialogue with other students. A black student said, “I’m pretty friendly. Most of the time I’d probably ask how are they doing, whoever’s around me. It might not be a long conversation.... might ask how the weekend is going.” I asked this student, “Do people come up to you?” The student replied, “I don’t think so.” A white student, when asked who initiated contact with persons of color, said:

It really depends on proximity, like where... like I said the majority of the time I when I talk to people is in the classroom. .. and if they're sitting next to me it doesn't matter what race, what color, what age... yea I talk to them. I'm just outgoing in that way. I'm just a talkative person. It doesn't matter but and as long they are sitting next me I'll talk to them, I don't see me going across the room to make an effort to go talk to someone that's black. That's not something I would do.

Despite difficulties interacting, several students expressed the benefits of increased inter-racial dialogue. When this type of dialogue occurred, students found they had more in common with other students than originally believed. A white student stated, "I think you find you have more in common then you thought you did. There again, people have pre-conceived notions about other people. They realize, hey he's a lot more like me than I thought." A black student expressed that dialogue with others of a different race:

forces them to cross that line to get to know this person and once they get to know this person then they realize their past beliefs was just totally wrong.... once you get to know the person, you discard the race. The first thing you want to see when you come into a room is a person most similar to you. That's where you're going to go and sit next to and that's who you're going to associate with and very seldom do you cross the line with someone else unless a group activity caused you to. The teachers have these activities that actually bring people together. I think that really makes a difference. Otherwise it's apart so it's bringing them together.... [students] come in apart.

Another black student captured this phenomenon:

there is a disconnection that takes place between the races in higher education, one of the things that you know... when you study psychology and things like that, that when people get to a certain age they are really trying to figure out who they are... and at that age because it is so conflicting and confusing all at the same time...that they only identify with who, what they've already known and therefore their mindset becomes very set, that you're not going to change me.

In summary, "you come to leave," residential proximity, white and black masses, and absence of dialogue, were issues that curbed connections at the campus. The "you come to leave" was race neutral. However, the remaining factors contributed not only to curbed connections between black and white students, they also played a role in the comfort levels on campus among these two racial groups.

Comfort

White student "I don't see color – I just see a person."

Black student "You're not color blind – that's stupid."

The interviews revealed comfort was an issue at the campus. In analyzing black and white participant comments, diminished comfort levels among black students became apparent. White students, however, reported no racial discomfort and had difficulties grasping the perspective of black students' race-related concerns. A total of three comfort related themes emerged from the data. First, black students reported evidence of discomfort experienced at the campus. Second, white student's perception of black student's comfort reflected minimal awareness and understanding of black issues. Third, white student discomfort was a discovered reality. The data

indicated the “you come to leave” culture masked these issues of comfort at this institution. Despite this masking, it was clear from the data that comfort levels varied among black and white students at the campus.

Black Discomfort

Spatial boundaries, eye contact, and race-related comments were three realities identified by black students that diminished comfort.

Spatial Boundaries. Black students tended to sit on the periphery in the classroom. A black student said:

When people come into class they tend to sit with people they’re comfortable with.... young white females sit in back, young white guys sit in the back, older white males sit in front of them, then older white females in front of them. I was the only African American. There was one Indian, one Mexican. Minorities sit in the same section of the classroom.

I, too, observed black students sitting on the periphery of classrooms. A white student recalled “I had last semester a class in here and we did have an African American student – he always sat in the in the corner in the very last chair by the door. I see a lot of that.” And another white student reported:

It just seems there are boundaries that African Americans won’t go to or they stick to the sides while we do our thing or something like that. I don’t ever see and African Americans outside of class doing things on the campus. I’ll see ‘em walking in the hall or something.

Eye Contact. Eye contact emerged as a theme raised by black and white students. Eye contact, however, varied by race. Eye contact and head nods were silent methods reported by black students used to connect with each other. Black students indicated an awareness of the *lack* of eye contact on campus. A black student explained eye contact:

the people out here [at Spruce] don't do that. White, black, whatever. I mean it's a different thing, when you go whether I know you or not when you walk around. Even though the black community doesn't have too much togetherness and they're not as unified as they should be, mostly anytime you go to a city you'll always see black people, people of color, always acknowledge each other if nothing else. A head nod or just something... that here doesn't happen. Rarely you will get eye contact. You really don't expect it like a white person... it happens every once and awhile.... But you kinda expect outta' someone that looks like you... but it's not happening.

Similarly, a black student reported:

you can walk in the door and sometimes people will not make eye contact with you, which to me, being the person I am, eye contact says a lot...if you look at me, it still makes a difference...and... it's like everybody's kind of in their own world....and they want to say I'm gonna' get to where I need to go, I'm in a rush, I got this to go do , this to go do.... And unless you have part of an in-clique .. in some kind of way in road, You get help but sometimes it is not as warm... you still get the help that you need ... there's a totally different amount of warmth they don't exude on that campus.

White students acknowledge eye contact as a mechanism to connect with other students but did not identify an absence of eye contact at the campus. A white student speculated in regards to initiating contact with other students:

I guess most of it's like eye contact like you can tell recognition when you first see someone and you're like okay, you make eye contact with them, you can say "oh you look familiar"... or ... "oh yea, we had a class together." Pretty much I think it's like mutual.

Race-based Comments. Black students reported persons in class asking them to represent the black view on issues. Black students reported this type of question increased their discomfort and alienated them from white students. A black student acknowledged hostile race-based comments in class and the issue of addressing the comments:

when this guy or these guys in class do that that's how it makes me want to feel...it's like I should just hop over my desk, take care of it and they'll never say something again, but I know that will just add to their fuel or why they would hate. But you could bring it up and tell them how ignorant they are but it's just gonna' add fuel to them and they'll be the same way....and there's gonna' be a big argument....and in my mind, I'm thinkin' if anything starts it will all come back to my fault.

Similarly, a black student reported, "like everyday I'm biting my tongue. We have some students [white] in there that are pretty ignorant about racial diversity. Some of the comments they've said are pretty racial I just have to ignore them basically." This same student said that a white student said so many different things:

It's hard even to remember. He said something about when the people came over in the boat he wishes they all would have died... or something... just some ignorant stuff. We have a professor – he tries to stay out of it and act like he doesn't hear it tends to ignore it and keep going on with the class but it's pretty distracting I think.

White Student's Perception of Black Student's Discomfort

The following dialogue regarding black student discomfort, revealed white students' perceptions:

White student: No – a lot of them they tend to hang out with people of their same race but I don't think they have discomfort with someone of a different race.

Researcher: What if some say they are [i.e. uncomfortable]?

White student: I'm awful not saying their isn't some. I'm sure they are, not sure how I would address something.

Similarly, another white student said, “just because I think not very many of them... and I'm sure that makes them feel uncomfortable. They shouldn't. I don't see the students around here being racist or anything.” A different white student observed:

When you do see black people they're mostly together. But they don't usually sit down in the loft...cause... I don't know why.... just pretty much cause a bunch of white people. They [black students] probably feel threatened. Most of the time its just white people hangin' out.

White students were less concerned with race and desired to “move on from the past.” A white student shared:

I think a lot of other races are trying to, they're trying to bridge the gap between the two, they're trying to make advances, and I think there's a lot of other races that like to keep that gap for what ever reasons. Hey for "you owe us something" or we owe you something or whatever. A lot of people like to keep that gap and while I agree it is good to be diverse and recognize your own individual culture and history, I think that you got a lot of things you just have to put 'em away. But life goes on. And people die and people get hurt, but that's the way it always is. And I agree its good to be upset about things for awhile, but you can't hold a grudge. You can't do that. And so I think a lot of times people try to hold grudges when they can push past those then they could really get to know each other better.

But, black students considered race an important issue. A black student reported:

some of my friends have this new theory that you just don't discuss race at all.

That race doesn't exist. Those are the people I stay away from. Because race does exist. They try to say "We're all friends and everything and your race doesn't matter"... but I notice the ones that talk about that and really try to get you to agree with that – they don't have many friends of other ethnicities.... You seem them hanging out with their closest girl pals and they are not black and I've noticed that.

White student's initiatives to include black students were one-way in nature and inclusive into the dominant white race majority. It was a "come and join us" attitude. White students were not likely to "cross the line" and join black students. The following white student illustrated this theme:

I wish more people would open up and talk to other people and get ‘em [black students], drag into the middle of the classroom and just bring them in...and say “hey come join us.” I do see a lot of people come in with groups before class and they just go sit around and sit in their little square, just kind of over there...you see people [a black student] come in and they’re just like...look around say “I’ll sit over here”....away from everybody else.

Another white student acknowledged the absence of black students sitting in the loft area and said, “I don’t think I’ve ever seen one just hanging out up there, a black person.” At the expense of casting doubt on the veracity of this student’s observation, on the way to our interview I observed, in this very area referenced by this student, two black female students studying together. Adjacent to these students were two white students but I observed no interaction between these groupings of students.

White students indicated they were comfortable with diversity yet they consistently indicated friendships primarily with white students at the campus. A white student articulated, “For most of my life I’ve grown up in a white neighborhood, I went to Catholic schools, I guess I’m pretty much kind of elitist or whatever. I mean I didn’t get exposed to a whole lot of black people or different nationalities or whatever.”

Other than the acknowledgement of a small black presence on campus, white students reported no personal racial discomfort and rarely reported awareness of black discomfort. White students reported and equated the absence of hostile and aggressive race-related acts on campus as proof for good race relations on campus. A

white student commented, “We pretty much get along. Haven’t seen any fights.” A black student commented on this aggression issue:

For them [white students] to say all is okay if there is not hostility that’s kind of crazy. I mean there’s no hostility because there are few [black students] that go there. If there’s a group of people in my class .. say there’s three of them [white students] that are saying these comments and I decide to do something stupid and be hostile about it...then it’s going to be three on one...and there’s not another black person in the class that would join in and help me out, you know what I mean? You wouldn’t have someone at the Norwood campus saying something like they say at Spruce campus. I mean I wouldn’t be sitting in the class when each class probably has at least two or three blacks in it, you wouldn’t hear someone say a comment like that because then there would be two or three people after that one person.

The data made clear that white students were ignorant of race-related issues that black students encounter. White students expressed a desire to move on from a racialized past and come together as people. With the exception of the observed 5% black student population, white students failed to recognize how black students could be uncomfortable at the campus.

White students were not able to cross the “color line” to enter a black student’s experience. The comfort of white cliques and a large white critical mass provided a safe place for white students to maintain the status quo of inter-racial relationships. Regarding the comfort of black students at the campus, a white student stated:

I wouldn't see why they [black students] would be uncomfortable. It's not like this is only for white people or anything... I mean because everyone is everywhere. So if this is easiest for them to go to school..... I mean if they have had a bad experience with a racial issue then yea that would be uncomfortable for that person but I don't see why there's not a hostile environment here when it comes to that kind of thing. I haven't seen anything at all.

Invisibility of White Discomfort

White student's racial discomfort with black students was also invisible to white students. White students' major concern about the campus was the absence of dormitories and the campus not being like a real college. White students reported no race-related concerns regarding comfort. They never brushed the issue.

White students at Spruce indicated nothing divided black and white students. "We all get along," said a white student. Another white student expressed, "I don't see color – I just see a person." Another white student said, "Like I said ... they're a pretty small minority, for them to be considered a minority here." Another white student added:

Uncomfortable? Not from what I've seen. I don't think that I've seen any students at any Southwest Community College campus feel uncomfortable. I don't think that African Americans are uncomfortable out here [Spruce]. I don't think so because it seems to me that Southwest Community College promotes diversity and intermingling and stuff to an extent that people aren't uncomfortable at all, there's no real separation between them.

The invisibility was not completely apparent with this anecdotal evidence, but it became more clear with additional information. First, hesitancy to interact with black students for fear of being racist and uncertainty if they wanted to interact were primary drivers for white students distancing themselves from black students. A white student said, “If I don’t talk to you [a black student], it makes me look like I’m racist.” Second, white cliques, carried over from high school, insulated white students from black students. Third, not attending African American Student Association meetings clearly demonstrated white students discomfort with “crossing the line” and interacting with black students in the only predominantly black group setting on campus. Fourth, the 5% black population at the campus created a non-threatening environment for white students and veiled the disconnect between black and white students. Finally, the subtle, unfriendly environment expressed by white students through limited eye contact and race-based comments toward black students, rendered their own racial discomfort invisible.

What is Being Done – Solutions

Students articulated an absence of activities that specifically addressed race issues. Intentionality on the part of the campus to bring students together along racial lines was lacking. Black students reported the small minority faculty presence at the institution was a detriment to the student body. Students reported that increased interaction between race groups and individuals is needed if race relations are to improve so that all students feel more comfortable on the campus. A white student captured the essence of inter-racial communication:

I met a black person here, and we were cool. The more you hang out with them, the more you find out about 'em, then you find out about their background, what their parent's went through, it's just going to get passed on and that has to effect you.

A black student reported:

I think those students who do take advantage of the different organizations would probably would be able to maintain a relationship. For those that don't, they'll only have the relationships they have from high school, or maybe their new boy friend or their girl friend that they just met here and maybe their new immediate group of friends.

Many students reported a "one-way" style communication pattern at the campus. Students who initiated contact with others reported students would say "hi" back at subsequent meeting points but the initiators felt it was consistently one-way. To account for this, a black student said, "maybe cause there's not many activities going on...so there's not a chance for people to get together and make friends and know each other. People are just here I guess to get their credits out of the way and go home." When asked if more activities were offered people would take advantage of them. The student replied:

I don't know....they may not... you're dealing with so many different age groups... it probably would be a little different. In high school everybody's basically the same age... you have sports to attend, pep rallies.....you have no choice but to interact with other people.

Through the interview process, I observed people who had had deeper levels of interaction with others who differed racially. Under these circumstances, students reported a positive experience and left the class with a greater respect for others. They attributed this positive experience to being connected. In classrooms where faculty bridged students together, those students reported more connectivity and an appreciation for others of a different race.

Students offered solutions to help remedy the comfort issue at the campus. A black student indicated race discussions should be built into the curriculum or even added as a course:

I think in major corporations you hear a lot about diversity training, and classes and courses that are being taught to ease out some of the differences between the races at work. I think maybe it should be addressed a little sooner in colleges. If that was a requirement maybe for all degrees, I don't know if it would be 3 hours class, an hour class, or whatever but maybe a class that would be a pre-requisite for a bunch of classes, that you had to take it towards the very beginning of your degree would be helpful.

Similarly, a black student encouraged the campus to consider having more involvement by minorities in planning social activities:

You may have some of the ethnic students come there, but some will say, "Well, I don't want to go there", it might have something to do with race. Consider having those designing it be of different races so they can make sure that the social event will invite all the races and groups going can relate to this. That would help bring people together socially.

Black students offered more ideas and desired to work together to have dialogue than did white students. A black student captured this phenomenon with the following:

I think they [white students] probably have not been exposed to African Americans. I think they go more on about what they hear of the past, what they hear in media, what somebody told them, and not a one on one experience.

Summary

This chapter presented an overview of the college including, student, community, and participant demographics. Five data driven themes were presented: prior connections, connections on campus, connecting locations, curbed connections, and comfort. The data demonstrated that racial comfort and discomfort were realities. These realities fell along racial lines.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Ties and Perpetuation Theory serve as analytical lenses in this study in an effort to sharpen an explanation accounting for racial comfort and discomfort among black and white students at the Spruce campus. For the purpose of this analysis, discomfort is operationalized as exclusion and alienation; comfort is operationalized as inclusion and connection. This analysis peels back the layers of social realities found along racial lines at the campus. The analysis is divided into four sections: analytical lenses, segregated experiences *and* strong ties, weak ties, and micro-macro social context *and* the strength of ties.

Analytical Lenses

Perpetuation Theory (Braddock, 1980) is the lens through which I view students' entrance to the institution with social networks already in place. This theory is "a micro-macro sociological theory of racial segregation" (Braddock, 1980, p. 532). This theory is traditionally linked to the study of black students who enter a dominant white higher education culture. Black students who are exposed to integrated settings in primary and secondary education better assimilate, accommodate, and negotiate subsequent inter-racial experiences (Braddock, 1980). Perpetuation Theory states that segregation tends to repeat itself "across the stages of the life cycle and across

institutions when individuals have not had sustained experiences in desegregated settings earlier in life” (McPartland & Braddock, 1981, p. 149). Desegregation efforts help black individuals obtain greater inclusion in society (Dawkins & Braddock, 1994).

The present study expands Perpetuation Theory to address *any* racial group that has limited inter-racial contact in their growing up years and how this factor perpetuates the segregation of racial groups. Perpetuation Theory is particularly helpful in examining the critical white mass at the Spruce campus that comes from the surrounding white, middle-class area of the community.

Granovetter’s (1973) Strength of Ties provides a lens through which I view interpersonal relationships at the campus. An examination of ties informs how black and white racial groups remain divided at the Spruce campus. Ties are inter-personal links between individuals. Granovetter asserts:

the strength of a tie is a (probably linear) combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie. (1973, p. 1361)

Like Perpetuation Theory, Strength of Ties theory links “micro and macro levels of sociological theory” (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1360). Granovetter argues that “small-scale interaction becomes translated into large-scale patterns, and that these, in turn, feed back into small groups” (p. 1360).

The hypothesis which enables us to relate dyadic ties to a larger structures is: the stronger the tie between A and B, the larger the proportion of individuals in *S* to whom they will *both* be tied, that is, connected by a weak or strong tie. This

overlap in their friendship circles is predicted to be least when their tie is absent, most when it is strong, and intermediate when it is weak. (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1362)

In this study, black and white students represent the micro level. Dyadic interaction falls under this category. Black and white student groups represent the macro level.

Like Perpetuation Theory, Strength of Ties is not a theory targeted to a particular race, gender, or class. Granovetter (1983) argues for the general application of the usefulness of the theory, “there is no special reason why such an argument should apply only to lower socioeconomic groups; it should be equally persuasive for any set of people whose outlook is unusually provincial as the result of homogeneous contacts” (p. 205).

Granovetter (1973) believes strong ties perpetuate ingroup solidarity. Subsequently, groups who form strong ties within their groups but form few ties with other groups are more likely to feel isolated. Coser (1975) indicates through strong ties, “everybody knows fairly well why people behave in a certain way. Little effort has to be made to gauge the intention of the other person, nor is much reflection needed to determine one’s own response” (p. 254).

Granovetter (1973) suggests that as more weak ties form between groups, inter-group cohesion and communication increase. More specifically, Granovetter (1983) suggests, “ties serve crucial functions in linking otherwise unconnected segments of a network” (p. 217). Alternatively, “individuals with few weak ties will be deprived of information from distant parts of the social system and will be confined to the provincial news and views of their close friends” (Granovetter, 1983, p. 202).

Together, Perpetuation Theory and Strength of Ties account for interpersonal interaction and its impact on broader social contexts. Both provide micro-macro theoretical propositions. Used together they tell two parts of a story. Perpetuation Theory accounts for a broader sociological understanding of racial interaction. Strength of Ties theory reveals the embedded interpersonal links, or lack thereof, that perpetuate the status quo or promote change. These theories frame the portrait painted by the participants in this study. In addition, Blumer's (1969) symbolic interactionism provides a broader, theoretical explanation to the meaning of skin color and how it impacts ties.

Segregated Experiences and Strong Ties

Students come to campus already divided along racial lines. A black student expressed:

if you've always been taught that separate is equal, you don't want to immerse yourself in a society that has been typically Caucasian. So it is a very severe and diverse thing because as African Americans and as Caucasians we were never taught to be individuals, we've always been taught to be a unit.

Students from surrounding, predominantly white neighborhood's attend the campus. Students bring strong ties formed along racial lines through white racial ideologies. These prior relationships perpetuate themselves through strong ties on campus.

Strong ties make sense at this campus. Strong ties provide familiarity and a non-threatening environment for the majority of the students – the white majority. A white student said:

For most of my life I've grown up in a white neighborhood, I went to Catholic schools, I guess I'm pretty much kind of elitist or whatever. I mean I didn't get exposed to a whole lot of black people or different nationalities or whatever.

A black student observed, "Before they get here they went to high school together...come to school in groups...they don't want to come to school all by themselves." Black and white students find comfort in associating with their own race. A black student expressed, "that's what you see walking around - specifically those sets. African Americans are with the African Americans, whites are with the whites."

The interviews reveal that both black and white students identify friends within their racial group. This lends credibility to Granovetter's (1973) theory that strong ties exist in homogenous groups. Among the four characteristics defining the strength of a tie [amount of time, emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and reciprocal services], all are maximized, forming strong ties along racial lines.

At the campus, these four factors perpetuate inclusiveness for white students and alienation for black students. White and black students are discussed in terms of the tie building mechanisms they use to form and sustain strong ties within their groups.

White Students

Fordham's (1988) notion of racelessness intersects with white students' "color-blindness" and renders race invisible. Fordham's racelessness is a strategy black students employ to subordinate their own racial identity by adopting the majority race

identity. This also accounts for a white student who said, “I don’t see color – I just see a person.”

White students appear to confront race through a racial ideology developed out of their white, segregated experiences that race does not matter. A black student expressed, “You’re not color-blind, that’s stupid,” demonstrating how white students use a color-blind strategy. White students admit not seeing color – it was just “two students walking down the hallway,” not a black and white student. Not seeing color is an appealing and convenient ideal. However, it masks the presence of cultural and institutional racism (Carter, 1997).

Color-blindness renders black students invisible as they are absorbed into a white social context. This is consistent with Lewis’ (2001) finding that a predominantly white elementary school bred a racial ideology that perpetuated the notion that race was not important. “With regard to current race relations, most White parents believed (or hoped) that their kids were just taught that everyone is the same, and that we should all be color-blind” (Lewis, 2001, p. 788).

White students fail to see the impact of their white critical mass on black students’ feeling of exclusion and alienation. White students believe the small percentage of black students accounts for black students’ feelings of alienation and exclusion and nothing more. Although white students acknowledge the importance of the African American Student Association (A.A.S.A.) group as a means of supporting black students, they think this group segregates black and white students. This impacts the positionality of black and white student groups on campus. White students subordinate black students as a racial group by blaming them for segregating

themselves from white students. This was consistent with Carter's (1999) assertion that "Whites, through various mechanisms, continue to this day to maintain racial divisions in the society" (pp. 198-199).

White Cliques. Traditional-aged white cliques are present on campus and perpetuate the segregation of black and white groups. Black and white students identify the presence of these white cliques. Of the 5,335 white students on campus, 45% were 21 years old or younger. Rogers (1983) critique of cliques or "ingrown systems" includes their description as "an extremely poor net in which to catch new information from one's environment" (p. 297). The white cliques segregate black and white students. At a surface level, the white clique demonstrate white racial solidarity. On a deeper level, white cliques serve as a poor net unable to receive new information from black students. White, traditional-aged students' comfort in cliques preclude opportunities to interact with black students.

These cliques meet Granovetter's (1973) four characteristics for tie development. The amount of time, emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and reciprocal services, are all maximized through the cliques.

A white student said, "all my friends and acquaintances have been pretty much white people." Although students from local area high schools feel comfortable at the campus because their friends are there with them, the switch from the familiar high school environment to the college environment challenges comfort levels, particularly among white, traditional-aged students as they seek comfort in white cliques. White cliques carry over from high school and insulate white students from black students. White students tacitly express their discomfort with black students by maintaining

white cliques. The exclusion is not limited to race. Older non-traditional students also observe these cliques and feel excluded.

White Critical Mass. Although traditional-aged white students perpetuate cliques from high schools, these cliques couple with the non-traditional aged portion of the white population. This white critical mass at the campus breeds a tacit sense of white solidarity. White solidarity, perpetuated through strong ties among white students, excludes black students.

White students are unaware of this exclusionary impact on black students. White students believe black students blend into the surroundings on the campus. A white student said, “a lot of times it’s like because the minority is such the minority out there that sometimes it kinda’ gets overlooked. They just kind of blend into the surroundings and people tend not to be as aware of ‘em.” This marginalizes black students. White students report doing nothing about it.

White students envelope themselves in their large white critical mass. This is familiar to them having grown up with a similar critical mass in the southern area of town. Through the triangulation of data sources, the data reveals white students seek comfort in this critical mass. This mass intimidates, alienates, and excludes black students through subtle means. By virtue of the campus demographics, white students do not have to interact with black students on campus. For white students, interaction with black students is optional. Given the option, they primarily choose to stay with their own race. Hesitancy to interact with black students for fear of being racist or uncertainty of wanting to interact are primary drivers for white students

distancing themselves from black students. A white student said, “If I don’t talk to you [a black student], it makes me look like I’m racist.”

White students fail to engage themselves into black students’ social network. Although, white students claim color-blindness, they identify the majority of their time spent outside of the classroom is spent with white students. White students perceive black groupings of students as black students’ attempts to self-segregate or self-marginalize.

When white students interact with black students, it tacitly encourages black students to be a part of the white student’s dominant racial group. White students convey an attitude towards black students that “it’s okay to join us – we accept you.” It is not “I’ll come your way and try to understand the black race.”

White students hold the belief that the absence of hostilities or macro-aggressions on campus, such as physical altercations, indicate an absence of racial issues. Black students discount this. In line with Solorzano (1997), the importance to contextualize racism not as overt mechanisms such as stereotyped acts including drug and criminal involvement, but rather:

it is important to note that these outward or public stereotypes are usually not socially condoned and their use in the public discourse is rare. However, it is in the private discourse that they manifest themselves in more subtle ways. (p. 10)

This is consistent with Carter’s (1999) tripartite definition of racism that divides racism into individual, institutional, and cultural levels. This study demonstrates that institutional and cultural forms of racism against black students by white students are manifest through strong intra-racial ties at the campus. Micro-aggressions, defined as

“subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously” (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000, p. 60), are present at the campus, such as a white student not sharing notes with a black student upon the black student’s request.

Black Students

As mentioned above, black and white students come to this campus already divided along racial lines. The interviews demonstrate segregated experiences brought to the campus are held in place by embedded social structures (strong ties). Loo and Rolison’s (1986) suggest in the context of a larger white majority, black students find comfort within their own racial group because the values of the smaller group are not congruent with those of the larger group. Black students feel alienated by the larger, predominantly white student peer group. Black students are trapped in a small minority presence yet felt pressure to represent their race. A black student shared:

Everyone tends to place the entire race on you. Always want to make sure you’re representing race as well as possible, I always try to be as much as I can – feel like I’m competing against everyone, causes a lot of unnecessary stress.

The interviews reveal an intra-racial conflict within the black population at the Spruce campus. Black students are caught between a perceived need to represent their race and a desire for individuality. Black students are trapped between an intra-racial and inter-racial group identity, and an individual identity. A black student captured this phenomenon:

But when you get to the point and you are in higher education and they demand you think for yourself... to give your own opinions... and break away from the stereotypical of what you know to be true... and be differently... then it creates an inner war with you because, you got 18 or 19 years of set foundation of who are supposed to be or who you thought you were suppose to be.... And you've only got 3 to 4 years of someone telling you who you should be, where you gonna' go withWhich one is the stronger one, it's like it's an absolute war. Therefore I can understand because blacks have such a strong bond with their family connection, with their society connection, and things like that. Therefore, they're dragged back into where they say that they should be... their place... because if they break away and become something different then they become a different part of society and therefore they don't fit in with whites, they don't fit in with blacks...they have to create their own place... and sometimes they don't know their..... if you don't know your own identity from the beginning you can't allow your identity to grow into who you need to be.

Black students' individuality is robbed by the white majority when white persons ask black students to provide the "black point of view" on an issue. This intensifies the black students' conflict to represent their race and desire for individuality. This is consistent with Fries-Britt & Turner's (2001) study that demonstrates prejudice and stereotypes erode successful black students' "academic sense of self" (p. 420).

Feagin and Sikes (1995) indicate that in the face of a predominantly white majority, black students are seen as a group and not individuals. This is true in the instance of the A.A.S.A.. White students perceive this organization is a group of black students

who desire to self-segregate. The perception by white students that black students are a group, masks black students' individuality.

Although masked among black students, the desired expression for individuality among black and white traditional-aged students explains, in part, why some black students report everything is "okay" at the campus. It also accounts for the black and white traditional-aged student's micro-level interpretation of race relations at the campus. These younger students are removed from more overt racist social conditions of prior generations and have lost some of the group distinctiveness that traditionally fell along black and white racial lines. A traditional-aged white student observed:

I think my generation is more open minded. The older generation were raised to go separate ways. We [young people] didn't grow up in that time period so we weren't really there to experience what was going on between the races.

Grandparents, they talked about it. I've grown up giving my own opinion and thinking the way I want to think and just having my own personality and not living as somebody else - chose what I believe in.

In addition, the critical white mass at the campus jeopardizes black students' racial and ethnic identity. Black students have limited opportunity to express their racial and ethnic identities at a campus that is predominantly white. Black students report discomfort including setting spatial boundaries, limited eye contact, race-based comments, and having class notes not shared with them by white students. Black students self-marginalize as they sit on the perimeter of the classroom. The unfriendly environment expressed through limited eye contact and race-based

comments from white students masks white student's ignorance and lack of awareness of black students' comfort issues around white students. This is consistent with Hoberman's (2000) assertion that white students deal with black issues with indifference.

The African American Student Association affords black students opportunities for interaction and support. Black students report a need to be around students with a similar skin color – those, according to a black student, “who look like yourself.” In 1993, the A.A.S.A. was formed, in part, in response to the lack of comfort of black students. This student association strengthens ties among black students at the Spruce campus and provides feelings of inclusion. The A.A.S.A. provides the only formal group setting for black students to be together on campus.

The A.A.S.A. provides the time, emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and reciprocal services that leads black students to form intra-racial strong ties. Among other issues, A.A.S.A. members work together to plan fundraisers to financially underwrite a dance that is traditionally held late in the spring semester. Although white students perceive black students to be a group marked solely by skin color, as I visited the weekly A.A.S.A. meetings, I saw individual personalities, skill levels, verbal abilities, and humorist acts. I sensed a cohesiveness among the group and a sense of mutual support. A black student said, regarding working with two other black students to get other students to come to an A.A.S.A. meeting, “It's like a race to see who can get the most recruits right.... to get to come to the [A.A.S.A.] meeting.”

The A.A.S.A., in white students' perception, segregates black from white. A white student said:

I did see that African American Associate Club. It struck me as a self-segregating thing because of my previous experience. Never going to get along, or see people as they are, if you keep on making that distinction.

Alternatively, a black student said:

I don't see it as a divisive thing. More like to get a little more support to the African American person. Just because with our background, it's not always the best – pretty much to help them out. I guess to help them locate other people. I guess it would be a way to help them stay in touch with their culture, and I guess for support.

Juxtaposing the above white and black perception of the A.A.S.A., an irony emerges. The A.A.S.A. was formed in response to comfort issues among black students at this predominantly white campus. However, this very mechanism, designed and orchestrated by black students to deal with alienating and excluding social conditions wrought by white people, is seen by white students as unnecessary as it blocks the integration of white and black students. The irony is that black students are forced to find comfort among themselves and not their campus peer group of all students. Non-attendance at the African American Student Association by white students clearly demonstrates white students discomfort with “crossing the line” and interacting with black students in the only predominantly black group setting on campus. Thus, in analyzing the function of the A.A.S.A., this student group serves three purposes. Contextually, the A.A.S.A. strengthens ingroup solidarity for black

students, isolates them from white students, and perpetuates the racial divide between the two groups.

The Black Group and White Individuals

Black students are excluded and alienated by the white critical mass. The 5% black population is not a threat to the large critical white mass. The following scenario illustrates the power of the white critical mass. A black student said, “I’m the only one in my class.” In this same class a white student said aloud, “when the people [i.e. black] came over in the boat he [this white student] wishes they all would have died.” In our interview, the black student commented on this and responded, “when each class probably has at least two or three blacks in it, you wouldn’t hear someone say a comment like that because then there would be two or three people after that one [white] person.” This scenario is in line with Scheurich’s (1993) notion that white’s sense of individualism masks racial positionality:

racism’s grouping effect and the double consciousness it produces, people of color are not as seduced by the idea of individualism. People of color, through their social positioned experience, know that they are a racialized group rather than simply separate individuals. (p. 7)

Black students desire to express individuality, as expressed above, yet they perceive themselves as a group with a shared history of oppression. Black and white group identities compete on campus but the dominant white identity consistently wins. Whites subordinate blacks in the context of social networks on campus. White students believe black people navigate towards white people in order to have a social

network. No white or black student reported the migration of white students toward black students. White students absorb black students into their majority racial group.

In their perception, white students are not a group, they are individuals. White students are not aware of the impact their critical white mass has on black students at the campus. This impact demonstrates three cultural components. First, the impact demonstrates the white race *was* a group at the campus. Second, this white race group is invisible. Third, and ironically, white students, as a group, racialize black students as a group.

As Tatum (1999) suggests, it is acceptable to be in a homogenous group and that homogenous groups formed along racial lines are subject to being perceived as a clique and members feel alienated. This is true in this study but only with black students. The white critical mass places black students in an awkward social position. Moreover, a very small presence of black faculty and staff intensifies black alienation and exclusion.

Adding age into the social dynamic, black and white traditional aged students hold the perception that an individual's personality is a mitigating factor in navigating the social structure on campus. Traditional aged black and white students identify "the personal choice" of the individual (black or white) and her or his attitude as a factor in deciding whether to interact with others of the same or different race. Non-traditional aged students historicize race and acknowledge a group dynamic between the races. However, even among non-traditional aged students, black non-traditional aged students convey the impact of a dominant race group on a non-dominant group whereas white non-traditional aged students did not.

Weak Ties

On the surface, all appears quiet and calm at the campus. Macro-aggressions are absent. However, there is a huge disconnect between black and white racial groups. This disconnect is invisible. Coupled with the strong ties that perpetuate intra-race solidarity is the absence of weak ties that allow information to flow between racial groups.

Weak ties exist *within* both black and white student groups. Weak ties, however, that link black and white racial groups are missing. Granovetter (1973) suggests that a weak tie is a bridge if it serves as the only link between *two* groups. Black and white students already have strong and weak intra-racial ties and have little reason to form weak ties with each other. However, black students, due to their 5% presence on campus, have a limited black social network and have to have contact with white persons. Even if black students choose not to interact with white students, they still are in the presence of predominantly white faculty, administration, and staff.

Much like the “you come to leave” student culture *fosters* strong tie development, this same cultural component *prevents* weak tie development across racial lines. This makes sense in light of Granovetter’s (1973) defining criterion for the strength of a tie. Students limit themselves to social interaction because of responsibilities external to the institution. Among the four characteristics defining a strong tie [amount of time, emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and reciprocal services], all are minimized along racial lines except the amount of time. This is paradoxical.

Time. Students spend 16 weeks together, three hours per week. However, students seek inclusion with members of their own racial group inside and outside of

the classroom. This is not a surprise. White cliques draw the attention of traditional-aged white students at the campus. From these core cliques, weak ties form among white students who are asked to join in. Similarly, black students form weak ties through the A.A.S.A. with other black students. A core clique of black students is not present at the campus but factors outlined above indicate the ingroup solidarity of black students produces common bonds and therefore strengthens these bonds through the four prongs indicative of the strength of a tie.

Interaction among students rarely extends beyond the campus. More specifically, black and white student relationships formed in the classroom typically remain there. When class is over, black and white students go their separate ways and connect with others in their racial group. The majority of interaction between black and white students on campus, outside of the class setting, occurs in the hallway while waiting for a class to begin.

Emotional Intensity. Emotional intensity is limited as well. Instances of emotional intensity are negative in nature and cause black and white students to find comfort in their intra-racial group ties. For example, a black student reported:

like everyday I'm biting my tongue. We have some students [white] in there that are pretty ignorant about racial diversity. Some of the comments they've said are pretty racial I just have to ignore them basically.

Another black student said, "the breaks were terrible. I was by myself. Either I'd stay where I was seated or go to the bathroom." A white student said, "What I've found is really creating a larger division is talking about the conflict or past conflicts or stuff that is in disagreement between the two races."

Reciprocity. The absence of opportunities and conditions to form weak ties render limited opportunities for reciprocity. Black and white students have little to offer each other. In the case of sharing notes, black students find white students not always sharing with them. A black student said:

The teacher told me to get the notes from somebody else. I talked to him (i.e. the white student) and said, "Can I get yesterday's notes from you" and he just looked at me like... I could tell he didn't want to give them to me.

Inter-racial awareness and understanding are not in the mind of white student as they are in the mind of black students. White students attend the campus without having to interact with others racially different from themselves. However, black students, due to a small minority presence, have to interact with white students, faculty and staff. Black students have to negotiate black and white social contexts. If a white student desires to interact with other students, he or she has a choice. This choice among white students expresses itself through association with a white group of friends.

Reciprocity is a big thing within groups. White students support white students and black students support black students. Reciprocity manifests itself through the comfort found in a clique. Reciprocity also manifests itself for black students through the A.A.S.A.. The absence of weak ties between black and white racial groups inhibit inter-racial reciprocity.

Black and white students bring a rich cultural history to the campus. However, avoiding contact with others of a different race masks the issue of white discomfort and perpetuates missed opportunities to gain awareness of others through increased

interaction. The absence of forming connections among racial groups, in this case white to black students, contributes to unawareness of the lives and experiences of others who differ racially.

Intimacy (mutual confiding). The absence of weak ties fed by ignorance and apathy clearly keep inter-racial intimacy, as expressed through mutual confiding, to a bare minimum. White students provide little evidence of attempts to connect with black students. Although a white student said, “the classroom is the main thing that brings blacks and whites together,” another white student said:

I do see a lot of people come in with groups before class and they just go sit around and sit in their little square, just kind of over there...you see people [a black student] come in and they’re just like...look around say I’ll sit over here....away from everybody else.

White students indicate they spent most of their time outside of class with other white students. A white student said, “after class we go our separate ways.” From the black student view, this heightens racial alienation and diminishes comfort. White and black persons are friendly with each other but deeper issues are not shared because there are no formal or informal settings in which to have such a dialogue.

A white student said, “I think it just comes right down to the people [white people/person] as far as like just kind of opening up and saying come on over let’s play a game or something. I don’t know if they [black students] would respond that well.” A black student articulated:

I have noticed the biggest hindrance is that people either do not know how to get to know people and just have relationships. That’s going to be the bottom line -

that a lot of people do not know how to open themselves up to be able to communicate with another person – and anybody whether they're black, white, Asian, West Indian, whatever, they want to be understood that's human nature.

Nonetheless, race inhibits mutual confiding. At least to white students, race does not matter at this campus yet it keeps black and white students apart. A white student said:

As far as between like blacks and whites... we start talking about the differences in cultures or how whites have oppressed blacks or blacks have fought back or whatever you want to call it, I think that tends to sep... [was going to say separate] to create a larger division between the two.

Although a few black and white students individually express the benefits of confiding across racial lines, neither black nor white students express a strong desire to reach out across racial lines at the campus and to invest time to learn about differences associated with race. However, since there are a small number of black persons at the campus, a lack of understanding and ignorance of black people (i.e. limited exposure to either black students or groups of black people through weak ties) plays a critical role in perpetuating the divide between black and white students.

Classroom Connections

The interviews reveal that the classroom is the focal point of social interaction at this “you come to leave” institution. At first blush, the classroom provides the opportunity for students to development weak ties. Faculty are touted as the center

piece of the institution. A white student said, “finding common ground is a big step in that and a lot of times you know the teacher can be the bridge between the people that wouldn’t otherwise talk, just by bringing up discussion.” Students report that in classes where their faculty member created a network in the classroom by fostering interpersonal dialogue and group projects, they feel more comfortable talking to each other. Faculty are touted as providing opportunities for students to find common ground such as identifying one’s favorite food upon calling roll. A white student experiences increased comfort knowing that others in the class, regardless of race, have something in common. A white student said:

just get little discussions going like a little discussion everyday where people can get to know each other more and more, likes/dislikes, opinions, and so on and so forth, and that kind of breaks the ice. I think you find you have more in common then you thought you did.

This connecting activity, however, is not strong enough to override the racial group differences in the instance of race-related dialogue. This same white student who touts the benefit of getting to know others, emphatically said, “But that’s what I’ve found is really creating a larger division is talking about the conflict or past conflicts or stuff that is in disagreement between the two races.” This is consistent with Whitt’s (2001) conclusion that discussions about diversity and racism tend to be comfortable providing they did not require a lot of change on the part of the dominant race. Accordingly, a white student claims it is time for black persons to drop the race problem and move on in life. This student is blind to the racism of his or her dominant racial group (Sheurich, 1993). This same white student added, “I think a lot

of times people [black people] try to hold grudges when they can push past those then they could really get to know each other better.” It is easy for this representative of the dominant race to remedy this micro-macro level race problem in prescribing black students to simply let go of the problem.

Although the classroom is central to tie formation, it still falls short.

Contextually, the data support opportunities for weak tie development, but a disconnect occurs. A black student articulated this notion:

it just seems like the blacks want to stay with the blacks and the whites want to be with the whites and the only thing that is a common interest is the class itself. You really won't see them talking to each other outside of that. It's just basically what you think of this class, or how are you studying or something like that...kinda' just surface talk I would call it.

Another black student identified the same issue:

They probably just met 'em [black and white] through the class... so that's probably where they are comfortable at... you know, in the classroom. And when they leave class, somebody's probably already waitin' on 'em that they've know for awhile [of the same race] so they go hang out with them cause it's more comfortable hanging out with them rather than with someone they just met.

Black and white students share race-related thoughts in class but Dubois' (1902) color-line becomes apparent. A black student said:

What I think is there is going to be some division because people perceive what the other race is. Until they cross that line and get to know the person instead of the African American label, there's a gap.

Segregated dialogue reinforces strong ties within both racial groups. This is consistent with Locke and Kiselica (1999) who indicate the difficulty in teaching about racism due to the emotional nature associated with the issue. Albeit black and white students are “together” in one room, segregation prevails. This is similar to Granovetter’s (1986) study, “though classes are integrated, desegregation may be less than meets the eye” (p. 83).

Students who are enrolled in technical/occupational programs, provide partial exception to the racial divide referenced above. Black and white technical and occupational program students in the study developed weak tie relationships. Although each student is responsible for his or her own academic performance, students took the same courses in the same semester. These students formed study groups to help each other get through the coursework. This sequential fashion of the curriculum serves as a superordinate goal (Brehm & Kassin, 1996) that allows students to dialogue and share course related information and even personal information.

Other connecting activities that could bridge racial groups together are absent at the campus. The literature indicates that a variety of social roles such as high school counselors and children serve as weak ties in social environments linking individuals with others in relevant communities (Logan & Spitze, 1994; Wells & Crain, 1994). In this study, bridges between black and white students are absent on the campus. Black and white students participate together in on-campus learning opportunities, including the classroom. However, the absence of weak ties inhibits the transmission of culturally relevant information between black and white students. This blocks the

transmission of information that could increase awareness and understanding among those who differ racially.

Although black and white students occasionally interact, black and white student groups are kept apart through the absence of weak ties. Dialogue between black and white students is superficial in nature. Race-related dialogue, when it occurs at the campus, perpetuates the segregation of these two racial groups. The interviews reveal, for example, that racial division occurs when issues are raised such as “reparations” for descendants of black slaves. The need and ramification of race-related dialogue falls along racial lines. A black student, tapping into the notion of mutual confiding, reported “but if another person doesn’t take the time to ask this person ‘who are you?’ ‘what’s your story?’ ‘what do you like to do?’ then you’ll remain segregated.” A white student reported, “the only thing I have found that really drives people apart is when something is brought up that has specifically to do with race.”

Black students hold the perception that the campus is a place where they feel alienated and excluded. This information, however, is not shared with white students. Weak ties that bridge white and black groups through which this type of information can flow did not exist. The lack of weak ties between black and white students awkwardly position both black and white student groups. This observation is consistent with Granovetter’s (1973) hypothesis bridging dyadic ties to larger group social structures. Black students are awkwardly positioned by the larger white majority to find comfort by being alone, attending a African American Student

Association meeting, hanging out with small dyads of black students, or interacting with white students.

Consistent with strength of ties research, the absence of weak ties that link racial groups increase the opportunity for persons to misgauge the intentions of others (Coser, 1975). Misunderstandings result. The interviews reveal that both black and white students possess race specific information and values not held by the other group. However, the absence of weak ties fosters the absence of shared information, awareness, and understanding of race-related information between white and black students at the campus. Rather, black and white race groups hold onto this information through strong ties.

Black students articulated to me, as the researcher, their shared sense of history as a minority group. Yet, black and white students do not form strong ties through which they could pass race specific information to members of another race. Therefore, white students have a limited information base about black students as individuals and as a racialized group. In addition, white students lack insight on how a dominant white race can impact a non-dominant race group. Rather, white students rely on stereotypes garnered from media sources and limited life experiences with black persons to understand them. Therefore, as Coser (1975) suggests, in the absence of ties, white students are not equipped to gauge the intentions of black students.

The Researcher and Weak Ties

Analysis of my role as the researcher leads me to conclude that I served as a weak tie in this study. My methodology allowed me to develop rapport with the participants through multiple contacts. I visited with each student at least three times and in some instances four or five. These multiple contacts fostered familiarity and trust that helped me obtain information. Both black and white students reported they shared information that they had not expected to share but felt comfortable with doing so. In the instance of black students, this encourages me because black students instill their trust in me. Through mutual sharing, black and white students were better equipped to gauge my intentions as one who was interested and concerned with racial comfort at the campus. The interview process increased the awareness, particularly among white students, of race and its role in interpersonal relationships. Approaching both black and white students after the interviews were over was much easier having spent time in dialogue about racial issues.

Students in the classrooms achieve only one of the four criterion that indicate movement towards developing a tie – amount of time. The students are lacking the emotional intensity, intimacy (mutual confiding), and reciprocal services found in stronger ties. The lack of these three criterion inhibits tie development in the classroom. As the researcher, however, I met the four criteria and developed weak ties between the participants and myself. I spent less time with students than they would with each other throughout a semester in class, but the emotional intensity was high (e.g. one student wanted to make sure the door was closed when sharing information), mutual confiding occurred (e.g., I was told by several black students

that they shared information they normally would not share), and reciprocal services were present after the initial interviews as evidenced by students' willingness to participate in follow up interviews.

During the interviews, both white and black students accepted the questions asked and commented that the questions were appropriate and illuminated their thinking. My lack of weak ties with black students before to this study changed as a result of the data collection process. I believe the weak ties I formed with all students through this process allowed me to understand better the actions of both black and white students. The probability of my misgauging the intentions of black and white students has diminished. As a weak tie, I can now serve as a bridge between black and white student groups. My increased familiarity and trust with black and white students will allow me to address multi-racial groups more comfortably, address black and white students individually or as a group more comfortably, and confidently present to the college the findings of this study.

Micro-Macro Social Context & the Strength of Ties

At the campus, ties are either strong, weak, or absent (Granovetter, 1973). When friendship circles partially overlap, weak ties have strength in diffusing information. This means individuals will receive information not commonly known among their circle of friends. Strong ties reproduce the same information within the groups. As demonstrated in Chapter I, between 1993 and the time of this study, it was documented that an absence of racial comfort exist among black students at this campus. This study demonstrates the presence of strong ties *within* black and white

racial groups and the absence of weak ties *between* these groups and how these ties foster black students' sense of exclusion and alienation.

Understanding larger scale social patterns by examining smaller scale dyadic interactions is at the heart of Perpetuation Theory and Strength of Ties. These micro and macro levels of analysis work well to understand the racial dynamics at the Spruce campus. Six examples illustrate this micro-macro analysis.

First, traditional-aged students' believe that individuals are the arbiters of racial comfort. Juxtaposed against this is the non-traditional age students' group-based understanding of racial comfort. This illustrates the micro-macro analysis. Second, the dyadic black-white interaction when white persons ask black students for the "black point of view" intensifies the black-white group stratification on campus. Third, white individualism and its alter-ego group status demonstrate how individual white action links to larger scale white group behavior patterns. Fourth, the racial divide that occurs in the classroom and how black and white students would "go their own ways" after class, demonstrates how relationships at the dyadic level translate into a large scale patterns on campus. Fifth, talking in class about past racial conflicts segregates students, making clear, that smaller in-class cross-race discussions serve to keep black and white students apart, not only in the classroom but once they leave the classroom. Finally, and similarly, the simplistic, white students' prescription of letting the racial past go, feeds small scale interactions in class discussion that further segregates black and white students on the campus.

Symbolic Interactionism

Blumer's (1969) symbolic interactionism serves to provide a broader, theoretical explanation to the meaning of skin color and how it informs the presence and absence of ties. As seen in the data, ties form along black and white racial lines. Since race is a social construction (Cameron & Wycoff, 1998; Lopez, 2000; Omi & Winant, 1994; Tatum, 1999), subsequent social behaviors are predicated on this construction.

Blumer suggested that:

symbolic interactionism rests ... on three simple premises. The first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.... The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters. (p. 2)

The meaning of things, or objects, rests in the individual yet the meaning is shaped by the interaction of others in relation to the object. For example, Blumer asserts, "the members of an ethnic group may be seen as a different kind of object by members of other groups" (p. 11). In this study, skin color informs students' decisions to form or not form ties with members of the other racial group. White students' desire to connect with other white students is linked to perceived similarities or differences in skin color. Black students' conflict with individuality versus representing their race is predicated on the meaning skin color had for both black and white students.

Thus, symbolic interactionism adds a theoretical perspective to help contextualize the meaning of race as it plays out through strong and weak ties. Strength of Ties and Perpetuation Theory account for interpersonal interaction and its impact on broader social contexts. Perpetuation Theory accounts for a broader sociological understanding of racial interaction. Strength of Ties theory reveals the embedded interpersonal links, or lack thereof, that perpetuate the status quo of race relations.

Summary

This chapter analyzed the data through the combined theoretical lenses of Strength of Ties and Perpetuation Theory. Specifically, the inherent racial conflict brought to the campus and the related strong intra-racial group ties and the absence of weak ties perpetuates comfort *within* race groups and discomfort *between* race groups. In this social context, weak ties are difficult to form.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND COMMENTARY

The community college is the higher education institution of choice for the majority of students of color. Due to location, costs and open admission requirements, access to the community college is easier than to regional and comprehensive institutions. Yet, nationally, for black students, lower transfer rates from community colleges and lower credit hour completion rates ghettoize the community college. A whole body of research supports the need for heightened awareness about diversity and racism on the American community college campus (AACC, 1993, 1995; Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000).

While experts in the field recognize the ideals for diversity on college campuses, there is a paucity of research in higher education at the community college level addressing the interaction of students across racial lines. Shaw, Valadez and Rhoads (1999) indicate that education researchers tend to ignore community colleges and “our knowledge of the inner workings of community colleges remains rudimentary, in large part due to the macro-level, often quantitative analyses that have dominated research on these institutions” (p. 2).

These quantitative studies tell us “what” but not “why.” It is entirely possible that students of color drop out of college due to discomfort that is fostered by invisible, exclusionary social mechanisms. This study looked qualitatively at the micro and macro social levels operating at a community college campus.

Summary of the Study

This study was conducted at a community college in the southwest region of the United States during the 2001-2002 school year. Students can earn an Associate in Art/Science degree, an Associate in Applied Science or Certificate of Achievement in a Technical-Occupational field of study. This study focused on one campus of a multi-campus system yet collected perspectives from students who represented all four campuses. The Spruce campus was chosen based on a preliminary study that revealed diminished comfort levels among its black students.

Problem of Study

Nothing at the campus *appeared* to be happening that indicated race-related problems, at least from a white perspective. However, it is clear from a documented nine-year period, from 1993 to 2002, the reality from the black student point of view indicates that an absence of comfort exists among black students at the Spruce campus. I speculated that the invisibility of racial comfort and discomfort at the campus was brought from the community and perpetuated at the campus through the strong and weak ties formed and perpetuated among its students.

Purpose and Research Objectives

This study examined the invisibility of racial comfort and discomfort at a predominantly white community college campus through the lenses of Strength of Ties (Granovetter, 1973) and Perpetuation Theory (Braddock, 1980). This study investigated the impact of ties formed by black and white students with each other in order to understand how these ties perpetuated racial comfort and discomfort at the campus. Specifically, the following objectives were met in this study:

1. Identified and discussed comfort and discomfort among black and white student race groups.
2. Analyzed ties using Strength of Ties and Perpetuation Theory to understand their impact on comfort and discomfort at the campus;
3. Speculated on the impact these ties may have on future efforts to create a sense of comfort at the campus and described other realities;
4. Assessed the utility of Strength of Ties and Perpetuation Theory in understanding comfort and discomfort at this community college.

To garner a broader perspective and illuminate the problem of study, a variety of data sources and data collection strategies were employed.

Data Needs and Sources

Because the purpose of the study was to investigate comfort and discomfort of black and white students, the primary data source was the students. Through responses gained from semi-structured, one-on-one interviews, black and white

students provided substance to the social networks between black and white students at the campus.

Data Collection Strategies

I used semi-structured interviews; held focus groups; observed students interacting on campus; and reviewed institutional documents. The availability, stability, richness and nonreactive nature of these strategies added additional credibility to the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The data was then presented in a structured format divided among themes that emerged from the data.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data was organized into themes that exposed comfort within black and white race groups as well as between these two race groups. Using Granovetter's (1973) Strength of Ties theory as a template, the presence and absence of ties were revealed through student's responses to questions regarding interpersonal relationships on campus. Braddock's (1980) Perpetuation Theory serves as a theoretical lens through which students' racial ideologies and prior inter-racial exposure impact the formation of weak and strong ties.

Summary of the Findings

The findings emerge from data obtained through semi-structured interviews, focus groups, participant observation, non-participant observation, and review of select institutional documents. The bulk of the data was from the semi-structured interviews. The rationale for this was to focus on the voice of the student in order to

garner their realities regarding inter-racial student interaction at the campus. Students represented traditional and non-traditional age groups, female and male, black and white, and technical and transfer degree programs. All respondents were cordial and willing to share information pertaining to questions asked in the interview.

The findings reveal racial conflict in the community is brought to the campus and is perpetuated by the absence of communication paths that could transmit intra-racial group information across racial lines and foster opportunities to increase inter-racial awareness and understanding. More specifically, this study demonstrates strong ties exist within racial groups and weak ties are limited between black and white students. The absence of weak ties inhibits the diffusion of information. In the instance of two racial groups with no weak ties, a racial divide is perpetuated. As evidenced in this study and consistent with Steinhorn and Diggs-Brown (2000), national desegregation and integration efforts stemming from the mid 1950s are illusory. Black and white students reside in the same classroom yet are worlds apart.

At the Spruce campus students spend the majority of their time on campus in the classroom. Consequently, the classroom bears the burden as the primary place students have extended periods of contact. Students deem the faculty member to be the person with the most impact on students and who serves to connect students that otherwise would not be connected. Even in this predicament, black and white students did not form weak ties in the classroom. Social conditions are in place that perpetuate a racial disconnect: a large white critical mass, a small minority presence of black students, and the “you come to leave” culture. Age is an additional finding that makes race relations more complex.

White Critical Mass

The white critical mass renders itself racially invisible. It is held together by a strong network of strong and weak ties. Strong ties exist in traditional-aged white cliques. These cliques link to the critical white mass through the weak ties of intra-racial similarity. In such a large critical mass, race becomes invisible. The white critical mass remedies external racial threats to itself through subtle exclusionary mechanisms, such as not forming weak ties with black students outside of class, not sharing class notes, or hanging out with a white clique.

By virtue of the demographics, white students do not have to interact with black students on campus. Whereas it is almost impossible for black students to attend campus without having to interact with white students. This large critical white mass awkwardly positions black students leading black students to find inclusion and connection by either being alone, attending African American Student Association (A.A.S.A.) meetings, hanging out with small groups of black students, or interacting with white students.

Small Minority of Black Students

The small presence of black students at the campus ironically and paradoxically serves to support the disconnect at the Spruce campus. The A.A.S.A. provides comfort through inclusion and connection for black students and reduces feelings of alienation and exclusion. White students think, however, this group segregates black students from white students and they question the need to have such a group. An issue black students report that white students did not, is that of a conflict of black

individuality versus representing the black race. While black students simply want to go to college and learn, they have an additional pressure to show white students they are capable and worthy of being at this college.

Black students are also torn when white persons ask them to provide the “black point of view.” This robs black students’ individuality and forces them to perform and provide a good impression that contradicts whites’ stereotypes of blacks being incompetent. Black students are not only on a mission to learn and be productive, educated citizens, but are on a mission to be individuals *and* to attempt to eradicate negative stereotyping.

The absence of weak ties bridging racial groups fosters conditions to rely on stereotypes formed through limited exposure to and experiences with members of a different racial group. According to ties theory (Granovetter, 1973), the absence of weak ties bridging racial groups hinders the transmission of cultural information that is typically communicated through strong ties with members of one’s own racial group. At this campus, weak ties could serve as communication paths to transmit cultural information between black and white students. Through the absence of weak tie formation by individuals from the white critical mass, this translates into larger scale patterns of segregated black and white groups on campus. Black students, as individuals and as a racial group, are basically left alone to fend for themselves. Only a small number of black faculty, professional staff, and administrators are employed at the campus that could offer support.

“You come to leave” Culture

The “you come to leave” student culture masks the subtlety of the racial disconnect on campus. Clearly, students are not on campus for great lengths of time. Outside of class attendance, students spend time in labs and minimal time visiting or studying in student seating areas. Nonetheless, when given an opportunity for students to spend time with others, the white critical mass relies on itself to provide a network of relationships to the subtle exclusion and alienation of black students. And to add salt to the wound, black students who continue the tradition of the A.A.S.A. student organization are seen as perpetuators of segregation and symbolize separation.

Age

The race issue at the campus is complex because of the differing views of traditional-aged and nontraditional aged students. Black and white traditional-aged students view the individual as the arbiter of good or bad race relations and neglect a group explanation for the state of race relations. These students’ generation has not experienced more overt instances of discrimination such as separate eating establishments for black and white patrons. Alternatively, older non-traditional age students have experienced blatant, discriminatory acts. Non-traditional aged students acknowledge racial grouping and how this provides explanation for strained racial relations at the campus.

Conclusions

Based on the problem of study, literature, data, and data analysis, I conclude that race is an invisible problem at this predominantly white community college campus. The problem stems from the social dynamics black and white students produce through the ties they bring to the campus and the ties they form on campus.

The absence of weak ties between black and white students translates into the absence of bridging weak ties between black and white student groups. Intra-racial ties on campus inhibit opportunities for inter-racial communication at the individual level, inhibiting inter-racial communication opportunities at the group level. Intra-racial strong and weak ties operate to isolate and solidify black and white racial groups. Therefore, coupling the absence of weak inter-racial ties at the dyadic, one-on-one level, with the absence of bridging weak ties between black and white student groups, perpetuates the disconnect between black and white students.

The white critical mass on the campus perpetuates a “color-blind” racial ideology. An ideology that race does not matter at the campus. This “color-blindness” backfires as it segregates white students from black students. On an individual (micro) level, white students are unaware that not forming ties with black students segregates them from black students. On a group (macro) level, the comfort found in white cliques precludes opportunities to interact and form ties with black students. This white critical mass tacitly breeds white solidarity that excludes, alienates, and marginalizes black students. The comfort of a black or white student found by remaining in their own racial group keeps inter-racial ties from forming.

Specifically, white students are unaware of their impact on black students as individuals and as a group. White students, through subtle ways, rob black students of their individuality by positioning them as similar members of a racial group. Black students are caught between a perceived need to represent their race yet at the same time they desire individuality. Black students are trapped between an intra-racial and inter-racial group identity, and an individual identity, all shaped by a dominant race culture.

White students perceive black groups, such as the A.A.S.A, as an offense to the white student population. White students present a social paradox on campus. They segregate themselves through subtle means, yet are offended by black students' attempts to have their own sense of identity as expressed in the A.A.S.A.. The question, "So why go off and form a support group?," captures the unawareness and ignorance of white students. White students holding black students responsible for this perceived segregating act actually shifts the problem away from white students, placing blame on black students. This culture ghettoizes black students. Black students are trapped. White students do not reach out to them. Black students' attempts to bring comfort to their race are thwarted by white students. The means black students use to deal with the large white critical mass support white students' racial ideology that "we are all the same – so why are you, black students, separating yourselves from us?" In essence, white students subordinate black students as a racial group by blaming them for segregating themselves from white students.

Race is an invisible problem at the Spruce campus. The stated problem in this study indicates a lack of comfort is present among black students at the Spruce

campus. This is, in part, explained by the ties that perpetuate feelings of alienation and exclusion among black students. During my time employed at this campus, people ignored racial comfort issues. No one talked about it and no one asked about it. The results of this study demonstrate that the notion that race is not a problem at this campus is simply not true. I concur with the black professor of sociology who claims there is an absence of comfort among black students at the campus.

It is tempting to conjecture, based on the findings of this study, that race-related issues identified in this study transfer to community colleges across the country. However, the findings of this study are contextually bound. Transferability of the findings are threatened by the greater community setting in which the study took place. The community in which the study took place is wrought with racial tension. A community college that exists in a community that is not as laden with racial tension may express itself differently at its own community college. Therefore, exercising caution in assuming the findings of this study would be found across all community college contexts is in order. In addition, the variance in the racial composition of faculty, staff and administration at other community colleges, serves to threaten the transferability of the results of this study to other colleges.

Implications

A research study should inform three unique sources. These include educational theory, research, and practice. The findings of this study accomplish this.

Theory

This study coupled Strength of Ties (Granovetter, 1973) and Perpetuation Theory (Braddock, 1980) to examine racial conflict at a community college. Application of these two theoretical lenses to the study of higher education adds more depth to the literature and theory base. This study demonstrates the usefulness of these two theories for studying social phenomenon in educational settings by considering the impact of one-on-one relationships and how these dyadic relationships translate into larger scale behavior patterns. In addition, this study broadens Perpetuation Theory's traditional focus on African American and Latino students to Caucasian students.

As seen in Chapter II, the research base using Granovetter's (1973) theory to explore racial dynamics at community colleges is limited. This study expands the ties theory literature base. Later in this chapter, I propose a model demonstrating the creation of a new network of inter-racial weak ties from the context of absent inter-racial group weak ties. Based on the findings from this study, I propose to clarify Strength of Ties theory by advocating a fourth division of ties. I speculate that absent ties, as seen in this study, are ties that possess an invisible nature formed by the powerful symbol of skin color. This new division of ties is *race-embedded ties*. A black or white person approaching another person with a different skin color, racializes that person, connecting him or her to a racial group. Thus, this provides a decision point for tie formation. I speculate that insecurity with other races is proportionate to one's exposure to other race groups. Parham (1993) claimed that white people rarely navigate towards black people. They would rather protect their own privilege in society. It is possible that white people selectively form ties with

each other, not only to seek economic gain through occupational status (Granovetter, 1995), but to protect their race-based privilege in society.

Research

This study adds to the community college research literature base. This study illustrates the impact of a non-residential institution on social relationships. This study considers how race relations from the community are perpetuated locally through the community college. In particular, it demonstrates how local racial ideologies enter the community college and impact social relationships on the campus. This study is particularly useful for communities whose racial demographics reflect a large, single race majority. More specifically, this study adds depth to community college research literature that focuses on age and race. This study provides data on which to construct a survey instrument useful in subsequent quantitative and qualitative research. Majority group norm based instruments do not accurately reflect the intentions of students of color (Schwitzer, 1999). Thus, an instrument rooted in the voice of black students, garnered through qualitative research methods, would be of practical significance.

Practice

This study informs educational practice, particularly at the site of this study. The multi-racial group concept presented in the commentary section of this chapter could serve as a point of origination for a richer network of weak ties. This multi-racial group could be a useful tool to other higher education institutions experiencing

similar race-related issues. More broadly, this study informs the field of education calling for a continued practical focus on race and the community college. The literature demonstrates that students of color are less likely to complete an associate degree let alone a baccalaureate degree. Exploring reasons for lower transfer rates calls for research that explores, identifies, and uncovers embedded social structures that allow disparate transfer rates to continue.

Recommendations

Given the data and its analysis and interpretation, four recommendations emerge from this study: informing stakeholders, forming a multi-racial group, breadth of design, and a model for linking theory to practical change.

Informing Stakeholders

Stakeholders, such as administration, faculty, support staff, and students will be informed of the findings of this study as appropriate. The sensitive nature of race relations, particularly in a predominantly single race majority, adds a precarious edge to the dispensing of these findings. Awareness of the findings could promote dialogue about the theoretical underpinnings of the study.

The irony in the *strength* of weak ties appears contradictory to conventional wisdom of strong ties and perceived benefits of knowing others. Granovetter (1983) asserts there is an inherent weakness in strong ties in terms of diffusing information. Through dialogue with select black and white individuals at the campus regarding the findings of this study, I found that the theoretical lenses in this study divert the focus from skin color to a focus on social structures. This partially eliminates the emotive

nature common to race related dialogue. Alternatively, any resistance to, or disagreement with the theoretical lenses or the findings of this study, could foster a more intense, time consuming, and intimate dialogue. As Granovetter (1973) would predict, these dialogues could build weak ties with others at the college. Ironically, this could serve to fulfill Granovetter's theory. In the discussion of this study with a multi-racial group, weak ties begin to form, especially as it pertains to race, without racial stereotypes or prejudices brought to the conversation.

Forming a Multi-Racial Group

The embeddedness of the present tie structure between black and white students is ingrained and self-perpetuating. Thus change will require an individual or small group of individuals to intentionally form weak inter-racial ties. The individual impacts a small circle of individuals which then impacts their related social circles. The implications are nothing short of a small pebble dropping into the water. The ripple effect simply occurs. However, aiming intentional strategies at forming new inter-racial weak ties could help insure their embeddedness at the campus.

During the data collection process, I personally transformed from one whose ties with black students were absent to the formation of weak ties with black students by following Granovetter's (1973) criterion for the strength of ties. As Granovetter would predict, through my multiple contacts with students and the sharing of stories I became more connected with them, forming weak ties.

Creating a network that benefits more than one racial group would require efforts by members of all racial groups who wish to bridge differences. Networks are

naturally self-serving and benefit those who are apart of them. A more inclusive network would require creating new networks to replace the current networks that perpetuate racially inclusive networks. The identity of each racial group would be maintained in the process.

Theoretically, as this group forms, members could form weak ties among themselves. Subsequently, the members of this multi-racial group would serve as weak ties to black and white racial groups on the campus. Not only would members of this multi-racial group be connected to each other through weak ties, but the weak ties linking them to each others friendship circles would provide strength to the social network across racial lines at the campus. Information exchange could occur more freely. Gauging the intentions of others could be diminished and comfort levels of black and white students could increase.

Breadth of Design

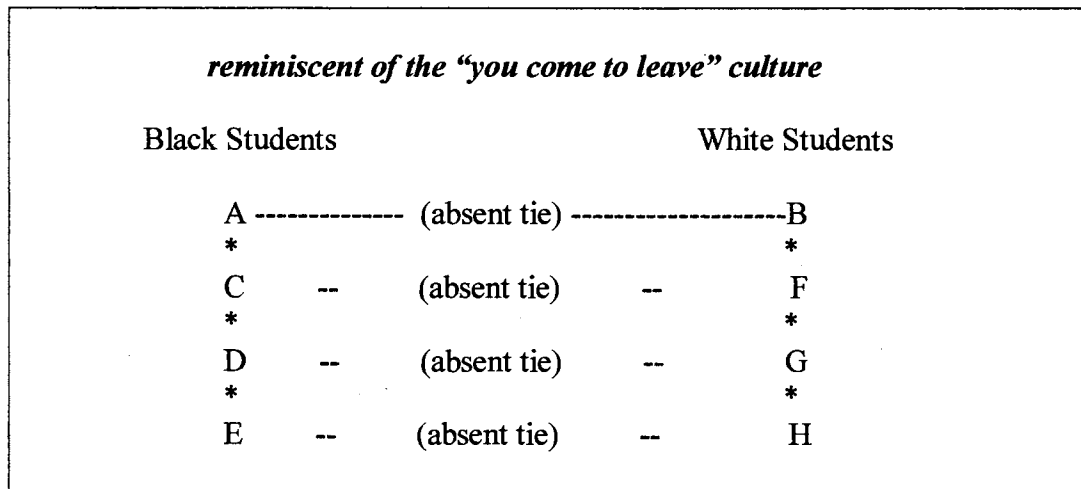
To broaden this study, I recommend four strategies. First, interview faculty, staff and administration in order to further triangulate data sets and discover additional truths could add more credibility to the study. Second, survey community members regarding their comfort levels and ties within the community in order to understand the severity of racial divisions. Third, interview students who represent other student of color groups in order to assess if the problem of race relations at the campus extends beyond black and white students. Fourth, interview and observe students, faculty, staff and administrators at other community colleges regionally and nationally to assess if the results of this study are isolated to this campus.

Linking Theory to Practical Change

The nature of the information shared by black and white students in the interviews, was not shared between white and black students on campus. Black students, for example, communicated feelings of oppression, lack of understanding, and feelings of exclusion and alienation. Alternatively, white students told me about being tired of hearing about a racialized past and wished we all could just move on. White students did not grasp the historic black past as much as black students wished they could. These serious issues were not discussed at black and white dyadic levels. The issues, however, seep through to the larger racial group social structures on campus. Weak ties could bridge the two groups allowing culturally relevant information to be shared. Getting to that point by using ties theory as a strategy to create change is the focus of the following series of figures.

Under the current conditions at the campus, weak ties between black and white students, in general, are absent. This is reminiscent of the “you come to leave” culture. Figure 1 depicts the tie formation that results from the current status of race relations between black and white students at the campus.

If a tie were absent between A and B then, according to Strength of Ties theory (Granovetter, 1973), black students C, D, and E, who know A and each other, will not likely communicate with white students B, F, G, and H and vice versa. In the absence of weak ties, their friendship circles are unlikely to overlap.

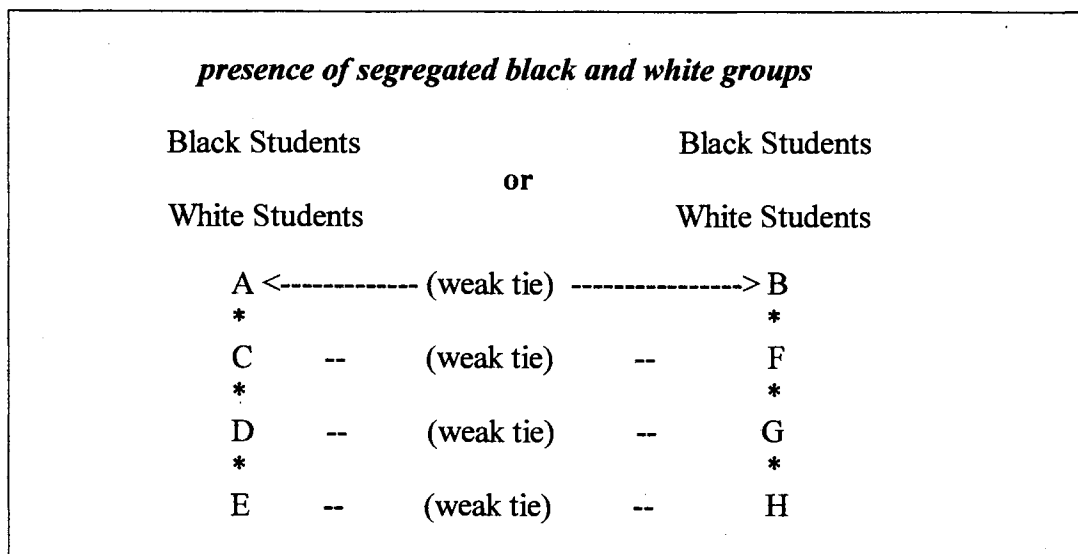


(* denotes a strong tie)

Figure 1. A is black and B is white (Current State of Absent Inter-Racial Ties)

If A and B were both black or both white, however, as seen in Figure 2, the presence of intra-group strong ties would predict much greater overlap of friendship circles. Persons C, D, E, and F, G, H, are members of A and B's friendship circles and are likely to overlap if A and B have a strong tie between them. Under these conditions, intra-racial group cohesion is perpetuated by strong ties and weak ties within the same race group.

This study demonstrates that black or white students who form strong ties within their racial groups and form few ties with other groups are more likely to feel isolated when their group is the minority group. When a group has a majority presence, however, the lack of weak ties do not impact comfort and feelings of exclusion and



(* denotes a strong tie)

Figure 2. A and B are both black or both white (Intra-Racial Group Ties)

alienation near as much as they do for the minority group. This renders the problem invisible among the majority race. This study demonstrates that white students, because of their critical mass, do not see the problem (lack of weak ties) because they do not feel excluded or alienated. White students perceive that all students at the campus are comfortable. Due to their large critical mass, white students are blind to the absence of inter-racial ties and the exclusionary and alienating impact of this absence of ties on black students. The large white majority has more comfort in their critical mass and are not impacted by the absence of weak ties within their race group. Black students, however, feel alienated by the critical mass and the absence of inter-racial ties. Although the large majority creates a sense of wellness for itself, it does not foster comfort for the minority group.

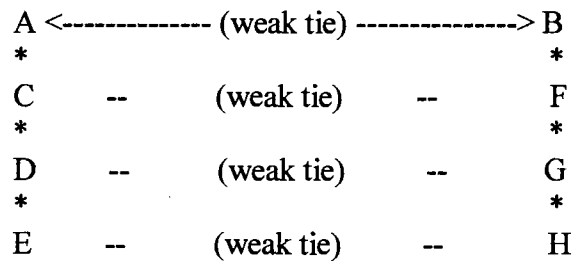
Before weak ties could be formed at a broader group level at this campus, weak inter-racial ties at the dyadic, one-one-one, level would need to be intentionally formed. According to Granovetter (1973), if weak ties form within a multi-racial group at the campus, additional weak ties would be more likely to emerge among the acquaintances and friends of the multi-racial group members. Communication and knowledge strength is in weak ties because a diverse information base is not available within a densely knit social network of each racial group. Subsequently, bridging racial groups allows information to travel more freely across racial lines through weak ties which is then shared within race specific groups. Therefore, if weak ties are formed across racial lines at the dyadic level, information about differences, similarities, and other ancillary issues could be shared. This could increase inter-racial awareness and understanding. This is similar to the information flow I experienced during the data collection process as I formed weak ties with the participants.

As seen in Figure 3, if A were black and B were white, black students A, C, D, and E, will moderately, but not entirely, overlap in friendship circles with B, F, G, and H (Granovetter, 1973). The intentional fostering of inter-racial weak ties through time, emotional intensity, intimacy (mutual confiding), and reciprocal services among students of color and white students could serve to create a network of multi-racial weak ties. Thus, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, and H would have an inter-racial network of weak ties.

multi-racial group concept – formation of black/white dyadic ties

Black Students

White Students

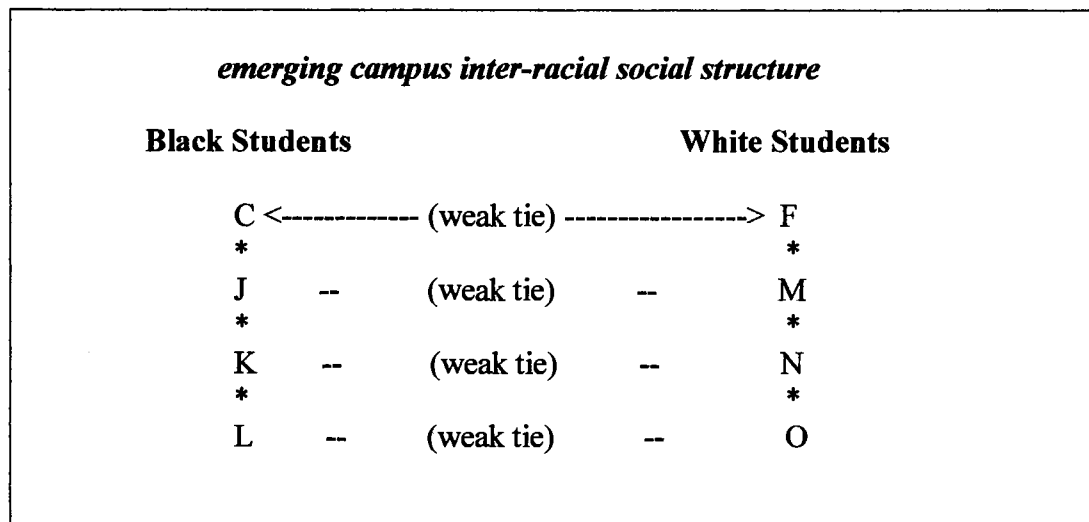


(* denotes strong tie)

Figure 3. A is black and B is white (Weak Tie Inter-Racial Relationship)

After inter-racial weak ties are formed, black students A, C, D, and E having weak ties to white students B, F, G, and H will, theoretically, create weak ties to other students who know either A, C, D, and E, or B, F, G, and H. In other words, students A, B, C, D, E, F, G, and H will now have greater access to the friendship circles of those in this newly formed multi-racial peer group.

Figure 4 demonstrates a model for a possible network emerging out of the multi-racial group concept. For example, black student C from Figure 3 and white student F from Figure 3 now have a weak inter-racial tie. Black student C knows black students J, K, and L. White student F knows white students M, N, and O. The network builds as friends of J, K, L, M, N, and O overlap with their respective friendship circles. For example, L knows Y, who is a black student, but now Y



(* denotes strong tie)

Figure 4. C is black and F is white (Weak Tie Inter-Racial Relationship)

is connected to O, N, M and F. A second example could be, M knows Q, a white student, and can now introduce Q to L, K, J, C, and A.

A multi-racial group of individuals forming weak ties at the campus would serve, then, to foster opportunities for increased weak tie formation among all constituents (i.e. students, faculty, staff, and administration). Granovetter (1973) suggests as more weak ties form between groups that inter-group cohesion and communication increase. This is consistent with Hansell's (1984) conclusions that "once a new interracial relationship is formed, the new friend's friends become likely candidates for friendship as well. Thus a small number of new interracial ties may greatly expand the potential pool friends of the opposite race" (p. 325).

At the Spruce campus, the perpetuation of strong ties along racial lines is key to fostering discomfort between black and white students at the individual and group

levels. The opportunity to gauge the intention of others of a different race in the absence of awareness and understanding perpetuates the use of stereotypes and prejudicial thinking used to understand those who differ racially from oneself. The multi-racial group would serve as a bridging-weak tie (Granovetter, 1973) to both black and white groups on the campus. Dialogue would result, exchange of information would flow more freely, gauging the intentions of others would diminish, and comfort levels of both black and white students would increase.

This study identifies the absence of activities aimed specifically at bridging racial groups at the campus. Change is unlikely to occur unless an intentional effort is undertaken to address the current social structures and to make modifications such that students from racial groups can have opportunities to interact. This fosters opportunities to learn more about others by exploring more fully the human experience of race and racial divide.

In summary, it will take a micro approach to begin to remedy the problem. At the micro level, it will start at the dyadic level with a small inter-racial cadre. From this group, the network will form weak ties to both black and white students. Theoretically, an increased level of cultural information will be transmitted through these weak ties allowing for improved race relations at the campus for black and white students. Comfort levels could rise, particularly among black students. White students could gain awareness of the impact of their white majority on minority groups on campus.

The mission of community colleges is to provide local access into freshmen and sophomore courses. Weis (1985) suggested schools, by creating their own cultures,

perpetuate and reproduce a culture that sends students back into the society from which they came. Contextually, the community in which this study took place has a history of racial segregation that still exists. If higher education's role is to educate citizens, then the incorporation of strategies to increase ties at this community college could result in increased inter-racial ties that could bridge to the community at large. Rather than the local community college serving to perpetuate racial comfort within race groups and discomfort between race groups, its role could be to bridge the differences through a strategic use of weak ties.

The role of a majority race group and its power to perpetuate its value system can be expressed and controlled through the ties it forms with other groups. Comfort is more likely to occur with a person of the same race. This sets up the opportunity, through strong ties, for more intimate information to be shared but only within racial groups. Consequently, this perpetuates distrust among the groups. Stated differently, this prevents the learning of new information through weak ties.

Commentary

Higher education, historically reserved for the elite, is now accessible by all in American society. The community college movement fosters access into post-secondary opportunities for many whom in prior years had limited or no access to college. With this opportunity came the adaptation and assimilation of color groups into the university and college culture predominantly shaped by European Americans. Without the skills, knowledge, desire and commitment to understand and, at times, reconcile racial differences, overt and covert frustration, anger, and violence prevail on American's college and university campuses.

Higher education is precariously postured to be either a perpetuator of the status quo or to be a change agent for racial reconciliation in America. Intentional efforts of both white and people of color will be required to remove the omnipresent embeddedness of racial inequities in American higher education. This intentionality must be undertowed by a network representative of all racial groups. If not changed, the current network will perpetuate the disconnect and our problems will remain. The struggle may not be against racism, per se, but reestablishing the social networks in American higher education such that all voices are equally represented at the table of decision making and that all needs are represented and all students have a sense of comfort and inclusion on the campus yet with ethnicity held intact.

Since the community college is the entrance point for the majority of students of color, its role in bridging racial divides is augmented. Students of different racial backgrounds have the opportunity to learn together, discuss together, and hopefully grow together in a learning environment. However, as this study clearly demonstrates, black and white students at this community college are together in the classroom yet they remain segregated.

The saliency of skin color was made clear in this study. Blumer's (1969) conceptual expansion of symbolic interactionism provides additional explanatory depth. In this study, skin color serves as a pervasive, differentiating symbol. In line with Lopez's (2000) findings, students in this study use skin color "as markers widely interpreted to connote racial difference only in particular social contexts. The local setting in turn provides the field of struggle on which social actors make racially relevant choices" (p. 172). Thus, symbolic interactionism serves well as a theoretical

perspective to contextualize the meaning of race as it plays out through strong and weak ties.

Students are critical stakeholders in the educational arena. They should be invited to share their voice on issues that directly impact the nature and quality of their educational experience. In particular, the voice of the black student is crucial to the understanding of the issues at this predominantly white community college campus. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) believe “that the voice of people of color is required for a complete analysis of the educational system” (p. 57).

This qualitative study captures the voice of both black and white students. Shaw et al. (1999) assert, quantitative “studies capture the meta-level processes contributing to social inequality; however, they fail to examine the lived experiences and interactions that make up the culture of these institutions” (p. 3). Similarly, “understanding how White students develop their racial subjectives and understandings is crucial to understanding future possibilities for greater racial equity in the United States” (Lewis, 2001, p. 782).

As mentioned in Chapter I, I asked a black professor about the nature of black and white race relations at the predominantly white community college where she and I worked. Without hesitation the notion of racial “comfort” and its obvious absence, at least to her, came into the dialogue. At the completion of this study, it is now obvious to me. This study demonstrates that the ties between students play a role in perpetuating a divide that white and black students bring to the campus. These ties, however, inhibit seeing what is happening. Thus, there are *ties that blind* on the campus.

The findings of this study are not intended to promote the bridging of black and white students at the expense of their cultural and ethnic differences. Rather, the lack of connection between racial groups, robs students in each group the opportunity to learn about racial differences. A new connect, however, could lead toward a more racially reconciled college community. As the literature reveals, black students live in two different worlds (Weis, 1985). Laden (1999) observed:

these students must either maintain separate identities, behavioral patterns, and peer associations, or they are forced to leave one cultural world behind and uneasily accept the dominant culture. Frequently, they become uncomfortable in both cultures, resulting in a profound sense of isolation or loss. Crossing these cultural borders is an integral part of the community college experience for many students. Hence the question of how community colleges can help students to make a successful transition into the academic world while retaining their own sense of cultural identity is a critical one. (p. 174)

At the Spruce campus with a 5% African American enrollment this rung true. However, as my study demonstrates, border crossing must be a two-way street. White students in particular need to cross the border into the black world to gain a greater understanding and awareness of their cultural values. Black *and* white students could grow in understanding and appreciation for each other by focusing on individuality more than on collectivity as can be defined by race.

The real issue in this study is a focus on seeing what is invisible. Consistent with Ancis, Sedlacke, and Mohr (2000), to the white person there is little or no racial unrest, yet to the black person there is covert and overt race-related discomfort. An

additional feature of invisibility uncovered in this study is white students' unawareness of the impact of their majority presence on black students. This invisibility is explained through the perpetuation of ties and traditions that mask its presence. The ties that *blind* could be changed to the ties that *bind*. Social solidarity does not necessarily have to be an ingroup phenomenon but rather an inter-group phenomenon. The ties that bind need to replace the ties that blind.

The Researcher as a Bridge Between White and Black Students

My research demonstrates the current inter-racial social networks perpetuate racial tensions at a subtle, almost invisible level of interaction through the absence of weak ties. The interview portion of my methodology clearly demonstrates the benefits of dialogue about racial issues and that race could be discussed if insuring the respect of individualized views.

All students were receptive to the protocol questions and the race-related dialogue that ensued throughout the interview process. Black students who were interviewed for this study, in addition to several black persons on campus with whom I had casual conversations, were always open to dialogue about race. White students, however, were challenged by the questions asked in the interview. One white student said, "I don't usually think about race this way." Another white student wanted affirmation for her reflection about race as if she felt guilt over her expressed thoughts. Another white student told me he was going to be more observant of race as a result of our interview.

Black participants appreciated my awareness of white privilege issues. Black participants conveyed to me their increased respect for me as I took time and learned about race issues and demonstrated a desire to cross the color-line to dialogue about such issues. In addition, black students, faculty, and staff appeared pleased that I, a white person, displayed interest in the comfort level of black students.

Students in the A.A.S.A. group welcomed me to their meetings and were appreciative of my support and interest in their organization. My first visit to an A.A.S.A. meeting was educational. I felt I blended in. I participated in the meeting. I sensed community among the organization's members. Individuality was clearly expressed by all. The personalities were diverse. A student whose class I had visited earlier that week said to the group that I was "cool." I sensed the students and advisors appreciated my presence at the meetings.

I could not help noticing I was the only white person in the group. My most valuable experience was to look over to the side of the room, a glass wall, and see my reflection. I was the only one of my race in this social setting. At that moment, I felt uncomfortable but I garnered a new perspective on how black students could feel at this campus.

The social experiences in my life and the lives of these students, that represented a gap of ignorance and misunderstanding, paled in comparison to the degree of similarity we shared. The feeling of being embraced and accepted by this group was a reward and certainly increased my desire to attend again – which I did. I felt welcome but also felt like a stranger. I did not know how to socially navigate the situation due to my discomfort rooted in my underdeveloped understanding of black

culture. My fear resided in misunderstanding some of the language, symbols, my fear of rejection, being laughed at, not fitting in, or not being accepted. I realized, to a certain degree, I was in an unfamiliar world – unfamiliar yet I was strangely accepted for who I was and the race I represented. I grew a lot that day (and subsequent days) and owe gratitude to those students.

In closing, with efforts to verify my findings, I presented the results of my study to a class composed of black and white students. I presented for about 45 minutes. The following day I received an email from a black student who wrote:

Actually we talked a bit more about your comments and felt that your approach was long over due. It is unfortunate that we have taken so long as a society to accept these facts. The work you are doing is important and I believe that these small awakenings can have a rippling affect.

REFERENCES

- Alford, S. M. (2000). A qualitative study of the college social adjustment of black students from lower socioeconomic communities. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 28(1), 2-15.
- Alfred, M.V. (2001). Expanding theories of career development: Adding the voices of African American women in the white academy. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 51(2), 108-27.
- Alger, J.R. (1997). The educational value of diversity. *Academe*, January/February. Retrieved October 15, 2002, from <http://www.aaup.org/Issues/AffirmativeAction/Archives/1997/aadivart.htm>
- American Association of Community Colleges. (1993). *Making good on our promises.... Moving beyond rhetoric to action: A report of the commission to improve minority education*. (AACC Special Reports No. 3). Washington, DC.
- American Association of Community Colleges. (1995). *Multicultural strategies for community colleges*. Washington, D.C: American Association of Community Colleges.
- Ancis, J.R., Sedlacek, W.E., & Mohr, J.D. (2000). Student perceptions of campus cultural climate by race. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 78(2), 180-185.
- Arredondo, P. (1999). Multicultural counseling competencies as tools to address oppression and racism. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 77(1), 102-108.
- Astin, A.W. (1984). Student Involvement: A Developmental Theory for Higher Education. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 25(4), 297-308.
- Bartlett, T. (2001, November 30). An ugly tradition persists at southern fraternity parties: Colleges grapple with how to respond to a series of incidents with blackface. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, pp. A33-34.
- Becker, H.J. (1979). Personal networks of opportunity in obtaining jobs: Racial differences and effects of segregation. *Report No. 281*. Baltimore, MD: Center for Social Organization of Schools, Johns Hopkins University.

- Bensimon, E.M., & Soto, M. (1997). Can we rebuild civic life without a multiracial university? *Change*, 29(1), 42-44.
- Berlak, A., & Moyenda, S. (2001). *Taking it personally: Racism in the classroom from kindergarten to college*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Blau, P. (1974). Parameters of social structure. *American Sociological Review*, 39(5), 615-635.
- Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: University of California Press.
- Braddock II, J.H. (1978). Internal colonialism and Black American education. *Western Journal of Black Studies*, 2(1), 24-33.
- Braddock II, J.H. (1980). The perpetuation of segregation across levels of education: A behavioral assessment of the contact-hypothesis. *Sociology of Education*, 53, 178-186.
- Braddock II, J.H., & McPartland, J.M. (1988). The social and academic consequences of school desegregation. *Equity and Choice*, 4, 5-10, 63-73.
- Braddock II, J.H., & McPartland, J.M. (1989). Social-psychological processes that perpetuate racial segregation: The relationship between school and employment desegregation. *Journal of Black Studies*, 19(3), 267-289.
- Bramlett-Solomon, S., & Liebler, C.M. (1999). Enhancing theory courses with racially inclusive research. *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator*, 54(3), 73-84.
- Brehm, S.S., & Kassin, S.M. (1996). *Social psychology* (3rd ed.). Princeton, New Jersey: Houghton Mifflin.
- Brint, S., & Karabel, J. (1989). *The diverted dream*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Cameron, S.C., & Wycoff, S.M. (1998). The destructive nature of the term race: Growing beyond a false paradigm. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 76(3), 277-285.
- Carter, R.T. (1997). Is white a race? Expressions of white racial identity. In M. Fine; L. Weis, L.C. Powell, & M.L. Wong (Eds.), *Off white: Readings on race, power, and society* (pp. 198-209). New York: Routledge.
- Chang, M.J. (2002). Preservation or transformation: Where's the real educational discourse on diversity? *The Review of Higher Education*, 25(2), 125-140.

- Cochran-Smith, M. (2000). Blind vision: Unlearning racism in teacher education. *Harvard Educational Review*, 70(2), 157-190.
- Cohen, A.M. (1998). *The shaping of American higher education: Emergence and growth of the contemporary system*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Cohen, A.M., & Brawer, F.B. (1996). *The American Community College* (3rd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
- Cohodas, N. (1997). *And the band played dixie: Race and the liberal conscience at Ole Miss*. New York: Free Press.
- Cookson Jr., P.W., & Persell, C.H. (1991). Race and class in America's elite preparatory boarding schools: African Americans as the "outsiders within." *Journal of Negro Education*, 60(2), 219-228.
- Corbett, D. (1995). Women of color. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*, 66(7), 25-27.
- Coser, R.L. (1975). The complexity of roles as a seedbed of individual autonomy. In L. Coser (Ed), *The idea of social structure: Essays in Honor of Robert Merton* (pp. 237-263). New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Cross, B.E. (1993). How do we prepare teachers to improve race relations? *Educational Leadership*, 50(8), 64-65.
- Cross, T. (1996). Black scholars hold a pessimistic outlook for African American prospects in higher education. *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 0(11), 74-77.
- Cross, T. (1997). The warring theories about why Blacks are unequal. *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 15, 7.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. London: Sage.
- D'Augelli, A.R., & Hersberger, S.L. (1993). African American undergraduates on a predominantly white campus: Academic factors, social networks, and campus climate. *Journal of Negro Education*, 62(1), 67-81.
- Dawkins, M.P., & Braddock, J.H. II (1994). The continuing significance of desegregation: school racial composition and African American inclusion in American society. *Journal of Negro Education*, 63(3), 394-405.

- Delvecchio, S., McEwan, T., & McEwen, B.C. (2001). Impact of race on business students' perceptions of business careers. *Journal of Education for Business*, 76(4), 199-208.
- Durodoye, B.A. (1999). On the receiving end. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 77(1), 45 - 47.
- Feagin, J.R., & Sikes, M.P. (1995). How black students cope with racism on white campuses. *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 8, 91-97.
- Feld, S.L. (1998). When desegregation reduces interracial contact: A class size paradox for weak ties. *American Journal of Sociology*, 103(5), 1165-1186.
- Fine, M. (1997). Witnessing whiteness. In M. Fine, L. Weis, L.C. Powell, & M.L. Wong (Eds.), *Off white: Readings on race, power, and society* (pp. 57-65). New York: Routledge.
- Fine, M., Weis, L., Powell, L.C., & Wong, M.L. (Eds.). (1997). *Off white: Readings on race, power, and society*. New York: Routledge.
- Fisher, B., & Hartmann, D.J. (1995). The impact of race on the social experience of college students at a predominantly white university. *Journal of Black Studies*, 26(2), 117-133.
- Foeman, A.K., & Nance, T. (1999). From miscegenation to multiculturalism: perceptions and stages of interracial relationship development. *Journal of Black Studies*, 29(4), 540-557.
- Fordham, S. (1988). Racelessness as a factor in Black students' school success: Pragmatic strategy or Pyrrhic victory?" *Harvard Educational Review*, 58(1), 54-84.
- Friedkin, N. (1980). A test of structural features of Granovetter's strength of weak ties theory. *Social Networks*, 2, 411-422.
- Fries-Britt, S.L., & Turner, B. (2001). Facing stereotypes: A case study of black students on a white campus. *Journal of College Student Development*, 42(5), 420-429.
- Futrell, M.H. (1999). Recruiting minority teachers. *Educational Leadership*, 56(8), 30-33.
- Gallego, A.P. (1996). Leading the multicultural community college. League for Innovation in the Community College - *Leadership Abstracts*, 9(5). Retrieved October 15, 2002, from <http://www.league.org/publication/abstracts/leadership/labs0596.htm>

- Granovetter, M. (1973). The strength of weak ties. *American Journal of Sociology*, 78, 1360-1380.
- Granovetter, M. (1983). The strength of weak ties: A network theory revisited. In R. Collins (Ed.), *Sociological Theory* (pp. 201-233). San Francisco: Plenum.
- Granovetter, M. (1986). The micro-structure of school desegregation. In J. Prager, D. Longshore, & M. Seeman (Eds.), *School desegregation research: New directions in situational analysis* (pp. 81-110). New York: Plenum.
- Granovetter, M. (1995). *Getting a Job: A study of contacts and careers* (2nd ed.). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Gregory, S.T. (2000). Strategies for improving the racial climate for students of color in predominantly white institutions. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 33(3), 39-47.
- Hallinan, M.T., & Smith, S.S. (1985). The effects of classroom racial composition on students' interracial friendliness. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 48(1), 3-16.
- Hansell, S. (1984). Cooperative groups, weak ties, and the integration of peer friendships. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 47(4), 316-328.
- Harris, Z. (1989-1990). Institutional Commitment to Cultural Diversity. *Community, Technical, and Junior College Journal*, 60(3), 35-37.
- Harvey, W.B. (1998). When silence is not golden: University initiated conversations on racism and race relations. *College Student Affairs Journal*, 18(1), 18-24.
- Henderson, G. (1999). *Our souls to keep: Black/white relations in America*. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press.
- Hoberman, J. (2000). The price of "black dominance." *Society*, 37(3), 49-56.
- Jacobson, M.F. (1998). *Whiteness of a different color: European immigrants and the alchemy of race*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Karweit, N.L., Hansell, S., & Ricks, M.A. (1979). The conditions for peer associations in Schools. *Report No. 282*. Baltimore, MD: Center for Social Organization of Schools, Johns Hopkins University.
- Korte, C., & Milgram, S. (1970). Acquaintance networks between racial groups. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 15(2), 101-8.

- Laden, B.V. (1999). Celebratory socialization of culturally diverse students through academic programs and support services. In K. M. Shaw, J.R.Valadez, & R.A. Rhoads (Eds.), *Community colleges as cultural texts: Qualitative explorations of organizational and student culture* (pp. 173-194). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2000). Fighting for our lives: Preparing teachers to teach African American students. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 51(3), 206-214.
- Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W.F. IV (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record*, 97(1), 47-68.
- Lawrence, S.M., & Tatum, B.D. (1997). Teachers in transition: The impact of antiracist professional development on classroom practice. *Teachers College Record*, 99(1), 162-178.
- Lewis, A.E. (2001). There is no "race" in the schoolyard: Color-blind ideology in an (almost) all-white school. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(4), 781-811.
- Lewis, A.E., Chesler, M., & Tyrone A. (2000). The impact of "colorblind" ideologies on students of color: Intergroup relations at a predominantly white university. *Journal of Negro Education*, 69(1-2), 74-91.
- Lin, N. (1990). Social resources and instrumental action. In R. Breiger (Ed.), *Social mobility and social structure* (pp. 247-271). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lin, N., Ensel, W.M., & Vaughn, J.C. (1981). Social resources and strength of ties: Structural factors in occupational status attainment. *American Sociological Review*, 46(4), 393-405.
- Lincoln, Y.S., & Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Liu, W.T., & Duff, R.D. (1972). The strength in weak ties. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(3), 361-366.
- Locke, D.C., & Kiselica, M.S. (1999). Pedagogy of possibilities: Teaching about racism in multicultural counseling courses. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 77(1), 80-86.
- Logan, J.R., & Spitze, G.D. (1994). Family neighbors. *American Journal of Sociology*, 100(2), 453-476.
- Loo, C.M., & Rolison, G. (1986). Alienation of ethnic minority students at a predominantly white university. *Journal of Higher Education*, 57(1), 58-77.

- Lopez, I.F.H. (2000). The social construction of race. In R. Delgado & J. Stefancic (Eds.), *Critical race theory: The cutting edge* (2nd ed.), (pp. 163-175). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Massey, W.E. (1999). From colored people to people of color. *Presidency*, 2(2), 14-21.
- McAllister, G., & Irvine, J.J. (2000). Cross cultural competency and multicultural teacher education. *Review of Educational Research*, 70(1), 3-24.
- McFalls, E.L., & Cobb-Roberts, D. (2001). Reducing resistance to diversity through cognitive dissonance instruction: Implications for teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 52(2), 164-172.
- McGhee, J.D. (1983). Black Solidarity: The tie that binds. Geographic Source: U.S.; District of Columbia Clearinghouse No.: UD023046. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED234117)
- McPartland, J.M., & Braddock II, J.H. (1981). Going to college and getting a good job: The impact of desegregation. In Hawley, Willis D. (Ed.), *Effective school desegregation: Equity, quality, and feasibility*, (pp. 141-154). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Mio, J.S., & Iwamasa, G. (1993). To do, or not to do: That is the question for white cross-cultural researchers. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 21(2), 197-212.
- National Center for Education Statistics (1999). Minority enrollment in Community Colleges: Fall 1992 and Fall 1997. Retrieved October 23, 2002, from http://www.aacc.nche.edu/pdf/AboutCC_Racial.pdf
- Newcomb, T.M. (1961). *The acquaintance process*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- News and Views (1996-1997). Student transfers to highly ranked universities are often closed to blacks. *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 0 (14).
- Nieto, S. (2000). Placing equity front and center: Some thoughts on transforming teacher education for a new century. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 51(3), 180-187.
- Nora, A., & Cabrera, A.F. (1996). The role of perceptions in prejudice and discrimination and the adjustment of minority students to college. *Journal of Higher Education*, 67(2), 119-48.
- Olivas, M.A. (1997). *The law and higher education: Cases and materials on colleges in court*. Durham, North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press.

- Omi, M., & Winant, H. (1994). *Racial formation in the United States*. New York, New York: Routledge.
- Opp, R.D. (2001). Enhancing recruitment success for two-year college students of color. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 25(2), 71-86.
- Parham, T.A. (1993). *Psychological storms: African American struggle for identity*. African American Images: Chicago.
- Pascarella, E.T., Edison, M., Nora, A., Hagedorn, L.S., & Terenzini, P.T. (1996). Influences on students' openness to diversity and challenge in the first year of college. *Journal of Higher Education*, 67(2), 174-195.
- Pedersen, R.T. (1997). Value conflict on the community college campus: An examination of its historical origins. In L.F. Goodchild & H.S. Wechsler (Eds.), *The history of higher education* (2nd ed.), (pp. 499-509). Needham Heights, MA: Simon and Schuster.
- Perna, L.W. (2002). Retaining African Americans in higher education: Challenging paradigms for retaining students, faculty, and administrators. [Review of the book *Retaining African Americans in Higher Education: Challenging paradigms for Retaining Black Students, Faculty and Administrators*]. *Journal of Higher Education*, 73(5), 652.
- Perry, P. (2001). White never means having to say you're ethnic. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 30(1), 56-91.
- Portes, A., & Wilson, K.L. (1976). Black-white differences in educational attainment. *American Sociological Review*, 41(3), 414-431.
- Reitano, J.R. (1989-90). The community college mission: Access or anarchy? *Community Review*, 10(1-2), 5-12.
- Rogers, E.M. (1983). *Diffusions of innovations* (3rd ed.). New York: Free Press.
- Sarason, S.B. (1996). *Revisiting "the culture of the school, and the problem of change"*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Scheurich, J.J. (1993). Toward a white discourse on white racism. *Educational Researcher*, 22(8), 5 -10.
- Schwitzer, A.M., Griffin, O.T., Ancis, J.R., & Thomas, C.R. (1999). Social adjustment experiences of African American college students. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 77(2), 189-197.

- Scriven, M. (1971). Objectivity and subjectivity in education research. In L.G.Thomas (Ed.), *Philosophical redirection of education research (71st Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part 1)*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Shaw, K.M., Valadez, J.R., & Rhoads, R.A. (1999). Community colleges as cultural texts: A conceptual overview. In K.M. Shaw, J.R. Valadez & R.A. Rhoads (Eds.), *Community colleges as cultural texts: Qualitative explorations of organizational and student culture*, (pp. 1 – 13). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Shrum, W. & Cheek, N.H. (1987). Social structure during the school years: Onset of the degrouping process. *American Sociological Review*, 52(2), 218-223.
- Sidel, R. (1994). *Battling bias: The struggle for identity and community on college campuses*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Solomon, B.M. (1985). *In the company of educated women*. New Haven, CT: Yale University.
- Solorzano, D.G. (1997). Images and words that wound: Critical race theory, racial stereotyping, and teacher education. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 24(3), 5-19.
- Solorzano, D., Ceja, M., & Yosso, T. (2000). Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate: The experiences of African American college students. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 69(1-2), 60-73.
- Stake, R.E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Steinhorn, L., & Diggs-Brown, B. (2000). *By the color of our skin: The illusion of integration and the reality of race*. New York: Penguin.
- Suen, H.K. (1983). Alienation and attrition of black college students on a predominantly white campus. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 24(2), 117-121.
- Tatum, B.D. (1999). *"Why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?" and other conversations about race*. New York, New York: Basic.
- Taylor, R.L. (1979). Black ethnicity and the persistence of ethnogenesis. *American Journal of Sociology*, 84(6), 1401-1423.
- Tinto, V. (1987). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

- Twombly, S.B., & Moore, K.M. (1987). Job search: Career changes among community college administrators. *Review of Higher Education*, 11(1), 17-37.
- U.S. Census Bureau (2001). State and county quick facts. Retrieved October 22, 2002, from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/40/40143.html>
- Vail, M. (1993, March 17). New association faces racial issues. *TJC Connection*, p. 7.
- Valenzuela, M. (1999). Expanding coverage of diversity beyond ethnicity and race. *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator*, 54(2), 40-49.
- Weis, L. (1985). *Between two worlds: Black students in an urban community college*. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Wells, A.S., & Crain, R.L. (1994). Perpetuation theory and the long-term effects of school desegregation. *Review of Education Research*, 64(4), 531-555.
- Whitt, E.J., Edison, M.I., Pascarella, E., Terenzini, P.T., & Nora, A. (2001). Influences on students' openness to diversity and challenge in the second and third year of college. *Journal of Higher Education*, 72(2), 172-204.
- Wilson, B.P. (1999). The culture wars in higher education. *Phi Kappa Phi Journal*, 79(1), 14-18.
- Yonezawa, S., Wells, A.S., & Serna, I. (2002). Choosing tracks: "Freedom of choice" in detracking schools. *American Educational Research Journal*, 39(1), 37-67.
- Zamani, E.M. (2000). Sources and information regarding effective retention strategies for students of color. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 28(4), 95 -104.

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A
SUBJECT'S AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE
AND INFORMED CONSENT

Hello. I am working on a study that examines interpersonal relationships at this community college. I will be conducting 45 minute individual interviews with both African American and European American community college students in order to gain insight into their formed relationships. More specifically, I will be exploring the impact of social relationships or “ties” formed by both African American and European American students with each other to better understand the nature of these relationships. I am searching to understand if and how these “ties” could create a sense of inter-racial comfort and discomfort at the college. It is my hope that the results of this will help to inform policy at the community college in order to improve interpersonal relations across racial lines.

As you agree to participate, it is my responsibility to provide you informed consent. This is the process by which prospective human subjects, or their legal representatives, are informed of the nature and purpose of the proposed research, including risks, in a manner appropriate to their level of understanding and in non-technical language that they have the right to decline to participate or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty given adequate time to decide if they want to participate.

Before the interview process begins, I will further orientate you to the interview process and will explain more fully the intent of the study before the start of the interview. I have composed a protocol of questions which I will follow throughout the interview which will be held at the campus. At times it may be necessary to deviate from this protocol of questions to clarify any of your responses. I have chosen to tape record each participant’s responses in order to best capture all comments made. You certainly can waive this option if you wish. I will, however, allow you to view a transcribed version of the interview in order for you to make sure it accurately reflects all of what you shared. At the close of the interview, I will entertain questions you may have about the study. At no time do I perceive any risks or discomfort to anyone in this study. Identity of the participants will not be revealed in the study. The results will be reported in a thematic fashion. My intent is to insure confidentiality of all materials. All data collected through my interviews will be kept secure and off site.

Participation in this study is voluntary. I wish for you to take time to think about participating and to ask questions. Refusal to participate will not involve a penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled. Termination of participation at any time will not involve a penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled.

This particular study is being conducted through Oklahoma State University. For more information regarding this research and research subject’s rights you can either contact my advisor Dr. Adrienne Hyle at (405) 744-9893 or Sharon Bacher, executive secretary of the IRB, at (405) 744-5700 or myself (918) 595-8484.

APPENDIX B
IRB APPROVAL

Oklahoma State University
Institutional Review Board

Protocol Expires: 1/21/03

Date: Tuesday, January 22, 2002

IRB Application No ED0263

Proposal Title: THE TIES THAT BIND: PERPETUATION OF RACIAL COMFORT AND DISCOMFORT
AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Principal
Investigator(s):

Douglas B. Price
901 E. 96th Street
Tulsa, OK 74133

Adrienne Hyle
314 Willard Hall
Stillwater, OK 74078

Reviewed and
Processed as: Expedited

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

Dear PI :

Your IRB application referenced above has been approved for one calendar year. Please make note of the expiration date indicated above. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Sharon Bacher, the Executive Secretary to the IRB, in 203 Whitehurst (phone: 405-744-5700, sbacher@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,



Carol Olson, Chair
Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL & DEMOGRAPHICS SURVEY

Interview Protocol

- **Demographics – Collected from Demographics Survey**
- **Student's picture of this community college and campus climate**

What is it like to go to this college?

What other campuses do you attend and why?

How did you select this campus?

Describe a typical day at this college campus. Other campuses?

Describe a typical classroom experience.

Describe the interaction of black and white students at this campus.

Describe community seating areas at the campus?

Where do students tend to congregate? How do people group themselves?

Describe diversity initiatives available at this college. Follow-up: what impact do these programs have on the blending of racial groups?

- **Student Interaction (who, when, where, why)**

Describe the interaction of white students and black students on this campus?

Identify three or four persons with whom you share personal information?

Follow-up: how would these individuals racially identify?

Who do you feel initiates contacts among black and white students?

Where within the campus structure do you feel student friendships are actually formed and maintained (e.g. inside or outside the classroom)?

What percentage of time on campus do you spend with persons of a different race at the college?

Describe your experiences at this campus regarding being around persons of a different race.

What is the general nature of dialogue when talking to a person of the same/different race?

Do you find persons approaching you after you have approached them? How does this vary across racial lines?

Demographics Survey

Interview # _____

Please take a moment to answer the following demographic questions – Thank you!

How many credit hours are you taking at the following campuses this Spring semester?

Norwood _____ (hrs); Spruce _____ (hrs); Maple _____ (hrs); Willow _____ (hrs)

In my time at SCC I have taken classes at the following campuses:

Norwood _____ Spruce _____ Maple _____ Willow _____

Credit Hours Earned to Date: _____

Major Field of Study: _____

Gender: Female _____ ; Male _____

Age Group: 18 – 21 _____; 22 – 27 _____; 28 – 34 _____; 35 – 45 _____; 46 + _____

How long have you lived in (name of city)? _____ (years)

If you did not grow up in (name of city), in what area(s) of the United States have you lived?

From your home, what is the approximate distance (in miles) to the campus(es) you currently attend? _____ (miles)

I take: day classes _____; evening classes _____; both day and evening classes _____

How much time do you spend (in hours) on campus each week?

Inside the Classroom _____ (hours); Outside the Classroom _____ (hours)

How do you racially self-identify? _____

List any student organizations or campus activities in which you are involved:

VITA

Douglas Blair Price ²

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: THE TIES THAT BLIND: PERPETUATION OF RACIAL COMFORT AND DISCOMFORT AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Major Field: Higher Education

Biographical:

Education: Graduated from Kelly Walsh High School, Casper, Wyoming in 1981; received an Associate of Science degree in Psychology from Casper College in May 1983; received a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology from the University of Wyoming in May 1985; received a Master of Arts degree with a major in Industrial/Organizational Psychology at the University of Tulsa in May 1989. Completed the Requirements for the Doctor of Education degree at Oklahoma State University in December, 2002.

Experience: Worked as a psychiatric technician at a mental health center in Casper, Wyoming; Moved to Tulsa, OK in 1987 and in 1989 was employed by Tulsa Junior College. Since that time I have held positions of Career Advisor, Academic/Career Counselor, Adjunct Psychology Instructor, Director of Counseling & Testing, and serve currently as the Associate Dean of the Liberal Arts & Community Services Division.

Professional Memberships: Association for the Study of Higher Education.