

ASCRIBED VERSUS SELF-DETERMINED IDENTITY:
CRITICAL INTERPRETIVE INQUIRY
INTO THE SUBJECTIVITY OF MICROMINORITY IDENTITY

A Dissertation
by
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Abstract

ASCRIBED VERSUS SELF-DETERMINED IDENTITY: A CRITICAL INTERPRETIVE INQUIRY INTO THE SUBJECTIVITY OF MICROMINORITY IDENTITY

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Oftentimes minorities are perceived through an external racial lens by peers and personnel in educational institutions. Furthermore, the literature often homogenizes minorities into broad racial groups such as Black, Asian, and Hispanic. This study has been designed to explore if there is a discrepancy between internal, subjective perceptions and external, institutional perceptions regarding the identity of micro-minorities (i.e., minorities who are part of very small groups or of no group at all).

This qualitative critical study was conducted on the campus of a four-year university in North Carolina. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with six international students from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Some of the participants reported not being able to identify with groups they were homogenized within by the institution based on race. Instead, they considered themselves part of very small and specific groups or of no group at all. Additional findings revealed that the way these participants perceived their

identity diverged significantly from institutional perceptions: Most participants considered culture and not race as central to their identity. Furthermore, the data suggested that being part of a small minority group or no group at all results in a very different experience than being part of a larger group. I chose critical race theory as the theoretical framework for this exploratory study, which also contained a self-reflective component designed to supplement, compare, and contrast the experiences of the participants with my own.

Acknowledgments

Moving to a foreign country has been all at once scary, challenging and rewarding. Coming here allowed me to expand my horizons and provided me with opportunities I would not have had back home. For that I am eternally grateful. I found one particular poem that I think captures the essence of my experiences in this country: “I see A Child” by Cindy Herbert.

You can never be me, and I can never be you.

We have each grown from different pasts,
our imaginations are different.

But we can each find new parts
of ourselves in what the other is;
and use these selves to create a world that has
more possibilities for both of us than either of
our worlds alone.

It will be a new world that has grown from our differences.

I'd like to thank my committee, Dr. Leslie Bolt (Committee Chair), Dr. Alecia Youngblood, and Dr. Vachel Miller (Current Director of the Doctoral Program) for being patient and not giving up on me. I would like to thank Dr. Alice Naylor, as the former Director of the Doctoral Program, for her positive attitude towards me and for her support throughout this process. Furthermore, I'd like to thank everyone who supported me, emotionally or otherwise, particularly those few people in my life with the ability to see

beyond race and perceive me for who I truly am. Last but not least I would like to thank all the people who did not support me and tried to place me in a racial box. Your culture blindness inspired this study and fortified my will to succeed.

Dedication

To my daughter Cheyenne;

A true fighter and survivor

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Chapter I: Introduction

Who Determines the Identity of Minorities?

Some minority students in higher-education institutions are homogenized with groups they do not identify with by the institution (whether professionals or their peers) based on race. Although to some minority students' identities may be fluid and subjective, institutional entities sometimes attempt to dictate how minorities should identify or categorize themselves. In this country, race has been and still is the primary means through which minorities are perceived, categorized, grouped, and studied. Quintyn (2010) argued that people tend to believe in what they can see; and in the streets of America, people see race. Unfortunately, sometimes this is also the case in educational settings.

Although many people in this country have been conditioned to believe that race is the most important aspect of minority identity, some minorities do not consider it to be the primary dimension of their identity. Consequently, due to a discrepancy between internal and external perceptions, the risk of misunderstanding and conflict increases. I suspect that minorities who consider themselves to be unique or part of very small groups, because of the subjective manner in which they perceive themselves, have experiences that differ from minorities who consider themselves part of larger minority groups. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2012), Critical Race Theory (CRT) has proposed that individual and group identities are much more complex than the American Census data, which is primarily based on race, would have us believe. This study was designed to explore discrepancies in how what I call "microminorities" perceive their identity and in how they think their identity is perceived by the institution.

If the main propositions of this study have merit, the implications for the field of higher education are substantial. This “race-first” mindset may not only jeopardize the accuracy and validity of research related to minority populations, it also poses a dilemma for those professionals in the field who assume that minorities who are racially similar must also be culturally similar.

Significance of the Study

Looking Beyond Race

Attempts at understanding the relationship among diverse populations from a purely racial perspective are often doomed to fail, simply because a large amount of crucial information, such as the cultural component, is undervalued or overlooked. Gates (1997) has argued that recent schools of thought posit the concept of race as based on nothing more than its influence as a symbolic system, and that this insight has opened up the possibility of critically reanalyzing the concept of race and conventional race-relation theories.

I have worked as a mental health therapist for the past 14 years, and it has taught me that racial differences are far from the only reason for tensions between various ethnic groups. Many people I have talked to over the years have cited cultural or subcultural differences—such as attitudes, styles of clothing, musical tastes, and language—as reasons to distrust and dislike one another.

LaBaron (2003) described culture as systems of shared symbols (including language) that create meaning and a sense of belonging. Each of these cultures has its own set of currencies or ways of existing and acting in the world. Individuals are thought to belong to multiple cultures with various “currencies,” which interact to make up our world view. LaBaron argued that a person's world view is essentially the way they see the world through

their own cultural lenses. Included in their world view is their identity, which is essentially how they see themselves in relationship to the world. She describes identity as a construction based on both cultural influence and personal characteristics.

According to LaBaron (2003), tension can occur because individuals wish to protect their cultural identities and the accompanying meanings they cherish. It stands to reason that if cultural differences can cause divisions and tension among people from the same country, conflicts between groups of people from different countries are even more likely because cultural differences are more distinct, even if the two groups are racially similar. Consequently, it will be difficult to fully understand the experiences of non-American minorities as long as they are viewed exclusively through a racial lens.

To demonstrate this gap in cultural understanding, Oku-Dapaah (2006) has argued that studies conducted on the experiences of African youth entering the American school system have usually obtained data homogenized from the African American population based on race, without considering any other factors of social identity. Oftentimes these studies ignore cultural dissimilarities among people who look similar; race and culture are treated as if intrinsically connected, and the studies assume that people who share similar phenotypic traits must also be culturally similar.

Origins of Classification

The classification of individuals and populations has a long history, not simply in this country but around the world. Staum (2003) has argued that since ancient times philosophers have developed the idea of a “Great Chain of Being,” or a natural ladder. This notion, based on the Christian context of an omnipotent creator filling the world with a plethora of creatures, positions the Deity at the top with spiritual angelic beings. Hybrid material/spiritual humans

occupy an intermediate rank; last come animals, vegetables, and mineral substances.

According to Foucault (as cited in Staum, 2003), most classical epistemology of the 17th and 18th centuries is based on the classification of species, and to many thinkers of the day it seemed logical to extend Swedish naturalist Linnaeus' system of naming species to use in categorizing humans.

This hierarchical way of viewing humans persists in modern times. Bhopal and Donaldson (1998) have stated that terms of identity concerning ethnicity (or culture) are not fixed labels that can be assigned to people using the same principle as zoological classifications.

The fact that people, who often have no say in the matter, are being labeled by others is not the only problem. The simplistic if not inaccurate terminology used to describe diversity, evidenced by such terms and monikers as "black culture" and "Black History Month," also seems to suggest one all-encompassing culture and history that people with dark skin share in this country. Consequently, some non-African American minorities with dark skin continue to be misunderstood because American concepts of "blackness" and "black culture" aren't adequate to accurately describe their specific cultural backgrounds.

Although little research has been conducted on the subject of how minorities perceive or categorize themselves and the effects that external misperceptions have on them, an increasing number of researchers have steered away from conducting research that categorizes minorities into simplistic race-based groups. More than likely this tendency has resulted from increasingly multicultural (in this context culture is not synonymous with race) organizations over the past few decades. Increasing attention has also been paid by business practitioners and

scientists to the integration—as opposed to the suppression—of cultural differences among employees in organizations (Chemers and Murphy, 1995).

Williams and O'Reilly's (1998) study on heterogeneity and relational demography, as well as one by Jackson, Stone, and Alvaraz (1992), suggested that research on cultural minorities and their integration in organizations is lacking. Furthermore, Williams and O'Reilly's study posited that cultural diversity has been less extensively examined than other demographic variables, such as gender, age, tenure, and race.

The current study was designed to critically examine the contribution that racialized terminology makes to the homogenization and misunderstanding of minority populations in higher education in the U.S. Racialized language often suggests that there is an intrinsic connection between race and culture. Ironically, the existence of African-Americans, who have been cut off from their African heritage and culture suggests that race and culture do not necessarily have predictive relationship.

Impetus for the Research

The conflict between ascribed versus self-determined identity has permeated my own experience. Since my early days growing up as person of color in Germany until after I immigrated to the U.S., I have noticed a discrepancy between how others perceived my identity and how I perceived myself. Eventually I discovered that my struggle in the U.S. was going to be very different than that in Germany. In addition to racism, I now had to deal with discrimination based on cultural difference. Consequently, discrimination of one type or another came from all sides (Caucasian American, African Americans, and other minorities), and I was caught in the middle. It took little time for me to realize that, although race was (and still is) very much a taboo subject in this country, race becomes the go-to descriptor for

most people when categorizing and identifying people, seemingly independent of their own race or ethnic background.

My rejection of race as the ultimate determining factor of my identity led to ridicule and judgment, not only by the European-American community but, even more so, by the African American community, whose members tended to view my choice—of primarily identifying myself based on nationality and culture—as an attempt to act superior or to separate myself from them. In reality what I did at the time of my arrival, and what I still do, is the same, I try to be authentic to what I think defines me: my culture. I was born in Germany to a German mother and, like me, my extended family, including grandparents—uncles, aunts and cousins—are German citizens. Although my father was Nigerian, I never knew him. I have never been to Nigeria nor have I ever had prolonged exposure to Nigerian culture. My first language is German, and I attended German schools from Kindergarten through twelfth grade. I was raised Catholic and lived and breathed the German culture for many years. My passport says that I am German and so do the people in my life who are able to see beyond race.

My detractors in the field of higher education have argued that my efforts to distinguish myself from the African American community are futile because I would always be perceived as an African American. To them I say that surrendering to external perceptions has never been an option for me and that I am not interested in pretending to be something I am not. Since German culture has fundamentally shaped my thinking, personality, and attitudes, being German is central to my identity. Delgado and Stephancic (2012) maintained that: “although people with common origins share certain physical traits, such as skin color, physique, and hair texture, these commonalities constitute a very small portion of human

genetic traits and have little or nothing to do with human higher-order traits, such as personality, intelligence, and moral behavior” (p. 8).

When I started working as a counselor at a North Carolina community college, I noticed that professionals in higher education weren't immune to racial tunnel vision. Not only did they insist that I consider race as the most important part of my identity and align myself accordingly, and “learn how a black man should conduct himself in a primarily white institution,” some would also racialize the identity of students as well.

On some occasions, African-American students were asked to see me specifically. The reason that was given to me was that “they needed someone black to talk to,” i.e., someone who they could relate to and someone who could related to them. I also noticed that at least one of the Caucasian counselors would deliberately avoid talking to African-American students who were waiting in the lounge to see a counselor. I'm not sure what her reasoning for this was, but I observed this behavior frequently enough to be certain that this wasn't just a misperception or paranoia on my part. The most frustrating part about this is that my protest against this sort of blatant racial profiling was once again misconstrued as some type of elitism. These experiences significantly contributed to the impetus for this research. Since I decided to remain authentic to my cultural and national heritage and refused to submit to the pressure of conforming to the race-based expectations that surrounded me, I felt increasingly isolated and alone. There was little doubt in my mind that there was no one like me in the city (or perhaps state) I lived in. It seemed that, although from an external racial perspective I was a minority like many, from an internal combined cultural and racial perspective I was a microminority of one. This made me wonder if there were other minorities who were similarly affected by this phenomenon of discrepancies between internal

and external perceptions. I also wanted to know more about how being a member of a small minority group, or a being a minority of one, differs from being part of a larger minority group. Since my review of the literature revealed that microminorities are often homogenized with other minorities based on race, I felt that my research could be beneficial to the field of higher education.

Purpose Statement

Many researchers and professionals in the field of education believe race to be the primary identity by which all minorities identify and categorize themselves. The purpose of my study is to explore and verify this belief for students not born and raised in this country. As part of this process, I will shift the focus from the discourse about race relations to a discourse about how tensions can occur between individuals who may be racially similar but culturally very different.

The course of my investigation in this study explores a deeper layer within the concept of diversity by introducing the idea of microminorities: smaller minority groups or individual minorities, such as (cultural minorities) who may have unique experiences and specific characteristics that can be obscured or lost within the broader context of race-based research.

Although critical race theory (CRT) has traditionally focused on how the experiences of the African American population are affected by the pervasive and engrained nature of racism, I intend to use its structure as a guideline for my own theoretical framework. At the core of my framework is the notion that discrimination occurs not only because of racism but also because of cultural differences or the rejection of race as the primary part of identity. The manner in which CRT can be used to analyze the effects of an oppressive phenomenon, such as racism on certain minority groups, should be adaptable or expandable to how

microminorities—who may not view race as their primary identity—may be affected by the similarly oppressive phenomenon of racialization.

The purpose of this research study was to better understand the discrepancies between external and internal perceptions of microminority identity. The study participants were a diverse group of international students at a four year University in North Carolina from a variety of cultural and national backgrounds. In this Qualitative/Critical Inquiry, I used methods of one-on-one interviews, field notes and reflective journaling in order to understand in what way the experiences of microminorities differ from the experiences of minorities who are members of larger minority groups and how their subjective perceptions of their identity diverge from institutional perceptions. The following research questions were designed to guide my research:

Research Questions

In this chapter I presented my research questions, the significance of the study and my personal connection to the topic. The following research questions were addressed by this study

1. How do students who are microminorities describe the dimensions of their social identity?
2. What conflicts, constraints, and possibilities emerge as a result of interactions between these personal and institutional descriptions?
3. Do the experiences of microminorities differ from the experiences of other minorities? If so, in what ways are they unique?

My study focused on finding discrepancies within the internal subjective and external institutional perception of microminority identity and the effects this phenomenon has on the

participants of this study.

Personal Background

Although rare, microminorities such as Europeans of African descent who then later immigrated to the U.S. have existed for years and continue to expand. Germans of African descent are most often identified as the offspring of African immigrants to Germany and their German mates. According to Famonville (2003), at that time about 200,000 Germans of African descent lived in Germany, a country with approximately 90 million inhabitants. Campt (2003a) argued that the history of the black European community has been largely overlooked in scholarly engagement with the African diaspora. The terms Afro German and Black German emerged through cross-cultural dialogue among black women on the specificities of the experience of race and blackness in their respective cultural contexts (Campt, 2003a, p. 289); however, Campt maintained that, although the experiences of African Americans initially served as a central point of reference through which the very different experiences of black Germans were articulated, Afro Germans as a population substantially differ from African American and British communities of color. The relevance of diaspora as an analytical tool for understanding the formation of German communities of color must necessarily be measured against the specific historical circumstances that gave rise to them.

During a trip through post-WWII Germany and Austria in 1949, Nancy Rudolph (2003) was surprised and disturbed simultaneously when she spotted a little boy of color around 4 to 5 years old dressed in traditional German clothing (lederhosen), speaking German to his blonde, blue-eyed mother outside of the Hofbrauehaus, the massive, noisy beer hall that Hitler used as a staging ground for his Nazi party. Rudolf was disturbed by this image because she worried what would happen to a child in a country where six million Jews and other

minorities had recently been exterminated. Although the concentration camps had been shut down by allied forces, the racist German mentality was (and still is) very much alive. Upon further research, Rudolf (2003) found that in 1956, 17,500 children were born of fathers of color, a number that was positively diminutive compared to African Americans in the United-States. Unlike their African American counterparts and similar to microminorities in the United States, these children had no Afro-German community that could act as a support system nor did they have an emerging leadership structure to give them guidance, advocate for their rights, or fight for their equality.

Faymondville (2003) asserted that Germany in particular which is still identified, both internally and abroad, as a central European homestead populated by a “settled white” population with age-old traditions, had a unique cultural status among the European powers. According to Faymonville (2003), Germans of African descent have been ignored by the German and international media, as well as the academy, until very recently. Although Germans of color received some (generally sensationalistic) media attention, very little serious critical engagement had been employed of the kind found in the Anglo American or British contexts to social, literary, and cultural questions raised by their presence.

The microminority concept developed out of an ongoing struggle to understand my own identity and my failed attempts to fit into American society since my arrival in this country. I have been both a racial microminority at home (in Germany) and a cultural microminority in the United States (see definition of key terms for explanation). Time and experience has taught me that I prefer the first. After immigrating to the U.S., I soon realized I was very different from most people I encountered. When I entered Winston-Salem State University, a predominantly African American university, the music I listened to, the sports I

liked, the food I ate, and the way I spoke continued to be at odds with what most people expected of me. That I was born and raised in another country, and identified myself primarily as German, seemed interesting to some and offensive to others. Some people were curious and had questions about what it was like to grow up in Germany, others had misconceptions based on what they may have heard or seen about Germans on TV, and most were confounded by the notion of the “nonwhite” German. Others felt it was their duty above all to remind me that I was first and foremost “black.” People constantly told me that I didn’t look German, as if all Germans were supposed to be blond and blue-eyed or, at the very least, Caucasian. I came to realize that, in the minds of many people, the concepts of race, culture, and nationality were confused and entangled. Although a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-racial America was taken for granted on one level, many people I spoke to seemed to think that other countries consisted of largely homogenous groups of people. Race in particular seemed to be of great importance to many of my fellow students, and it wasn’t long before I noticed that professionals in higher education exhibited similar racial tunnel vision. This was evident by various statements made reminding me that “I was also black.” The fact that I primarily identified myself as German, not black, and that I possessed more education than all of my immediate supervisors, seemed to be a combination that irritated the largely African American leadership of the division I worked for.

European Americans seemed slightly more tolerant regarding how I chose to identify myself, although they often seemed equally baffled by the concept of a “black German.” For the most part they refrained from beating me over the head with Afrocentrism, with a few exceptions. At one point I was told that as a “black male” I should be mentored by a “black male,” not by a “white female.” I was very disappointed when evidence mounted indicating

that my mentor had buckled under the pressure of this stereotypical assumption, or actually believed she had very little to offer to a “black male” in terms of mentoring.

Delgado and Stefancic (2012), two CRT theorists, considered that the very framework many people use to consider problems of race reflects an unstated black-white binary paradigm. Under this paradigm the black-white binary effectively dictates that non-“black” minority groups must compare their treatment to that of African Americans in order to address their grievances. This paradigm holds that one group—African Americans—constitutes the prototypical minority group. Furthermore, Delgado and Stefancic argue that in this context “race” means, quintessentially, African American. By this rationale, other groups, such as Asians, American Indians, and Latinos, would only be considered minorities in so far as their experience and treatment can be analogized to those of African Americans. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) offered the example of a recent college president who assembled a group of scholars and activists to lead a yearlong national discourse on race. During the course of the first meeting the chair, a prominent African American historian, proposed that the group, “for sake of simplicity,” limit its focus to African Americans. Although he backed down when other members of the commission started to protest, he still insisted he was “right,” citing that “America cut its eyeteeth” on discrimination against “blacks.” He argued that if one understood the violent history of this country as it relates to African Americans, one would also understand, and know how to deal with, racism and discrimination against all other groups.

The discussion of negative consequences for non-black minority groups in CRT is an important one. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) contend that because of this black-and-white mindset non-African-American minorities, as well as other minorities outside the dominant

society's idea of race in America, run the risks of being seen as foreigners, are marginalized, or rendered invisible. However, even as CRT acknowledges that non-black minorities are at risk of being marginalized because of the black-white paradigm, it is fundamentally still a race-driven theory. It fails to consider that some groups or individuals could be marginalized not because they are of a race "other" than black or white, but because they reject race as their primary means of identification.

Structural Determinism

In order to illustrate the powerful CRT concept of structural determinism, Delgado and Stefancic (2012) postulate that in contrast to certain societies having multiple words for one phenomenon, as is the case with Eskimos and their various words for snow, sometimes societies have a tendency to use only one word for a concept or phenomenon (for example, the minority). Individual identity is vastly more complex than that.

Microminorities Defined

The defining characteristic of a microminority concerns extremely small numbers. Theoretically, anyone could become a microminority given the right (or wrong) circumstance, and for various reasons that may include but are not limited to, race. Using a racial example, a Caucasian American man in certain parts of Africa might be in a microminority if few other white people are present; thus he would represent an extreme racial minority in that particular situation. Conversely, a Vietnamese person living in China may be considered a microminority because of his or her culture or nationality, not necessarily his or her race.

The reason a distinction between conventional minorities which tend to be part of larger groups and microminorities needs to be made is because the experience of being either

one of a kind or part of a very small minority group, is likely to be very different from being part of a larger group. Baumeister, Twenge, and Nuss (2002) have argued that belonging to a group, provided it is supportive and protective, can help its members survive (e.g., through the pooling of information), and that group leadership structure may free some individuals from the burden of making all of their own decisions. Group membership can help individuals make effective decisions, avoid danger, resolve problems, cope with misfortunes, and obtain life-sustaining resources.

As mentioned earlier, a variety of factors might differentiate a microminority from a minority. These factors include aspects of culture, religion, nationality, and gender, among others. Sometimes these combinations of factors make a person unique to a specific environment. For example, the fact that I am black (in a purely racial sense of the word) doesn't make me a microminority; however, the fact that I am a black German in the American South does. The phenomenon of racialization complicates matters for microminorities because society oftentimes tries to blend them into larger racial groups.

Rationale and Impact

If culture or nationality is found to be more important than race and ethnicity to the identity of some minorities, this study might invite leaders and aspiring leaders in the field of higher education to reevaluate their perception of microminorities. Furthermore, this study seeks to contribute to a shift away from the racially focused lens of research, toward a more comprehensive way of studying minority identity that includes both race and culture.

Conceptual Framework

The United States census groups minorities into a finite number of broad racial categories, which has influenced or reflected the way the general public views minorities.

The core concept of this study is based on the premise that certain minorities do not always identify and categorize themselves based on race nor do they coalesce based on racial similarities. If the premise that certain minorities sometimes identify and align themselves along other dimensions of their identity is correct, professionals and practitioners in higher education should understand more about how and why this happens. For example, Awokoya and Clark (2008) argued that, although mainstream sociological theories have aimed to capture the social and economic experiences of first-generation children of African immigrants, not much is known about their day-to-day experiences because such studies often group these individuals with other minority populations based on race. The design of this proposed study is conceptually different from other research studies as it avoids imposing racial labels and categories upon its subjects. Instead, the study is designed to explore how students who consider themselves to be part of very small minority groups or who consider themselves to be the only minority of their kind experience issues related with the various facets of their identity.

It will be especially interesting to understand the impact of discrepancies between internal and external perceptions of microminority students, and how such discrepancies affect their everyday life. In other words, how microminorities perceive themselves versus how they think they are being perceived by the institution, that is, their peers and personnel. Recent research supports the notion that some first-generation African immigrants are underserved in U.S. schools due to cultural misunderstandings, often related to a lack of familiarity with educational policies and practices (Awokoya & Clark, 2008). These findings suggest that many challenges face foreign students in the United States, as a whole, and few if any of these challenges are fully understood, much less reconciled. As a result of racialization

in research practices, the emotional, social, academic, and professional health of first-generation immigrants remains in great peril (Awokoya & Clark 2008).

Essentialism and Anti-Essentialism

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2012), essentialism and anti-essentialism are two competing concepts within critical race theory. On the one hand, essentialism holds that all oppressed groups have one thing in common: oppression. The main argument for essentialism or paring something down until the heart of the matter stands alone (from a CRT perspective of racism) is that although the goals of a “unified” group may not exactly reflect those of certain factions within it, the larger group benefits from the participation of all factions because of the increased numbers they bring. On the other hand, a strong argument for anti-essentialism (the belief that no type of entity or group has to have specific characteristics or traits in order to be considered to be that specific entity or group) can be made. Delgado and Stefancic have pointed out that although it typically takes a multitude of the oppressed to make their voices heard, some of these voices may not fit into a single category of oppression. Although microminorities may experience the effects of racism, just as their African American counterparts do, they may also experience discrimination because of other dimensions of their identity, such as nationality or culture. Not only is it possible that these nonracial types of discrimination are equally or more distressing to microminorities than racism, a very real possibility exists that these cultural and nationality based prejudices can emanate from the very group they are expected to unify, making the formation of a united front difficult if not impossible.

Definitions of Key Terms

The following is a list of terms and concepts relevant to this research study.

- *Intersectionality*: The belief that individuals and classes often have shared or overlapping interests.
- *Minority group*: A minority group is a racial, religious, political, national, or other group, thought to be different from the larger group of which it is part. A minority group can also be a group of individuals with little power or representation relative to other groups within a given society.
- *Racialization*: The act of racialization involves the differentiation and/or categorization of individuals according to race. Racialization often includes the imposition of a racial characteristic or context on people and situations. It also includes experiencing and perceiving individuals and groups of people primarily in racial terms.
- *Racial identity*: Racial identity is a visible type of identity based on phenotypic or racial traits. Because of its visual nature racial identity is often ascribed by others.
- *Cultural identity*: Cultural identity is a type of identity not visible, thus it remains hidden from others. Such identity is based on a person's lived experiences; self-determination is an important factor in the establishment of cultural identity.
- *Cultural competency*: Cultural competency is a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies coming together in a system, agency, or among professionals that enable effective work and cross-cultural situations. Cultural competency is often seen as an organizational development process.
- *Ethnicity*: The term ethnicity relates to the characteristics of a human group having, racial, religious, linguistic, and certain other traits in common. Since the concept of

- ethnicity implies shared racial characteristics but also includes other identity dimensions such as culture and language, it may be difficult to apply to all minorities.
- *Exceptionalism*: A belief that a particular group's history justifies treating it as unique.
 - *Culture blindness*: The concept of cultural blindness is based on the notion that cultural differences are inconsequential and/or that equity is achieved among minority groups if cultural differences are downplayed or ignored altogether.
 - *Racial stereotyping*: This term is defined generally as the making of inappropriate and unfounded assumptions about an individual's national, cultural, political, ethnic, religious, and biological characteristics based on their "race." Individuals are not only categorized according to their appearance, they are also often stereotyped accordingly.
 - *Race and racial labeling*: The term "race" pertains to a specific way a population might be divided on the basis of physical characteristics such as skin or hair color. Racial labeling will be generally defined as the act of placing or using a term or label to identify a person or group of people based on their phenotypic (racial) traits. For example, the term black originally related to the various populations around the world characterized by dark skin pigmentation. However, judging by the literature, the term black in contemporary society has transcended its status as a mere racial category and has become synonymous with the term African American or African American culture.
 - *Microminorities*: An individual could be considered a microminority if he or she is one of a kind or part of a very small minority group due to uniquely intersecting identity dimensions.

Chapter II: Review of the Literature

Introduction: Focus on Race

The attitude of many students, teachers and administrators I have encountered over the years is reflected in Quintyn's (2010) stance on racialization. He argued that as part of the human evolutionary make-up we are predisposed to classify individuals instantaneously according to race, and that racial classification is a given; therefore the act must not be viewed as good or bad. Instead, Quintyn suggested professionals should simply accept the existence of racial classification and educate students on the complexity of biological variation; however, simply accepting racial classification ignores the experience of people on the receiving end of discrimination and stereotyping.

Studies have concluded that not all types of diversity are equally apparent. For example, Tsui, Egan, and Xin (1995) have observed different levels of diversity. They described surface-level diversity, also known as demographic diversity, as the extent to which a group of people shares heterogeneous characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity, functional background, and organizational tenure. Race might also be categorized as a surface or superficial type of diversity. The U.S. Census report has used demographic data to categorize the population with little or no input from the populous itself on the applied compartmentalized. The 2010 U.S. Census divided minorities into seven racial categories: American Indian or Alaskan native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, White, and an unidentified "Other" race. These broad racial categories

do not even begin to describe a population that is becoming more and more racially and culturally complex.

Overview

As a former international student and counselor, my reasons for conducting this study are rooted in my own experiences as a microminority (German of color). On many occasions entities within the institutional environments I found myself in have sought to define my identity for me (typically in racial terms) and then expected me to conform to those definitions. As a counselor and student advocate, I started to wonder if the students I worked with were having similar experiences to my own and if this problem transcended me. If it did, I wanted to learn more about how students may be affected by it. In order to answer these questions I designed this critical interpretive study in which I interviewed six international students in order to explore their experiences on the campus of a four year University in North Carolina.

In this section I will explore what the literature has to say about the potential causes of racialization, the five characteristics of Critical Race Theory and why I have chosen this particular theory as a theoretical framework for this study. Furthermore, I discussed the pitfalls of producing and consuming literature that utilizes racialized language. One of the most important purposes of this literature review is to demonstrate how racialized language in literature contributes to the homogenization of specific minorities into broad racial groups. Fortunately, the literature review also demonstrates that some scholars have caught on to the notion that minority identity can be subjective in nature and that culture and not race may be central to the identity of some minorities. Finally but perhaps most important, I will discuss evidence in the literature which suggest that individuals who are racially similar can be culturally significantly different, thus making race an unreliable indicator of culture.

Subjectivity

According to Ellis (1992), subjectivity has been neglected as a topic of sociological inquiry. Katz (1988) argued that one of the reasons so little attention has been given to subjectivity is that many sociologists feel repelled by the unruly content of subjective experiences. Furthermore, Katz contended that subjectivity can be both unpleasant and dangerous. He maintained that it could be unpleasant because emotional, cognitive, and physical experiences frequently concern events that, in spite of their importance, are considered to be inappropriate topics for polite society (including that of the researcher), and dangerous because the workings of subjectivity seem to contradict so much of the rational world view on which mainstream sociology is based on. Despite the controversies surrounding subjectivity I was convinced that a proper use of subjectivity would be the only way to help me better understand how microminorities perceived their identity.

Potential Causes of Racialization

Quintyn (2010) noted that placing people into neat biological and genetic categories is problematic, as demonstrated by the fact that more genetic variation exists within racial groups than between them. This makes race an unreliable if not invalid basis for the categorization of human beings. He argued that the average person is unlikely to be conscious of such nuances; what they see is dark versus light skin, straight versus curly hair, or pointy versus flat noses. Thus, in the minds of most people, race was very tangible.

Although, Barrick, Stewart, Neubert, and Mount (1998) contended that such differences indicated surface-level diversity, the invisible nature of cultural identity has found a formidable and persistent foe in racial categorization. Not only have researchers found racial

categorization to be automatic, they have found that it is difficult to control this instinct even when conscious of it.

Furthermore, Blair, Judd, and Fallman (2004) pointed to a strong consensus among researchers on the automaticity of category-based stereotyping, demonstrating that stereotypes operate efficiently, influence judgment without awareness, and can be very difficult to control. Similarly, Devine (1989) argued that stereotypes are activated automatically upon exposure to a member of a stereotyped group or their symbolic equivalent. This is irrespective of one's conscious intentions, beliefs, or prejudices, whereas the actual application of stereotypes is sometimes susceptible to conscious control.

A thorough review of the literature on the subject revealed that, aside from a lack of exposure to diverse populations and the automaticity of racial categorization, alternative explanations for the phenomenon of racialization exist. Arzubiaga, Artiles, King, and Harris-Murri (2008) noted that culture blindness, an ideology that permeates many dimensions of social activity including research practices, is based on the assumption that differences in culture are either inconsequential or that equity in a democratic society is achieved by ignoring these differences.

However, the importance of culture as a determining factor in the identity of cultural minorities may have been significantly underestimated. Cantes (2009) argued that, although many forms of social identities contribute to personal identity development (such as ethnicity, gender, nationality, and race), the form most intrinsic to selfhood is cultural identity.

De Munck (2000) explained the symbiotic relationship between culture and people as one in which an individual does not exist as a psyche outside of culture, nor does culture exist independently of its carriers. Culture would cease to exist without the individuals who make it

up, and thus requires our presence as individuals. With this symbiosis, self and culture both construct each other and, in that process, make meaning.

Critical Race Theory

Classon (2010) argued that at its most fundamental level critical race theory (CRT) can be defined as critique of racial reform efforts. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2012), CRT emerged from a group of scholars and activists interested in studying and transforming the relationship between race, racism, and power. Ladson-Billings (1998) stated that CRT appeared on the legal scene in the mid-1970s when legal scholars started to reexamine racism's persistence in post-civil rights legislation. Ladson-Billing and Tate (1995) asserted that CRT was introduced to the general field of education in 1995. Furthermore; DeCuir and Dixon (2004) contended that CRT was derived in the mid-1970 in response to the failure of Critical Legal Studies (CLS), to adequately address the effects of race and racism in the U.S legal system.

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2012), the CRT movement considers many of the same issues that conventional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses have addressed, but CRT places them in a broader perspective including economic, historical, emotional, group, and self-interest contexts. Unlike traditional civil rights discourse, which stresses a step-by-step progress, researchers noted that CRT questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including theories of equality, legal reasoning, enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles on constitutional law.

Furthermore, Delgado and Stefancic (2012) remarked that even though CRT began as a legal movement it rapidly transcended the discipline. These days many professionals in the field of education consider themselves critical race theorists, applying these ideas to research

and to understanding issues in areas such as school discipline and hierarchy, affirmative action, high-stakes testing, controversies over curriculum and history, as well as alternative and charter schooling (p. 6).

CRT has five characteristics that help distinguish it as a theoretical framework.

Counter Story Telling: Matsuda (1995) argues that counter storytelling is an essential feature of educational research which is conducted within a CRT framework. Delgado and Stephancic (2012) define counter-story telling as a method that casts doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially those subscribed to by the majority (p. 114).

The Permanence of Racism: Bell (1993), one of the founders of CRT stated that “racism” is a permanent component of American life (p. 13), making the permanence of racism in society one of the basic premises of CRT.

Whiteness as Property: Another aspect of CRT is the concept of Whiteness as property. Harris (1995) argued that because of the history of race and racism in the United States and the role that the U.S. legal system has played in making conceptions of race more real, the notion of Whiteness can be considered a property interest (p. 280). Harris further asserted that property functions on three levels; the right of possession, the right to use, and the right to disposition. In addition, Harris suggested that the right to transfer, the right to use and enjoyment, as well as the rights of exclusion, are essential attributes associated with property rights. Harris concluded from this that these functions and attributes of property historically have been deployed for the purpose of establishing Whiteness as a form of property.

Interest convergence: Bell (1980) proposed that the gains made specifically by African Americans during the civil rights movement should be treated with skepticism. Early civil rights legislation provided only basic rights to African Americans, rights that Whites have had

for centuries, essentially making these civil rights gain superficial opportunities because they were basic principles of U.S. democracy anyway. However, Bell (1980) argued that even those basic rights were only allowed as long as they converged with the self-interests of Whites.

Critique of Liberalism: According to DeCuir and Dixon (2004), CRT scholars tend to be critical of three basic notions embraced by liberal ideology; (Gotanda, 1991) argued that the notion of colorblindness has been adopted as a way to justify ignoring and dismantling race-based policies that were designed to address societal inequity. In other words, arguing that society should be colorblind ignores the fact that inequity, inopportunity, and oppression are historical artifacts that will not easily be remedied by ignoring race in contemporary society. Moreover, adopting a colorblind ideology does not eliminate the possibility that racism and racist acts will persist.

Furthermore, given the history of racism in the U.S. whereby rights and opportunities were both conferred and withheld based almost exclusively on race, the idea that the law is indeed colorblind and neutral is insufficient (and many would argue disingenuous) to redress its damaging effects (DeCuir & Dixon 2004, p. 5). Lastly, DeCuir and Dixon (2004) argued that the notion of incremental change stipulates that gains for marginalized groups must come at a slow pace that is palatable for those in power. In this discourse, equality rather than equity is sought. In seeking equality rather than equity, the processes, structures, and ideologies that justify inequity are not addressed and dismantled. Remedies based on equality assume that citizens have the same opportunities and experiences. Race, and experiences based on race are not equal, thus, the experiences that people of color have with respect to race and racism create an unequal situation. The concept of equity, however, recognizes that the playing field is unequal and attempts to address the inequality (p. 5)

Cultural Competency

A certain level of understanding about the complexity of diversity that transcends race is implied in the definition of cultural competency, as used in this study. Therefore, the notion that racial similarity need not equate to cultural similarity is related to the concept of cultural competency. Remus (2004) defined cultural competency as a collection of congruent behaviors, attitudes and policies that come together in a system, agency or among professionals that enable effective work in cross-cultural situations. By Remus's definition, it would be impossible for racialization and cultural competency to coexist. Since culture is often invisible to the initial perception of others, it can be in exact opposition to what one expects. Scholars and professionals who continue to base assumptions about culture on racial characteristics cannot truly be culturally sensitive, instead they need to realize that race and culture are two characteristics of minority identity that can be virtually independent from each other.

Racial Labeling

The practice of racialization in this country began in the early 19th century when it was employed by primarily white emerging power structures for the purposes of spreading and sustaining comprehensive racial ideologies (Gates, 1997). Smith (2006) has responded to this historical focus:

I want to assume that the "race" idea is powerful precisely because it supplies a foundational understanding of natural hierarchy on which a host of other supplementary social and political conflicts have come to rely on. Recognizing the role of race in specifying the logic of type and the nature of difference should lead us not deeper into an engagement with "race" or racial conflict—understood as natural phenomena, immune to the effects of historical or political practice—but away from "race" altogether and toward confrontation with the enduring power of racisms. (Smith, 2006 p. 424)

Racial labels have perpetuated more than racism, however; they also have propagated the entanglement of race and culture. In the U.S. being black has become synonymous with being “African American,” but for many minorities nothing could be further from the truth. Microminorities’ experiences are significantly different than those of the African American population of descendants from the African slave trade, or more recent immigrants from Africa. Due to labeling and other reasons, the term “black” has been used synonymously with African American throughout much of the literature. For example, Bell’s (2010) paper entitled *Understanding Black Males* used the terms interchangeably. The title suggested that his paper would help the reader gain a better understanding of the “black male experience”; however, the proclaimed purpose of Bell’s study was specifically designed to assess self-esteem, socialization skills, and academic readiness of African American males in a school environment. Hence, the experiences of non-African American minorities of color simply go unnoticed in this type of study.

Scruggs (2011) reported that a panel of students convened on the campus of Columbus State Community College, in Columbus Ohio, for the purposes of discussing the challenges that African American males face. Rather unexpectedly another topic emerged: Who exactly is African American? Scruggs (2011) described this as a loaded question, as Columbus is home to one of the country’s largest Somali communities. She noted that, from the perspective of those students, African Americans are American-born “blacks,” an identity Somalis do not embrace. Consequently, a rich dialogue developed around the differences between African Americans and Americans who are African.

Fortunately, other researchers such as Bhopal, Phillmore, and Kholi (1991), have pointed out that terms of identity should not be fixed as labels assigned to people on the same

principle as a zoological classification. Davis (2001) has cautioned that, although racial and cultural processes of populations have occurred in similar social situations, scholars must keep them separate in intellectual examinations.

Cantens (2009) distinguished between racial identity and cultural identity, saying the former is a property of a group who share similar background experiences with respect to customs, language, and traditions. In contrast, he described racial identity as a group property sharing the same phenotypic traits such as skin color, hair texture, and facial features. Perhaps most importantly, he maintained that racial identity is visible and thus can be determined and ascribed by others, whereas cultural identity is not transparent in this way. Instead, it is based on one's lived experiences and remains to some extent hidden; consequently, self-determination weighs significantly more in establishing cultural identity.

Non-Black Racialization

Racialization has been applied to groups other than blacks. According to Bhopal, Phillimore, and Kholi (1991), in Britain, for example, the term "Asian" is often unquestionably used by the mass media to refer to people from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, as if it were self-evidentially appropriate and despite how the populations may view their identities. Similarly, Bhopal, and Donaldson (1998) contended that contemporary European and American research on race ethnicity and health has used poorly defined labels to describe studied populations. They also argued that the search for accurate terminology remains controversial for scientific and social reasons, as illustrated by discussions of the terms Hispanic and Asian and the changing meaning of ethnicity and race in the U.S. (Bhopal & Donaldson, 1998). They have called upon researchers to describe their study populations further, define the terms used, and avoid lumping together heterogeneous populations.

Bhopal and Donaldson (1998) also noted that in medical situations in the U.S. the client's racial/ethnic group is often given in the opening of a case presentation. Caldwell and Propone (as cited in Bhopal & Donaldson, 1998) contended that racial labeling of patients is superficial and misleading, and should be abandoned in this context.

Scruggs (2011), a leader at Liberty University, had a significant number of minority students who found themselves correcting generalizations about their ethnic and cultural identities. In this study Scruggs recounted that one minority student reported an instance in which one of his professors made the following remark in front of the entire class: "I wish they had a buffet at the local Mexican restaurant. Don't you agree, Mr. Chavez?" The student in question remarked that he was forced to explain that the food in Nicaragua (where he was from) is distinct from Mexican food. The student added that he found it awkward to repeatedly explain his culture to people who assume he is Mexican. Clearly, the Latino community has had its share of such cultural minority stereotyping. Scruggs (2011) asserted that many Latino students (like non-American blacks) are homogenized based on race because they are automatically assumed to be Mexican.

Accepting the premise that discrimination and marginalization need not occur simply because of race, but rather because of fundamental cultural differences, and that the source of this discrimination can emanate from entities with similar racial characteristics, should allow for the modification of CRT into a more culturally comprehensive model, from which the effects of racialization on minorities who do not primarily self-identify based on race, can be extrapolated. Microminorities who have also been the victims of persistent racism were also considered racial minorities. I am proposing that persistent racialization and persistent racism were separate yet perhaps equally challenging phenomena that also occur together. What

makes identifying racialization perhaps even more daunting is that it also emanates from members of racial minority groups. To paraphrase Foucault, the oppressed can indeed become the oppressors, and people of all (perceived) races are capable of racism and discrimination based on culture. For example, I have witnessed African Americans discriminate against other African Americans because of differences in skin tone. I have also witnessed African Americans with racist attitude towards whites. Not sharing in these attitudes has led to tension between me and this demographic on several occasions.

Furthermore, whites are not the only demographic population able to form power structures. Although no group holds as much economic and political power as whites do in the U.S., African Americans can hold considerable political power in organizations, especially in predominantly African-American institutions of higher learning. Certainly they can have enough power to marginalize minorities with cultural or national backgrounds different from their own, especially if these minorities have little interest in forging alliances based on race. Consequently, retaining cultural integrity can be particularly challenging for microminorities who work under leadership that promotes “racial solidarity” and cultural blindness.

Implications for Leadership

A Latino student, interviewed by Scruggs (2011), argued that since diversity is becoming more common in colleges and universities, not only students but faculty members should become more culturally sensitive. The student also strongly urged college faculty administrators and staff to undergo cultural-competency training in order to learn how to treat and assist immigrant populations fairly on campus. He admonished staff and faculty that immigrant students know when they are being treated with a dismissive attitude or looked down upon.

Generalizations and inaccurate assumptions based on race have been particularly disconcerting and hurtful when they originate from individuals in leadership positions, because humans must be able to trust and respect their leaders. Scruggs (2011) further explained that Columbus State, like many other colleges, has found that traditional categories of race and ethnicity do not begin to cover the diversity of its student population. Like America itself, higher education institutions should confront the new wave of intra-ethnic diversity that expands old definitions of race and national origin.

Colleges' traditional methods of student services are also challenged by these changes. Scruggs (2011) quoted the director of the Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education, who remarked that a tendency to treat immigrants as a monolithic group persists despite the fact that there remain enormous differences. A closer look at the clubs of this community college indicated that cultural groups strive to maintain their identities and do not necessarily want to assimilate based on racial similarities. Thus the student union at Columbus State University has splintered. Now included are a "Black Student Union" for African Americans, a Liberian Student Association, a Pan-African Student Union, and a Somali Student Association. Scruggs (2011) noted that the days are long gone when Columbia had only a Black Student Union and that this unified front has been broken into a variety of different units. This evolution reaffirmed the suggestion that race is not the universally binding medium that many people believe it to be.

Arrogance or Authenticity?

Attempts of immigrants to be authentic to their culture and nationality sometimes have been unjustly misconstrued as Anti-African American arrogance. This has raised the question

whether non-Mexican Latinos or non-Chinese Asians who strive to retain their cultural identities are met with the same level of scrutiny and criticism?

Awokoya and Clark (2008) cited a report in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* which says that violent verbal and physical attacks on black immigrant students by African Americans often arise from the perception that these particular immigrants lack familiarity with so-called American norms. The attacks represented the African Americans' efforts to distance themselves from these immigrants and provided evidence of intra-racial Anti-African American sentiment.

Non-Americans of Color: A Different Experience?

Haines (2004) asserted that in our fast-paced world, little time or space is given to subtlety, thus terms concerning race, ethnicity, and culture are used interchangeably. The fact that black and African American have become synonymous terms in this country can lead to mistaken ideas of cultural identity; minorities of color might be black from a racial perspective, but that fact need not make them African American.

Significant evidence has suggested that the term black has transcended its role as a mere racial classification. In a recent article published in *Daedalus*, the term was used as a synonym for African American at least half a dozen times. Even the title, "Controversial Blackness: The Historical Development and Future Trajectory of African American Studies," suggested that black denotes African American:

On some campuses the students emphasized the *black* college graduate's responsibility to serve *black* communities. They saw black studies as a means of generating leaders for, and sharing intellectual resources with, neighboring *black* communities. Even more, they envisioned black studies as a means of training *black* students to one day return to affect campus politics [emphasis added]. (Biondi, 2011, v. 140, p. 227)

Johnson's (2011) *Black Person's Guide to Employment in the White Workplace* showed another example of conflating the terms black and African American, used interchangeably throughout the book. "Black people will be motivated in whatever they do" and "Blacks get inundated with the same mass advertising that white Americans get" form examples of the synonymous usage. The phenomenon of racialization was thus perpetuated by the use (or misuse) of terminology, in this society generally, and among scholars.

For a variety of reasons, the racialization phenomenon has homogenized one group (often smaller) with another based on race. Such cases involved the misuse of terminology, culture blindness, or convenience. This homogenization has been most evident when used to identify the African American population, but it affects other minorities of color as well.

Africans in Contrast to African-Americans

McWorther (2003) argued that from a cultural perspective African Americans are centuries removed from Africa, and that Nigerians and Botswanans living in the U.S., for example, are foreign to African Americans, who at heart are a distinctly American people. Similarly, Douglass (2007) argued that the experience of African American males is different than the experience faced by any other minority group. Also, Burrell (2010) pointed out that African Americans, because of their heritage and history, have a unique culture best reached through strategies, words, and images. Burrell (2010) also maintained that research in the 1970s and 1980s revealed African Americans to have distinct psychological needs, desires, fears, hopes, and aspirations. These are all born of the circumstances arising from their experience as chattel slaves in America.

African Americans in Contrast to Afro Germans or Euro Africans

According to Burrell (2010), a body of literature (spanning the early 1970s to the late 1990s) explicitly addresses key aspects of the black male experience in the U.S. He argued that countless literary anthologies, special interest journals, trade magazines, biographies, and websites have devoted their pages to defining, explaining, showcasing, and giving voice to black men and their unique social position in America. Since Lynn's (2006) paper focused exclusively on the education of African Americans, his remarks provide a further reminder of how the experiences of blacks born in the U.S. and those born elsewhere are homogenized.

However, not all black males are African American. Delgado and Stephancic (2012) described exceptionalism as a concept within CRT which holds that a particular group's history can justify treating it as unique. microminorities such as Afro Germans, whose histories may not be rooted in any of the histories of the most prominent minority groups, fit this description; however, their research revealed that the reaction to the concept of exceptionalism may help explain why many scholars and professionals in higher education have a tendency to fixate on larger minority groups such as African Americans. Delgado and Stephancic (2012) offered the example of a recent college president who convened a group of scholars and activists to lead a yearlong national discourse on race. During the course of the first meeting the chair, a prominent African-American historian, proposed that the group, for the sake of simplicity, limit its focus to African Americans. Although he backed down when other members of the commission started to protest, he still insisted he was right, citing that discrimination against "blacks is part of America's origin story." He countered that if one understood the violent history of this country, one would also understand, and know how to deal with, racism against all other groups. The guiding concept of this study stands in

opposition to Delgado and Stephanic's anecdote, since not all discrimination is based on race. One will not necessarily understand—nor know how to deal with—discrimination of some minorities by looking at the experiences of another, whether larger or smaller, minority group in the United States.

What is Culture and Why Does it Matter?

Chang (2008) argued that the concept of culture is inherently group-oriented and results from human interaction. He maintained that the notion of individual culture does not, and should not imply that culture centers on the psychological workings of an isolated individual. Instead, culture refers to individual and versions of group cultures formed, shared, retained, altered, and sometimes shed through human interaction.

According to Chang (2008), statements such as “I’m a typical American” or “My individual culture represents who I am,” are commonly made by students who study multicultural education. Chang claimed these statements are representative of two perspectives on culture. The first perspective associates culture with groups of people who have shared a definable culture, such as American, German, Japanese, and these cultures have clearly identifiable boundaries. Chang asserted that typical boundaries included nationality, ethnicity, language, and geography (p. 16). In Chang’s example, the student selected nationality and geographic boundaries to define her own people as unique from “everyone else in this classroom.”

In the second perspective, Chang (2008) considered culture from an individual’s point of view. Another student argued that the concept of culture started with her and that she was defined by a culture based on her personal beliefs, behaviors, and perspectives. She did not articulate how her individual culture overlapped or differed from other cultures. Despite this

student's lack of attention towards her relationship with others in society, Chang was correct to note that her focus on individuality highlighted the understanding that people are neither blind followers of a predefined set of social norms, cultural clones of their previous environment, nor copycats of their cultural contemporaries (p. 16). This perspective revealed the discrepancy between how people view themselves and how they are often lumped by others into broad categories based on physical appearance.

Chang (2008) also argued that, for the student, the group-oriented nature of culture is non-negotiable because culture results from human interaction. Chang (2008) believed the notion of "individual culture" does not and should not imply that culture is about the psychological workings of an isolated individual; instead Chang contended that the concept of culture includes individual versions of group cultures that are formed, shared, retained, altered, and sometimes shed through human interactions (p. 21). Below is a summary of the key concepts in chapter 2.

Summary

Two types of diversity described levels of identification: (a) surface-level diversity, such as gender, age, and race (also known as demographic diversity), and (b) deep-level diversity, rooted in culture, and significantly more complex. Although some researchers believed that cultural identity is intrinsic to one's selfhood, race has been the primary context in which minorities were perceived and studied.

Researchers have argued that the ways in which minorities are perceived and categorized by race is automatic, and that humans are mentally predisposed to do so. Some researchers and professionals tend to ignore culture because they believe it inconsequential or, on some level, may feel that ignoring cultural differences creates equity among minority

populations. Cultural competency consists of identifying a set of behaviors, attitudes, and policies that allows professionals to function effectively in cross-cultural situations. However, when professionals in higher education primarily focus on race when dealing with minority populations, it can lead to a cultural blind spot. More effective functioning on this level requires the awareness that although racial identity can be (and often is) ascribed by others, it may not be the primary identity dimension for all minorities. Broad racial labels can cause confusion and perpetuate racialization of minorities who view themselves according to a different set of identity parameters, since these labels suggest that minorities are part of homogenous groups.

Microminorities are minorities characterized statistically by very small numbers. For example, a Vietnamese person living in Chinatown could be considered a microminority. Although possessing racial similarities this person may be culturally very dissimilar from the rest of the population in which he or she is immersed.

According to Awakoya and Clark (2008), often the experiences of microminorities are rendered invisible because of a primary focus on race. For example, researchers have found that the experience of African Americans revolves around a heritage and history unique to that population. By default this conclusion could also mean that the experiences of non-Americans of color must be different in some ways. Unfortunately, many of the experiences of non-Americans of color continue to be ignored. For example, data obtained from studies of first-generation African immigrants is often homogenized with the African American population based on race, without regard to any other dimension of social identity. The identification of racialization provides a challenge not just for Africans. Latino students, no matter from which country, are often homogenized because they are assumed to be Mexican.

Critical race theory sprang up in the 1970s when a number of legal scholars, activists and lawyers noticed that the ambitious progress the civil rights movement had made seemed to have hit a glass ceiling and, in many instances, even regressed. During the past decade or so, CRT has splintered from a theory initially designed to help transform the relationship between race, racism, and power to a blight of the African American population, with several sub-divisions focusing on the struggles of other racial minority groups, such as Latin American, Asian American, and LGBTs. Thus CRT has demonstrated only limited knowledge about minorities. Although CRT has branched out to include groups other than African Americans, it is still very much a race-first theory for categorizing people, thereby imposing the importance of a racial identity upon all minorities.

Chapter III: Methodology

In this chapter I give a brief introduction to my approach to the research and why this mode of research is appropriate for this study. I discuss my rationale for my research design, define my role as a researcher, present my strategy for site and participant selection describe my data collection methods and discuss the data analysis process. Furthermore, I address the specific strengths and limitations of this study. I also explain my rationale for choosing Qualitative Inquiry for this study and discussed my research goals, research questions and the exploratory framework I have selected to guide this study.

Characteristics of Qualitative Inquiry

When it was time to make a decision about which type of methodological approach to utilize, I took into consideration the population I was interested in and what I was trying to achieve with this particular research study. Since the literature I reviewed for this proposal suggests that minorities who may not consider themselves part of the most populous and frequently studied minority groups are often homogenized based on race, I knew that the population I would be studying would most likely be small. What I needed was a methodological approach that would allow me to explore the experiences of a very small population in detail.

According to Maxell (2005), the strength of qualitative research is primarily derived from its inductive approach, its focus on specific situations or people and its emphasis on words rather than numbers (p. 22). Furthermore, Maxwell (2005) argued that the qualitative approach is especially well suited for understanding meaning. Understanding the meaning for

participants or from the participants perspective, not only refers to the physical events and behavior that are taking place, but also to how the participants in the study make sense of these.

Glesne (2006) contended that the research method one selects says something about what we consider to be valuable knowledge. Whether in the natural sciences or the social sciences, I have always felt that the rare and unusual is an important piece of a larger puzzle. From a sociological perspective, the microminority phenomenon can certainly be rare and unusual. Although, small in numbers this often elusive demographic can at either stick out like a sore thumb or be invisible to the world around it. Nonetheless I believe that microminorities play an important role in a greater sociological picture.

My interest in conducting a systematic inquiry into the subjectivity of microminority identity developed out of my own experiences as an international student, a professional in higher education, and as a microminority. Even as a child and teenager in my native Germany, I experienced discrimination; however, since coming to this country I have struggled with a new yet equally, if not more frustrating, phenomenon: homogenization based on race. Unlike stereotyping, which makes specific (often negative) presumptions about individuals due to their racial characteristics, I formulate a homogenization based on race from the simple premise that people who share racial characteristics ought to be part of that same group, and consider themselves as part of that group. I think the reason homogenization based on race has proven even more challenging to face than the blatant racism I faced in Germany stems from its stripping away one of our most basic rights: the right to determine one's own identity.

Because of personal experience, I have always been very critical of existing power structures and widely accepted theoretical paradigms. Consequently, I believed that a qualitative approach would be a good match for the critical perspective that I brought to the

study. According to Creswell (2009), Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribed to a social or human problem. Creswell noted that to study this social or human problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting, sensitive to the people and places under study, and using data analysis in inductive ways or ways that establish patterns and themes. The final written report includes the voices of the participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, and the complex description and interpretation of the problem (p. 37).

Considering the complexity and novelty of the concept I was trying explore, I chose a methodology that I believed would offer sufficient rigor. According to Schwalbach (2003), qualitative research seeks to describe how or why something occurs and examines complex situations in great depth. Furthermore, Stringer (2007) argued that it allows the researcher to state the problem, hone, and reframe the study in a continuing process. Furthermore, Grbich (2007) postulated that qualitative inquiry tends to be inductive in nature and utilizes research questions that help reach some type of conclusion from the data that has been collected and compared to existing concepts and theories. Questions used in qualitative research tend to be open-ended, exploratory, and the data collected is usually in narrative form. Grbich further asserted that reality can rapidly shift, subjectivity is usually viewed as important, and power primarily lies with the participants who are perceived as experts on the reality under investigation. Analysis is usually interpretive through thematic approaches, and deals with meanings, descriptions, values, and characteristics of people and things (p. 196).

Additionally, Maxwell (2005) stated that, the qualitative approach allows the researcher to better understand the particular context within which the participants act and

influence this context has on their actions. Qualitative researchers typically study a relatively small number of individuals or situations which makes it easier to understand how events, actions and meanings are shaped by unique circumstances. Furthermore, due to its inherent openness and flexibility the focus and design of a qualitative studied can be modified allowing the researcher to understand new discoveries and relationships (p. 22)

Another characteristic of qualitative inquiry that drew me to it was my long-standing personal interest in other cultures and civilizations. Glesne (2006) stated that qualitative inquiry is rooted in anthropology. He maintained that being present in the life of others, as I maintained in this study, constitutes a way for anthropologists to learn about other cultures. Similarly, Creswell (2009) observed that during a qualitative inquiry the researcher seeks to establish the meaning of a phenomenon from the views of the participants, which meant identifying a culture sharing group and studying how it develops shared patterns of behavior. He added that one of the key elements of collecting data for a qualitative research design is to observe participants' behaviors by engaging in their activities (p. 16). The only way to determine if the experience of microminorities differs from experiences of larger minority groups and if these minorities may have different needs is to conduct a research study that can reveal detailed personal data. Furthermore, Denzing and Lincoln (2009) asserted that qualitative researchers study subjects in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Denzing and Lincoln added that researchers using the qualitative approach make the world of the participants visible by situating themselves in it and using a set of interpretive tools, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. These tools make

qualitative research an interpretive, naturalistic approach to understanding the worlds of the participants.

Similarly, Glesne (2006) argued that qualitative research seeks to understand and interpret how the various participants in a social setting construct the world around them. Furthermore, in order to make interpretations the researchers must gain access to multiple participants. The researcher must keep an open mind to the variety of perspectives and issues that may arise. The researcher becomes the main research instrument, as he or she observes, asks questions, and interacts with the participants of the study (p. 5). Given the nature of the topic, and the small number of students that fit the microminority criteria, a qualitative study seemed more appropriate for answering the specific questions I had set out to answer with this study.

Because of my interest in anthropology, I was very much interested in day to day experiences of the participants in the environment that made them microminorities. In this case the campus of a four year University in North Carolina was such an environment. Creswell (2009) noted that data is typically collected at the site where the participant experiences the issue or problem. Also, the researcher is considered to be the key instrument of the study because he or she collects data through methods such as examining documents, observing behavior, or interviewing participants. Furthermore, researchers using qualitative designs may use multiple sources of data, such as interviews, observations, and documents. Creswell (2009) contended that the research process for qualitative researchers holds emergent meaning that the initial plan for research may change or shift. Additionally, qualitative researchers often use a theoretical lens to view their studies, such as the concept of culture or racial or class differences. Qualitative research is also interpretive in nature. Typically researchers form

interpretations of what they hear and understand. Creswell stressed that the interpretation of the researcher cannot be separated from her background or history. Finally, qualitative researchers aim to develop a big picture of the problem under investigation, which involves multiple perspectives, and identifying various relevant factors. After considering all of the characteristics of qualitative research, I decided a methodological approach was best suited for helping me reach my research goals.

Glesne (2006) outlined a series of attributes that the interviewer should ideally possess or develop. Although these attributes may not guarantee high-quality results, they can significantly improve the interviewing process. Anticipation refers to the interviewer ability of knowing what you have to say in order to present him or herself and you project in a coherent and understandable manner. This was particularly important in my case because with some participants there was a language gap. Some of the participants weren't as proficient in English as I am. I had to take great care that we understood each other correctly. Furthermore, there were cultural differences. Being a westerner from Germany, I had to make sure I was as culturally sensitive as possible. The last thing I wanted to do is offend one of the participants. It is equally important for the researcher to take on the role of a learner. Glesne (2006) encouraged the researchers to "be naïve." He described being naïve as taking on a special learner role in which the researcher sets aside the assumptions and pretensions in favor of seeking explanation of what the participants mean.

Throughout the process I tried to be as nondirective as possible in my approach in order not to influence or persuade the participants with my point of view or perspectives. Glesne (2006) suggested that as researchers we sometimes need to put our personal opinion aside in order to learn from participant beliefs and experiences, rather than trying to convert them to

our own perspectives. Lastly, Glesne (2006) maintained that as researchers we need to be analytical and probing. He stated that an analytic researcher realizes that sole purpose of interviewing is not the acquisition of data, but to also consider relationships, salience, meanings, and explanations (p. 94). When probing, the researcher needs to concentrate on being patient in order to give due, unrushed attention to the responses she elicits. Furthermore, Glesne (2006) argued that probes are requests for more explanation, clarification, and description (p. 96).

Role of the Researcher

I believe that my main role as a researcher involved being an advocate. I knew from the outset that the microminority condition is a phenomenon virtually invisible to society and the educational arena. Since I am a microminority myself, I felt it my duty to bring attention to the unique challenges individuals in this situation may be facing. Although I am aware that the main purpose of qualitative inquiry is to explore, I cannot deny that I possessed a certain desire to challenge and thereby change accepted ways of thinking about issues of race, culture, and the identity of minorities. Creswell (2009) argued that in qualitative research, researchers increasingly use a theoretical lens or perspective. Creswell added that this chosen perspective provides an overall orienting lens for the inquiry into issues of gender, class, race, and other issues of marginalized groups. Furthermore, Creswell contended that this lens then becomes an advocacy perspective that shapes the type of questions asked, informs how data is collected and analyzed, and provides a call for actions and change (p. 62).

Additionally, Creswell (2009) asserted that theoretical perspectives guide the researcher as to what issues are important (for example, marginalization or empowerment) and the people that need to be studied. Moreover, Creswell stated that these lenses determine

how the researcher positions him- or herself in the qualitative study (i.e., from historical, cultural, or personal context) and how the final account must be written.

In order to challenge commonly held beliefs about minorities, such as race being central to their identity, my theoretical perspective had to be critical in nature. Fay (1987) contended that critical theory perspectives are concerned with empowering human beings to transcend the constraints placed on them by race, class, and gender. Somewhat ironically, CRT marginalizes microminorities further through the use of homogenizing racialized language.

Critical Race Theory

As a teenager in Germany, I noticed my friends would sometimes try to defend me against racist bullies, saying things like, “It’s not his fault that he looks that way.” Despite allegations to the contrary, I never wanted to be “white”; I liked the way I looked. It wasn’t acceptance that I was seeking. Rather, I wanted my Caucasian compatriots to respect my basic human rights. As a result I have always had an interest in social justice, even before I cognitively knew what social justice meant.

I chose a hybrid critical inquiry and CRT model as a theoretical approach and data analysis tool. Crotty (1998) argued that:

Critical forms of research call current ideology into question, and initiate action in the cause of social justice. In the type of inquiry spawned by the critical spirit, researchers find themselves interrogating commonly held values and assumptions, challenging conventional social structures, and engaging in social action. (p. 157)

Hence, CRT seemed the best theory to initially ground my research. Traditionally, CRT explores how African Americans have been marginalized and discriminated against because of their racial characteristics, and how this group of individuals was affected by such phenomenon as racism and unfair treatment in the legal system. Delgado and Stefancic

(2012) argued that, during the past decade or so, CRT has expanded from a theory initially designed to help transform the relationship between race, racism, and power—as they relate to the plight of the African American population—to a theory that focuses on the struggle of other racial minority groups, such as Latin American and Asian American. This racial focus of CRT was far too narrow for my purposes and seemed to ignore the fact that not all blacks are African American.

The racialized language found in CRT uses inclusion to wrap distinct identities within one overall identity. Some of the concepts such as nationalism, the idea that a (racial) minority group should focus on its own affairs or interests first, seem to suggest that there is an essence to being black, which transcends culture and nationality.

Papadopoulos (2008) stated that the essentialist understanding of identity seeks to establish a systematic operational system, which ascribes specific attributes to each particular individual. In order to challenge the oft-held essentialist notion that minority identity can be externally determined and is rigid and primarily racial in nature, I chose Subjectivism as the epistemological cornerstone of this study. I theorized that the identities of minorities, especially microminorities, are in actuality subjective, fluid, and may sharply contrast with the rigid race-based world view often encountered in the institutions and in the literature.

Furthermore, my experiences made apparent that I was outside a larger minority group in some respects and that my rights were being denied within this smaller microminority. The concept of microminority helped me to name my experience, one that differed from what I perceived as African American or those of other people with dark complexions.

The CRT concept of intersectionality holds that no person has a single, easily defined, unitary identity. It also holds that the classical manifestations of oppression within society, such as sexism, racism, and discrimination based on religion, do not act independently of one another. Instead, these forms of oppression interact, creating a system of oppression that reflects an intersection of multiple forms of discrimination (Delgado & Stefancic 2012, p. 10). My experiences as a microminority, and my ideas around this concept were a necessary extension to intersectionality concept, because they addressed the isolation and marginalization that develops when specific characteristics occur in particular environments, or overlap in unusual ways. Although microminorities may be subject to the phenomenon of intersectionality due to intersecting characteristics, intersectionality in itself is not necessarily the reason they are microminorities. For example, a Japanese woman may be considered a minority for a variety of intersecting reasons, i.e., being Japanese and female. However, these two factors need not make her a microminority; she may exist in an environment where a significant number of other women have similar overlapping characteristics. This means that she may be able to look to others like herself for advice and support. If the characteristics of a minority overlap in a highly unusual manner, for example, being a British man of color in China, the challenges unique to the condition of being “one of a few” or “one-of-a-kind,” such as lack of support or feelings of isolation, might emerge.

The ongoing CRT discourse about race relations also failed to describe some of the phenomena I was experiencing. Certain knowledge from my experience preceded this study. I knew that being part of a small minority group, or from no group at all, was different than being part of a larger group. I knew that discrimination need not occur simply within a black-and-white dichotomy because of racial differences. I also knew that minorities do not

always align themselves based on color. Finally, I knew which dimension of my identity was central to my overall self and that the way I perceived myself was different from how others perceived me.

I also knew that these experiences were highly subjective and needed to be explored much more thoroughly. I didn't know if other minorities had similar experiences to mine. I needed to ask questions that went beyond the usual discourse about race relations, which I no longer believed adequate in describing the complexity and diversity of our current population.

Thus, my conceptual framework was instrumental in the design of my study. I wanted to make sure that I asked questions in a manner that didn't assume race as central to the identity of the participants of the study. Therefore, I took great care not to impose racial labels and categories. I avoided labels such as Black, Hispanic, or Asian, and did not attempt to suggest microminority categorizations to the participants. Instead, I explained the concept and explored it as something they might relate to. It was this opportunity to voice an opinion about their own identity that distinguished my study, diverging from other research related to diversity and minorities.

Qualitative Interviewing

Glesne (2006) has argued that effective interviewing is well within the capacity of most researchers. He notes that although some researchers take to it naturally and readily get more proficient over time, others need to work at it in order to improve. In particular, they may need to practice techniques such as probing or waiting with silence. My interviewing skills improved throughout the interviewing process and I made continual adjustments from one interview to the next. For example, after a few interviews I had learned how to position my

recording device in such a way that would pick up voices better, and came better prepared mentally to deal with the accents of some of the participants. It became clear to me that I had to use techniques such as probing, waiting with silence, and summarizing more effectively and perhaps more frequently with participants who had heavy accents or were less proficient in English.

Creswell (2009) has noted that interviewing can be described as a series of steps in a procedure. These steps include the idea of determining what type of interview is practical for obtaining the kind of data one needs for the study. One-on-one interviews suited this study because, unlike other types of interviewing techniques, one-on-one interviewing would allow me to observe informal communication, such as body language, an important source of data considering the emotionally charged nature of the topic. I made sure to encourage all participants to talk and share their ideas openly.

Furthermore, Creswell (2009) has maintained the importance of monitoring individuals who may dominate the conversation. I encountered one such participant and took great care to refocus his responses by restating my questions whenever he went off on tangents unrelated to the question at hand.

Fortunately, all participants were eager to speak and share ideas. I made sure that I chose a private setting (the study rooms at the library, which have doors that lock) in which this was possible. Creswell (2009) also encouraged researchers to use adequate recording procedures when conducting focus groups or one-on-one interviews. He recommended that prior to the interviews the researcher design an interview protocol. This would be a form of about four to five pages in length, with approximately five open-ended questions and enough space in between the questions for the researcher to record her own responses.

Creswell described open-ended questions as those that allow the participant to respond in their own words. He further states, that typically, open-ended questions start with words such as “what” or “how” and thereby convey an open and emerging design (p. 130). He has also described the process of developing interview questions by narrowing the central (core questions) into sub-questions (p. 133).

Glesne (2006) described interviewing as “a process of getting words to fly” (p. 79). On one hand, Glesne argued, researchers ask questions primarily important to themselves or their research purpose. On the other hand, respondents answer questions in the context of motives, values, concerns, and their needs. Thus researchers must unravel both their own questions and the responses in order to make sense out of the content that their questions generate. Glesne has noted that, typically, questions are created by the researcher and remain consistent throughout the interviewing process; however, questions may also emerge in the course of the interviewing process and the researcher may want to add to, develop, or replace pre-established ones. Furthermore, research questions should be thought of as tentative so they might later be modified or abandoned. (p. 80). According to Glesne (2006), the questions the researcher brings to his or her interview should not be set. Instead, the researcher might see them as her best efforts with a number of respondents. Although, the questions may have been validated, Glesne (2006) encouraged the researcher to think of them as tentative, possibly later modified or abandoned altogether (p. 80).

Strategy for Site Selection

I decided to conduct my research on the campus of a four-year university in North Carolina. I chose this particular university for two main reasons. Since I was a student at the university some of the faculty and staff already knew me, therefore it was easier to secure permission to conduct the study. Furthermore, the student population consists mostly of European-American students. I would estimate that 90% of the students or more are “white” American nationals. One of the staff members in the international student office told me that the total international student population consisted of roughly 140 students. This meant that I considered many of the international students to be microminorities. In some cases there were only a handful of students that represented certain countries of origin. Some of the students I selected remarked that there were only three or four other students that originated from their home countries and in some cases there was only one. Since my focus was on microminorities this type of environment seemed perfect for conducting my study.

Participant Recruitment

I met with international education officials and discussed strategies that allowed me to collect data from the international student population. We decided that it would be best to focus on students that had been in the country for at least one semester or longer.

Theoretically these students would have had at least some time to think about how various aspects of their identity were perceived by the institution.

Once my prospectus was approved and I had secured IRB approval, I developed an e-mail that explained the purpose of my study and outlined the type of student I was interested in talking to. I then forwarded this e-mail to an international student office staff member who distributed it to the international student population. I also constructed a flyer to

explain the purpose of my study and included a disclosure statement that explained that the information obtained through my participant observation activities will be kept confidential. I then distributed this flyer to the participants prior to actual data collection.

Introduction to the Participants

I decided to interview six participants who were international students. Once I finished the interviewing process I transcribed these interviews from the recordings. As I began to aggregate the data, I realized that all the six international students I interviewed had positive attitudes towards the process and seemed enthusiastic about sharing their experiences. Several major themes emerged from coding and categorizing the data. These students had a variety of different national, cultural and racial backgrounds. Countries of origin for the students I interviewed included, Nigeria, Italy, Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, and Laos/Thailand. When one participant (from India) cancelled due to a scheduling conflict I managed to find a replacement, who, although born in the United States had been significantly influenced by her parents respective Laotian and Thai cultures (Laotian and Thai). One aspect all of these students had in common was that according to the international student office and their own reports, there were very few or no cases of individuals with similar or identical socio-cultural backgrounds on campus.

Paul

Paul was a first year graduate student pursuing a master's. He was a bright-eyed individual who seemed full of enthusiasm. His body language was assured and he projected an aura of self-confidence and determination. Paul spoke with a thick African accent which made transcribing his interview particularly challenging. I had to often ask him to repeat what he had said in order to assure that I understood his responses correctly. Being around

Paul for just a few minutes gave me the impression that he knew exactly why he was here and what his plan was. Paul originated from the Bailey states in Nigeria. One of the interesting facts about the Bailey states is that unlike other areas of Nigeria, most of the population does not have any tribal affiliation.

Carla

Carla, an international student from Venezuela, was an outspoken young woman who had been in the country for about a year. I was surprised at the proficiency of her almost accent-less English and couldn't help but ask if for most students in Venezuela English was a secondary language. As it turns out, not many people in her home country speak English and she attributed being bi-lingual to having attended a type of English magnet school from an early age on. When comparing her life in Venezuela to her life in America, Carla sighted the physical dangers in her home country as one of the most significant cultural and experiential differences. A country of roughly 28 million inhabitants, crimes such as kidnappings, carjacking, muggings, and murder have been a consistent and rising threat to much of the population. Carla grew up in this dangerous environment and expressed her appreciation for the improved security situation she now finds herself in since moving to the United States.

Dinh

Dinh is an undergraduate level international student from Vietnam. He was a well-dressed young man with rather dark skin color. He had a very friendly and respectful demeanor. On several occasions Dinh apologized to his "poor" English. Though it was challenging at times to understand what he was saying, I found that his English skills were surprisingly good considering he had only been in the U.S. for a year. When asked about cultural differences, Dinh told me that certainly cultural similarities exist between Vietnam

and other Asian countries such as China. For example, most Vietnamese use both the Western calendar and the Chinese Luna (Chinese New Year) calendar. He also told me that many Vietnamese people celebrate the Luna festival on the same date China does. Although Chinese people are certainly not all homogenous in their external appearance, Dinh did not look like most Chinese people. Therefore the assumption by some of his peers that he is Chinese seemed indicative of a homogenization based on race. Dinh noted that about half of the people who make comments about his heritage ask him where he is from and the other half tended to assume he was Chinese. Dinh believed that Vietnamese culture is very unique in the sense that they love foreigners. He claimed that the Vietnamese people are generally very open to other cultures; if an American person comes to Vietnam, he or she would be treated better than most Vietnamese people. This might sometimes appear strange to people from other countries but, according to Dinh, despite a history of hostility with the United States, most of the time Vietnamese people would say: "Oh, wow, you're from another country, welcome, welcome. You come stay at my house you're so interesting, we love you."

Fatima

Fatima was a vibrant and strong female who was easy to admire. She was obviously close to giving birth when she agreed to do the interview. According to Fatima, a variety of cultural differences exist between the United States and her native Saudi Arabia. She described Saudi Arabia as a traditional country, home to very traditional people. For instance, she attended a school designed only for females; however, since attending the North Carolina institution, many of her teachers and classmates are men. This was a big transition for Fatima.

Susan

Susan was the only American in this study's participants. Her racial and cultural background is Southeast Asian. She is a first-generation American and her parents are refugee immigrants from Thailand and Laos. Susan comes from a very large family; she has 10 aunts and uncles, all very close. When I asked Susan if there were cultural differences between Thailand/Laos and the United States she replied:

There are a lot. We have such huge families, it's not the same as a typical two-child American family would have. I don't think most American families are as close as we are. I guess I always consider everybody an aunt or an uncle instead of just a person, and I guess always have the honorifics in mind. You know, we have to identify if they are older than you and stuff like that.

Franco

Franco originated from Italy; he had just completed his four-year degree, but agreed to come back in order to participate in this study. He was very outspoken about how he had little difficulty adapting to campus life and American society. He believed this was partly because he is considered white by most people, but also because he has made a substantial effort to adapt several aspects of his life and personality to American culture. For example, not only does he watch football and enjoy it, he decided to become a high school football coach. His spouse is American, he mostly listens to American music, and seems to have made America his permanent home. He expressed no desire to move back to Italy.

Research Questions

The purpose of this research study was to better understand the discrepancies between external and internal perceptions of microminority identity. The study participants were a diverse group of international students at a four year University in North Carolina from a

variety of cultural and national backgrounds. In this Qualitative/Critical Inquiry, I used methods of one-on-one interviews, field notes, and reflective journaling in order to understand in what way the experiences of microminorities differ from the experiences of minorities who are members of larger minority groups and how their subjective perceptions of their identity diverge from institutional perceptions.

4. How do students who are microminorities describe the dimensions of their social identity?
5. What conflicts, constraints, and possibilities emerge as a result of interactions between these personal and institutional descriptions?
6. Do the experiences of microminorities differ from the experiences of other minorities? If so, in what ways are they unique?

Rationale for Research

Most professionals and scholars in higher education are familiar with or subscribe to the “melting-pot” theory, where minority groups surrender their cultural values and traditions to meld into a larger group, eventually becoming an integrated part of American society. This “melting” did not reflect my own experience, nor did my informal observation and interactions with a variety of different minority groups suggest its prevalence. Instead, I sometimes observed prejudice, tensions, discrimination, conflict, and voluntary segregation among and between various minority groups.

As an aspiring future leader in the field of higher education I could not ignore such observations and yearned to know more about how certain minorities perceive themselves and how they are perceived by institutions of higher learning, themselves comprised from a combination of the European Americans and a variety of minorities.

In my review of the literature, I noted that several questions were not adequately addressed. Because these gaps were too large to explore in a single study, I chose one avenue not primarily focused on race. This avenue emerged from my longtime efforts to create more awareness around the complexity of diversity and the elusiveness of a single definition for it.

It was imperative that I went into this fully aware that my findings could completely contradict my own experience. Thus, I asked other professionals to read my writing in order to help keep my subjectivity in check. For example, it could have turned out that race was the primary manner in which microminorities self-identified. Furthermore, it was important that I was willing to learn new things. Thus, I needed to understand and respect each participant's perspective. I believe my background in Mental Health Counseling helped me immensely in this regard. Concepts, such as transference, helped me remain aware of the risk of transferring my emotions about the topic onto the participant. Furthermore, the concept of immediacy, the ability to sense what the client (or in this case, the participant) may be feeling helped me monitor the participants comfort level with particular topics. Through my research I hoped to realize the following objectives:

1. To assist other microminorities in embracing their uniqueness while simultaneously spreading awareness of their existence in the field of higher education.
2. To increase my understanding about the role of race and culture in relationship to the identity of microminorities.
3. To enhance existing theories of diversity and multiculturalism.
4. To better understand whether and how race is indeed the sociological glue that many scholars and professionals perceive it to be.

This study was designed to address a problem based on two commonly held assumptions or thought processes, those that emerged from (1) my review of the literature and (2) from my direct observations and experiences as a professional in higher education. First, the identity of minorities is determined by others, such as school personnel or peers, not by the minorities themselves. These identities are typically perceived in the simplest terms and most convenient definitions. Second, the presumption is made that race is (or should be) the most important factor in the identification and categorization of microminorities, or any other type of minority for that matter, and differences in culture should be either inconsequential or secondary, if not tertiary, to racial categories.

Data Collection

I collected data using three different methods: one-on-one interviews, reflexive journaling and field notes. Based on Glesne's (2006) recommendation to qualitative researchers, I utilized reflective journaling and field notes in order to record thoughts, feelings and events when collecting data. My research journal included thoughts and observations of all parts of the research process. In particular, I recorded field notes that contained my thoughts, feelings and observations after each session, and used field notes and the contents of my journal as secondary data to help monitor my subjectivity during the research process. Furthermore, the journaling helped me to critically reflect on my experiences as researcher and to theorize how these experiences compared and contrasted to the experiences of others. Part of the reflective process included critically examining my relationships with participants of my research, and questioning my own perspectives about race and culture, and how these two interact in me and others.

It is difficult to observe or define the concept of diversity directly in any given environment, and rather than engaging in participant observation, which heavily relies on direct observations techniques, one-on-one interviews would be more effective for understanding the phenomenon under investigation. Maxwell (2005) asserted that the best way to understand how a person perceives their experiences is to conduct standardized interviews, in which specific questions are used to probe participant experiences.

According to Crotty (1998), a variety of data collection methods might be used, such as focus groups, case studies, visual ethnographic methods, questionnaires, and surveys. However, if a study seeks a comprehensive approach towards understanding the meanings people make of their experiences, then interviewing is an essential path towards knowledge (Seidman 2006, p. 11).

I interviewed six participants. I scheduled the interviews in order not to interfere with their school schedules. I interviewed each student once and the interview lengths averaged 40-60 minutes. The purpose of the interviews was to better understand the lived experiences of an often invisible demographic and the meaning these participants made out of these experiences.

One-on-one Interviews

I collected data by conducting semi-structured interviews with six international students. According to the Duke Initiative on Survey Methodology (DISM), interviewing can provide greater depth than a standard survey, which allows better insight into how individuals understand and narrate aspects of their lives. Additionally, interviews can be specifically tailored to the knowledge of the interviewee.

Considering that most many people are not likely to constantly think about the nature of their identity and issues surrounding it, I decided to employ semi-structured interview format as a data collections method. According to the DISM, less structured interviews are most appropriate for early stages of research because they allow participants to focus on what they think is most relevant to the question (p. 1). Furthermore, the semi-structured approach can be valuable in contexts where little is known about the topic.

I designed the questions so that they would elicit individuals' understandings. Most of the questions I asked were open-ended. During the interviewing process, I carefully monitored my body language and tried to remain calm even when the some of the participants became emotional in their expressions. I used follow-up questions such as "What do you mean by what you just said" or "Can you tell me more about what you felt that day" that encouraged expansions of ideas that seemed relevant to the research questions. I used probes such as "Can you give me an example" in order to get the participants to elaborate on various themes and to help them clarify concepts. I kept these probes short and simple, so they would not disrupt the interviewing process. I also summarized key ideas and themes in order to assure that I had a proper understanding of the participant's meanings. The DISM suggested that creating a comfortable environment for the participants is crucial to the interviewing process. I was fortunate to be able to secure an environment that for the most part was free of distractions. Furthermore, my experience in Mental Health counseling allowed me to establish very good rapport with all of the participants. Next I made sure that all of the participants read and understood the confidentiality agreement. Considering the sensitive nature of the research, establishing a trusting environment with the participants was very important to me. Since most of the participants had some similar experiences to my own

I utilized limited self-disclosure as a trust developing tool. I structured the interviews like a conversation, meaning that I started with easier and more general questions; I then saved the more sensitive questions for the middle of the interview and closed by allowing participants to respond to any topic covered in the interview.

Although semi-structured one-on-one interviews can be intimidating to some people, they provided a level of detail and insight into the experiences of these students that other methods of inquiry may not have been able to provide. Creswell (2009) exerted that one-on-one face-to-face interviews can be useful when participants cannot be directly observed. Some participants may be too shy to speak up during focus group or direct observation sessions and may feel more comfortable in a face to face setting. Furthermore, the use of one-on-one interviews allowed me to conduct a more in-depth exploration into the individual backgrounds and experiences of the more introverted students and supplied me with an adequate amount of qualitative data. During these interviews I employed as many open-ended questions as possible. If the main questions weren't open ended, I tried to utilize open-ended follow-up questions as they tended to encourage participants to elaborate more freely and did not limit them to "yes or no" answers. This allowed for the collection of more relevant data. I interviewed each student once and each session lasted from 40 to 60 minutes, so that participants would not get tired or feel overwhelmed. I informed each participant that their real names would not be used in the study, and that data obtained from this study would be treated as confidential and kept as secure as possible.

All students were at least 18 years of age and had been attending this university for at least one semester or more. I believe that because I share similarities with the individuals I interviewed, and I am still a foreigner in this country who has also been an international

student, at some point these qualities allowed me to establish genuine rapport with all of the interviewees. Furthermore, my experience as a mental health counselor helped me to patiently probe during the interview sessions in order to extract more explanations, clarifications, and descriptions of initial responses from the participants. I think my experience in this field also helped me to present myself in a non-threatening manner, caring and grateful manner while simultaneously maintaining a certain level of professional detachment throughout the interviewing process. Glesne (2006) argued that it is important for researchers to learn the participants' beliefs, experiences and views rather than try to persuade them to our own point of view. Consequently, I tried my best to stay as nondirective throughout the interviewing process as possible.

Field Notes

Glesne (2006) remarked that a field log can be a tool for recording ideas, reflections, hunches, and notes about emerging patterns, as well as the researcher's personal reactions, which can manifest themselves in the form of reflective and analytical thoughts. In other words, field notes can position the researcher within the research.

Reflexive Journaling

Since I have had been a microminority of one form or another for all of my life and I have had extensive experience with homogenization based on race as an international and professional, I decided that my study should include a reflective component in the form of an autobiographical statement and reflective journal designed to capture how my findings are similar or different from my own experiences. According to Chang (2008), the age-old practice of telling stories dates at least as far back as recorded human history. It is easy to see how stories contain the autobiographical components of the storytellers. But, even if these

stories are not exclusively about the storytellers themselves, they can produce written narratives. These self-narratives forms a style of writing in which the writer primarily imagines him or herself in relationship to the explored subject or subjects. Chang maintains that writings with the “self” as the focus have, over the past few decades, increased significantly in number. These writings represent a variety of genres, thematic foci, and writing styles. They appear in the form of autobiographies, memoirs, journals, diaries, personal essays or letters. Because I have experienced firsthand what it feels like to be oppressed due to the way I choose to identify myself, having a reflective component to my research strategy made sense. I decided that my insights and life experience in this area as well as my status as a lifelong microminority should be used as an additional source of data which I then utilized to further bolster my research. The data I generated through this method addressed aspects of my identity that are most important to me and explored pressures and discrimination I have experienced as a student, as a professional in higher education, and in my personal life. This data in some ways mirrored what others are experiencing and provided some insight into how and why my experiences differ from other microminorities.

Data Analysis

Creswell, (2009) explained that data analysis involves the collection of open-ended data based on questions, and the development of an analysis from the information supplied by the participants. I took a critical interpretive approach to analyzing the data. According to Crotty (1998), the roots of interpretivism are often linked to the thought of Max Weber, who suggested that the human sciences focus on Understanding (“Verstehen,” in German). This means that Weber contrasted the interpretive approach needed in the human and social sciences, one that centers on understanding, or Verstehen, with the explicative approach of

explaining (“Erklären,” in German) most often found in the natural sciences. It follows, then, that the purpose of interpretive analysis is to break down the data into parts, analyze these parts and offer an interpretation of their meaning. My objective for using this approach was to gain a better understanding of how microminorities perceived themselves, how they believed they were perceived by others in their educational environment, and how participants were affected by any differences in those perceptions.

Munhall (2001) remarked that when a critical approach is employed within an interpretive framework, the primary goal is not social change, but rather to uncover new, hidden, or ignored meanings or practices that bind experience to the social world. Within a critical social framework, the possibilities for social change are increased if the experiences of marginalized groups are translated so that the commonalities and distinctions between the normative and the marginalized can be recognized (p. 441).

Data Preparation

The first step of the data analysis process involved data preparation. The data was obtained in the form of notes and tape recordings. The data obtained from tape recordings were then transcribed verbatim. Elliot and Timulak (2005) argued that insights and understandings can begin to emerge from an initial reading, and which can then be written down as memos. I read the entire data set, including some of my own reflective notes initially interwoven with the participant’s data but written into margins in a different font so I could clearly distinguish my own voice from those of the participants. This process helped me get a better overview of the studied phenomenon. Creswell (2009) argued that this preliminary reading of the data helps the researcher get a sense of the tone of the ideas, the overall level of depth, the credibility of the data, and how this information might be used. Reading through

all of the data allowed me to get a general sense of what the participants were saying and their mood when they said it.

Elliot and Timulak (2005) maintained that during or after the initial reading an initial editing of the data often takes place. During this stage I omitted obvious redundancies, repetitions, and unimportant digressions; at the same time I was careful not to delete any data that could have been important or relevant to the phenomenon being studied.

The next step involved a coding process. Rossman and Rallis (2000, p. 171) described the coding process as the organization of the material into chunks and segments of text before bringing meaning to the information. I initially picked out one interview transcript (one that drew my attention at the time). I segmented the text data into sentences and paragraphs, then made notes and comments in the margins. I repeated this task with the remaining transcripts and made a list of all the topics that emerged. Then I clustered similar topics together, which I arranged into columns labeled “Major Topics,” “Unique (unexpected) Topics,” and “Other Topics.” I took this list back to the data and abbreviated the topics as codes, which I then wrote next to the appropriate segments of text. As a result of this preliminary organizing a few new categories emerged.

Creswell (2009) encouraged the researcher to find the most descriptive wording for the topics and then turn them into categories. According to Hill, Thompson and Williams (1997), creation of categories is an interpretive process on the part of the researcher, in which she or he is trying to respect the data and use category labels close to the original language of participants. Furthermore, Hill et al. (1997) maintained that ideas for categories also come in part from the researcher’s knowledge of previous theorizing and findings in other studies. Consequently, categorizing is an interactive process in which priority is given to the data, but

understanding is inevitably made possible by previous understanding.

After I made final decision about the abbreviations, I analyzed each category by interpreting its meaning and relevance in relationship to answering the research questions. For this task my personal experiences as a microminority, a counselor in higher education, and international student helped immensely. These experiences created within me a heightened sensitivity towards certain phenomenon related to identity, such as internal versus external perception and cultural differences.

Even before beginning this formal inquiry, I had worked as a counselor at a local community college. It was my job to help students with academic, career and personal issues. During the better part of six years I encountered many situations that pertained to this study. Even then students reported incidence of discrepancies between the way they perceived their identity and the way they were perceived by the institution. Because these issues also affected me personally I became very sensitive to them. When similar concerns surfaced during the course of this study, they triggered memories of previous events, causing certain themes to occur to me, and helping to develop categories and codes. Moreover, a considerable overlap occurred between the recurring themes in the experiences of the participants and my own experiences. In my mind this overlap added validity to the themes, categories, and codes I selected. In order to add further validity and reliability of my findings I double-checked the transcripts in order to make sure they contained no transcription mistakes. To the best of my ability I kept the meaning of the codes consistent throughout the process of coding. I also sought to clarify the subjectivity I brought to the study as a researcher and made note of negative or discrepant information that emerged, so I could later include it in the findings.

Reporting

Lester (1999) argued that the development of general theories (i.e., which apply to situations beyond the participants or cases that have been studied) from phenomenological findings must be done carefully and transparently if such theories are to be considered. Furthermore, the conditions under which the research will be conducted must be communicated in the same transparent manner to all participants. According to Elliot and Timulok (2005), it is important to place one's qualitative findings within a context of previous theory and research findings. This can be accomplished partly by reflecting thoroughly on the methodological influences and limitations shaping the results of my study (and previous studies). Furthermore, it is also important to locate our findings within a socio-historical and scientific context, and to imagine useful further research.

Because I conducted only one interview with each of the six participants, the amount of data I was able to extract was somewhat limited. Therefore it was imperative that my findings be written in a manner that provided the reader with a good balance of data, theory, and my own personal reflections.

Ethics

Hesse–Bieber and Leavy (2006) maintained the importance of researchers anticipating ethical issues that may arise during their inquiries. Punch (2005) argued that ethical issues of a study might manifest within the identification of the research problem. Therefore, he reminded researchers of the importance of selecting a problem that will benefit the individuals being studied. Thus, the problem selected should be meaningful for people other than the researcher.

Similarly, ethical issues can arise during the construction of the purpose statement and the research questions.

Creswell (2009) pointed out that many ethical issues arise during the data collection stage and cautioned not to put participants at risk; the researcher needs to respect vulnerable populations. Furthermore, Creswell stated that it is imperative a researcher has their research reviewed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), which was created because of federal regulations designed to provide protection against human rights violations. Sieber (2013) asserted that the IRB process requires the researcher to evaluate his proposed study for potential risk of physical, psychological, social, economic, or legal harm. Creswell (2009) gave several guidelines to researchers that help reduce the risk participants being harmed by the data collection process. First, he pointed out that one issue to anticipate is that some participants may not want their identity to be kept confidential. Rather than discourage this, Creswell argued that permitting participants to reveal their identity will allow participants to retain ownership of their voices and give them the opportunity to make independent decisions. Creswell also cited the importance of a number of other ethical procedures during data collection, including gaining agreement of individuals in authority at a given institution to conduct research, conducting research in a manner that leaves the research site undisturbed, and making sure both the researcher and the participants benefit from the research.

Patton (2002) observed the difficulty of anticipating the possibility of potentially harmful intimate information being disclosed during the data collection process. Creswell (2009) argued that if this should occur the ethical code for researchers stipulates that whoever conducts the research should protect the privacy of the participants.

Lastly, I had to consider ethical issues when analyzing and interpreting the data. Creswell (2009) encouraged researchers to contemplate how they will protect the anonymity of individuals, roles, and incidents in the study. One way of doing this during survey research would be to disassociate names from responses during the coding process. Sieber (2013) recommended that, once it is analyzed, data be kept for five–10 years, then discarded.

The concept of “truthfulness” in research particularly comes into play during the interpretation phase of the research. Creswell (2009) argued that researchers need to provide an accurate account of the information they have gained from conducting their studies. This also means that researchers must refrain from suppressing, falsifying, or inventing findings to meet researchers or audience’s needs. According to Gibbs (2007), truthfulness (or qualitative validity) means that research checks for accuracy of the findings by utilizing certain procedures consistent across researchers and different projects. According to Yin (2003), one way to determine if a research approach is consistent or reliable is to document as many steps taken during the process as possible. Lastly, Neuman (2000) maintained the importance of the researcher releasing the details of his or her research, including the study design, so that readers might determine for themselves if the study is credible or not.

Keeping the abovementioned principles in mind, I conducted all interviews in the library of a four-year University in North Carolina, except for the last interview, which was conducted outside of the library on a day when school was not in session and the campus was virtually empty. A potentially ethical pitfall occurred during the last interview. During the interviewing process, the participant unknowingly made reference to another participant who I had interviewed previously. I realized this when the participant mentioned gave a detailed

description of the other participant. In order to protect the confidentiality of prior participant, I did not reveal that I knew or had interviewed her.

After I interviewed the last student, I started the transcription process, which at times was more challenging than I had anticipated because of the strong accents of some of the participants. Nonetheless, I took great care and did my best to transcribe each tape as accurately as possible. The interviewing process became significantly more fluent with each interview as I learned from what I did right, and what areas of my technique needed improving, from one interview to the next.

Trustworthiness

Because I have been a microminority in one form or another, who has been subjected to discrimination all of my life, my personal subjectivity represented one of the biggest obstacles to the trustworthiness of this study. Consequently, I employed a variety of steps in order to improve the trustworthiness of my study. Throughout the study, I tried to stay aware of the possibility that the experiences of others may sharply differ from my own. Monitoring my personal thoughts, feelings, and responses closely through the method of reflexive journaling helped me keep my subjectivity in check so that I was able to reduce the risk of negatively influencing the study. I reminded myself repeatedly that primary purpose of this study was not to tell my story or support my point of view. Also, I enlisted the help of secondary readers so they could point out when I was losing sight of my subjectivity.

During the analysis process, I double checked the transcripts to make sure that they do not contain obvious errors during the transcription. Secondly, although some of the initial codes were replaced with more descriptively effective codes, I tried to assure that the meaning of the codes stayed consistent throughout the coding process. I followed Creswell's (2009)

recommendation, which contends that this might be achieved repeatedly, comparing data with the codes and writing memos about the codes and their definitions (p. 190). In further accordance with Creswell's suggestions, I triangulated different data sources (one-on-one interviews, reflective journal and field notes in order to build a consistent justification for themes. Creswell (2009 p. 191) claims that if themes are developed based on converging several sources of data or perspectives from participants, then this process can be claimed as adding validity to the study.

I used rich thick description to convey the finding in an attempt to transport readers to the setting and give the discussion and element of shared experiences. Furthermore, I used negative or discrepant information that ran counter to the themes. Creswell (2009, p. 192) argues that because real life is composed of different perspectives that do not always agree, the discussion of contrary information can add to the credibility of an account. Lastly, I clarified the subjectivity I brought to the study, in the hope that this self-reflection would create an open and honest narrative that would resonate with readers.

Chapter IV: Research Findings

Introduction

In this chapter I organized the information from the participants and my personal experience in a parallel fashion under the framework of critical race theory, in order to create a detailed presentation of my research findings. I also used the three research questions as a guide for this study about internal vs. external perceptions of microminority identity. The personal information is sourced from a reflexive journal that I kept during the research process. This journal was designed to supplement and contrast the data collected from the participants with my own experiences. I felt that my extensive personal experience as a microminority could help reveal an additional layer of depth and complexity to the notion of diversity.

Review of the Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore if being a microminority (singular minority or minority who is part of a very small group) is a different experience than being a minority who is part of a larger minority group. Furthermore, I wanted to find out if there was a discrepancy between the way microminorities perceive and describe themselves and how they are perceived by their peers. Lastly, I wanted to better understand how microminorities are affected by homogenization into minority groups, whom they may not identify with based on racial similarities.

Thus, the three research questions asked were:

1. How do microminorities describe the dimensions of their social identity?
2. What conflicts, constraints, and possibilities emerge as a result of interactions

between personal and institutional descriptions?

3. Do the experiences of microminorities differ from the experiences of other minorities? If so, in what ways are they unique?

Overview of Procedures

In this chapter, I provide a detailed description of the experiences of each of the six participants in contrast to my own experiences, giving readers a glimpse into the world of microminorities, their experiences with racial generalizations and stereotyping, and how being part of a very small minority group or being one of a kind may differ from being part of a larger minority group. I present the data I collected from the participants under the philosophical framework of subjectivity and within the theoretical framework of critical race theory. I extracted direct quotes from the transcripts and also wrote some close paraphrasing in order to give a voice to the participants to capture any discrepancies between internal and external perceptions. I then organized the data into three sections: (1) describing the constraints, (2) conflicts, and (3) possibilities that resulted from perceptual difference and the unique experiences of the participants.

Finally, I examined the data and my findings to reflect on any implications and conclusions that could be drawn. I also incorporated arguments from the literature review, critical race theory—in particular Delgado and Stephancic's (2012) assimilation and separation and structural determinism approaches—to the findings to discover any patterns or relevant points.

Interpretive Analysis

Munhall (2001) remarked that when a critical approach is employed within an interpretive framework, the primary goal is not social change, but rather to uncover new,

hidden, or ignored meanings or practices that connect experience to the social world. Within a critical social framework, the possibilities for social change are increased if the experiences of marginalized groups are translated so that the commonalities and distinctions between the normative and the marginalized can be recognized (Munhall 2001, p. 441).

Theoretical framework

Critical Race Theory

I chose CRT as a grounding theory for my research findings because of its relevance to how minorities position themselves in society. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2012), CRT teaches us that individual and group identities are much more complex than the American census data would have us believe. Although critical race theory has traditionally focused on how the experiences of the African American population are affected by the pervasive and engrained nature of racism, I intended to use its structure as a guideline for my own theoretical framework. This frame, which at its core holds the notion, that discrimination occurs not only because of racism, but also because of cultural differences or the rejection of race as a primary part of identity. The manner in which CRT can be used to analyze the effects of oppressive phenomenon, such as racism, on certain minority groups, should be adaptable or expandable to how microminorities—who may not view race as their primary identity—may be affected by the similarly oppressive phenomenon of racialization.

Conflicts

In this section I discuss types of conflicts that emerged in the lives of the participants as a result of a discrepancy between external and internal perceptions. The data for this section originates from six participants and myself; Paul (from Nigeria), Carla (from

Venezuela), Susan (from the United States), Dinh (from Vietnam), Fatima (from Saudi Arabia), and Franco (from Italy).

As I went through the individual transcripts and started analyzing the data, I kept the three guiding research questions in mind. It became clear that most of the participants perceived and described their identity more in terms of culture and nationality. At the same time, others in their external environment, such as their peers, had a tendency to ascribe and sometimes impose identities onto them based on racial characteristics.

When asked which identity dimension was more central to their overall identity, all but one participant, who cited religion as her most important identity dimension, believed that culture and nationality were more important to them than race. Overall, these findings are in accordance with scholars, such as LaBaron (2003), who argued that culture, not race, is central to our identity and the ways we make meaning. LaBaron (2003) further postulated that misunderstanding and conflict can occur when our identities or personal beliefs feel threatened. The data I collected reaffirmed that these discrepancies between external and internal perceptions regarding the importance and centrality of specific identity dimensions can create tension and conflict between the microminorities and individuals in their external environment.

For example, when I asked Carla (from Venezuela) if the way the way people view her affects her interactions with them, she replied:

Yeah, because I get annoyed it's like a cycle. I think if it's somebody that actually worth my time then and they are actually trying to understand but if they just don't care and they keep trying to associate me with that culture without really trying to understand where I'm coming from then I feel like it's not really worth it.

Intersectionality

Delgado and Stefancic (2012) asserted that the concept of intersectionality holds that no person has a single, easily defined, unitary identity. Furthermore, the classical manifestations of oppression within society, such as sexism, racism, and discrimination based on religion, do not act independently of one another. Instead, these forms of oppression interact, creating a system of oppression that reflects an intersection of multiple forms of discrimination. Because of the intersection of their internal cultural self-identity and the external focus on their racial appearance, microminorities are particularly susceptible to this type of multi-dimensional discrimination.

When I asked Fatima which aspect of her identity she focused on the most, she remarked that race wasn't central to her identity and cited her religion as her defining identity dimension. Although she felt that many people are more likely to focus on her race when she first encounters them, she made it clear that she considers herself a Muslim first. Fatima believed that most people assume she is Mexican when she isn't wearing her hijab (traditional head scarf). This means that she is often subjected to the negative stereotypes that are associated with the Mexican community; however, being homogenized with the Mexican community and being subjected to their stereotypes wasn't the only type of discrimination she experienced. What seemed to affect her much more was that she was sometimes perceived as being dangerous, perhaps even as a potential terrorist. She said that some American friends, very close to her family, once invited them to Christmas dinner, but (she heard later) their friends were told not to invite them: "They will be at your home not as your friends, as you think they are; they are terrorists and they are coming to kill you."

Being the peace-loving individual that she is, Fatima was very hurt by this assertion. Similarly, she recalled taking a class for international students, taught by an American professor. During one particular session, the students were asked to stereotype each other. She recalled that the first thing the students said about Arabs was that they are fighters and killers. Although, the people saying these things were not all American—from other countries such as Brazil, Spain, and Venezuela—they perceived most Arabs as dangerous and violent. Fatima remarked that there are about a billion Muslims in the world, and that most of them are perceived as bloodthirsty and dangerous; she is trying hard to change this image by being “the best Muslim she can be.”

Personal Experiences with Intersectionality

In my personal life I have been affected by intersectionality. I am at once perceived as dangerous and belonging to a minority group I do not identify with. I believe that the United States has its own brand of discrimination against people of color or more specifically, African Americans. Being a dangerous criminal is one of those specific American stereotypes and one I had not experienced under the German system of discrimination. Because of homogenization based on race, the stereotypes that were originally constructed for African-Americans extends to blacks. There are a variety of incidences that suggest that fear of the dangerous “black man” is indeed a factor in my interaction with the, predominantly Caucasian, populous as indicated in particular by some encounters I’ve had with local law-enforcement, the European American population and some Asian minorities. I believe that some of the responses of white law enforcement towards me have been excessive and racially motivated. These responses include being surrounded by five police cars for going 10 mph over the speed limit, being pulled out of my car for having the wrong tags

and being disrespected by being told to “get the hell out of here” by a white police officer during a routine traffic stop. In none of these cases did I provoke these behaviors by being rude or disrespectful in any way. Additionally, the reaction of Caucasian women in public towards me often seems to be motivated by fear, as they tend cross the street when I walk towards them, push themselves in the corners of elevators, and consistently clutch their purses when I pass them in the mall or other public places. Lastly, my experiences with people from Asian countries (China and Japan to be specific), includes being profiled for shoplifting and being classified as a poor choice for a mate.

Paul (from Nigeria) stated that conceptually he could see how being a microminority could be problematic for some individuals. However, he did not feel that being part of a very small minority group has adversely affected him. Far from being shy, Paul is also a very extraverted individual, which helps him navigate complex social situations and traverse cultural differences. Nonetheless, he conceded that that there was a difference between external (institutional) and internal (personal) perception in relationship to his identity. He felt that people first and foremost perceive him as African or “black.” He also believed that, as a whole, the institution primarily perceives minorities in terms of race. Despite Paul’s assertion that being part of a very small minority didn’t pose any major problems for him, it was very clear that his Nigerian heritage was very important to him. This was evident by the clear distinction he made between himself or people from African countries and the African American population, sighting cultural differences such as day-to-day experiences, food culture, music, language, and interactions with elders and figures of authority.

Carla (from Venezuela) felt very frustrated because, although nationality and culture were central to her identity, she believed that she was primarily perceived through a racial

lens by the institution. When asked what part of her identity people around her tended to focus on, she responded that it was definitely race.

Honestly? I think its race. I mean I consider myself Hispanic I can't deny that but I feel that the larger Hispanic community does not truly represent me. Like even some aspects of the language and some other stuff is completely different. So I feel like those are not the people who represent me.

Subsequently, Carla reported that race has never been a big issue for her until she moved from Venezuela to North Carolina. When asked how much people in this state, and—more specifically—this educational environment, focused on race, Carla reiterated that race was indeed their primary focus: “Oooh, Yes! I was not aware that race was such a big deal until I moved here. I never really cared about it until I moved here. But, yeah, for them I think it's all about race.”

I am forced to concur with Carla's assessment. In my experience, individuals who primarily focus on culture rather than race are rare. At least in this state this is evidenced by a very high degree of voluntary segregation, which is found everywhere, from K-12 school bus stops, to organizations to churches and public social gatherings. When I asked Carla if she was mainly homogenized based on race by her peers, or by people who were employed by the school, she expressed that racialized perceptions were not limited to students.

I think it's just everyone. I think it's just everyone who is not part of that culture and honestly, to be completely honest with you even within the larger Hispanic community, they lump us together.

Separatism (Nationalism) vs. Assimilation

According to Delgado and Stephancic (2012) there are two ways in which minorities of color can position themselves in society. They can either assimilate or separate.

Assimilation refers to the process of adapting social and cultural traits of the majority race in the nation in which one resides and nationalism or separatism refers to the view that a racial

minority group should separate itself from mainstream society and pursue its own interests primarily (pp. 156, 172).

Franco (from Italy) remarked that in United States he is not categorized as a minority and that this has been beneficial to him. Because his appearance resembles most European Americans, he has been able to blend in. Franco also believed that he would probably be looked upon differently if his skin color was darker and that this would have made him feel more like a minority.

Visually, of course, color is the first thing they notice, right? That's just the way it is. I've never considered myself a minority. I look the part; looking at me you couldn't tell I'm not from this country. I'm very proud of my heritage and my roots of course. But I never took offense being considered being like everybody else.

Because European Americans have few negative stereotypes associated with them, they are mostly viewed as intelligent and socio-economically successful. Franco has been able to thrive in this environment. He established a large circle of middle-upper-class Caucasian American friends and maintains a successful career as a high school football coach. Although Franco could be categorized as a microminority, based on culture (there were no other Italian students at ASU while he attended), his ability to adapt, adjusting his interests and lifestyle and being perceived as white, allowed him to avoid some of the major challenges associated with the microminority experience, such as not fitting in.

I was one of a kind for the majority of my time here; we did have some international students exchange students from Italy for a semester. But I don't know of any other Italians that were here for the entire duration of my undergraduate degree.

Consequently, unlike the other participants who were trying to avoid being homogenized with larger (racial) minority groups they do not identify with and perhaps because of his personality, assimilation has worked for Franco, and he has succeeded in avoiding most of the negative stereotypes that come along with this categorization.

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2012), the separatist position holds that people of color should embrace their culture and (African American) origins. For example, a “black person” who takes a separatist approach may conduct as much business with other “blacks” as possible. A separatist-inclined black person may consciously choose a black-owned moving company, donate money specifically to African-American colleges, and work in the music industry to boost the careers of black musicians. In contrast, a black person who takes an assimilationist approach may practice law in a white-dominated firm on behalf of corporate clients, most of whom may also be white. This person may also live in an integrated suburb that is 90% white, with a modicum of blacks or other persons of color most of whom are also professionals.

Two main issues arise within this aspect of CRT. First, the racialized language used in CRT, especially the term black or blacks, contributes to the homogenization and consequently marginalization of non-African-American minorities of color, such as the grouping of Afro Germans or individuals from African countries with the African American population. For example, Awokoya and Clark (2008) argued that while mainstream sociological theories have aimed to capture the social and economic experiences of first generation African immigrants, not much is known about their day-to-day experiences because such studies often group these individuals with other minority populations based on race. Similarly, Camp (2003b) argued that the history of the black European community has been largely overlooked in scholarly engagement with the African diaspora. Consequently, such microminorities are at risk of being overlooked and marginalized in most educational literature, including the CRT concepts of separation and assimilation.

Furthermore, Delgado and Stephancic (2012) argued that one strand of critical race theory, backs the nationalist (separatist) view, which is particularly prominent with the materialists such as Derick Bell, for example, who urges his fellow African Americans to foreswear the struggle for school integration and aim for building the best possible “black schools.” Similarly, Delgado and Stephancic (2012) maintained that other nationalists urge the establishment of all-black or all-Latino innercity schools. Because of the entanglement of race and culture under CRT, the assumption is made that minorities who reject nationalism or separatism reject their culture in favor of assimilation with the dominant “white-European” culture. The participant and reflective data suggests that what is missing from CRT is the realization that there are minorities whose culture is naturally closer to white-European culture, despite what people may expect based on superficial observation of their racial characteristics.

Cultural Starting Points

LaBaron (2003) argued that at the base of an individual's identity, currencies and world view are starting points or place from which it seems natural to begin. These are essentially the underlying assumptions upon which culture is based. They often differ between different cultures. LaBaron provided several examples of opposing starting points. For example, high versus low-context communication refers to whether meaning is heavily tied to the context of the communication. Communitarianism versus individualism refers to whether people see themselves as first and foremost an individual or a part of a community and specificity versus diffusiveness which relates to whether people prefer specific concepts, or more fuzzy guidelines to concepts. LaBaron argued that when people encounter others with different starting points and currencies from their own, massive miscommunications are

likely, which often results in conflict development or conflict escalation. Consequently, cultural differences are directly related to interpersonal conflict.

Susan noted that she had met a lot of very religious or very Christian people who have actually told her that they don't know how to be grateful. Susan felt that one of the cultural differences between her and Americans not grounded in Asian cultures who have emigrated from war-torn and impoverished countries, lies in her extreme gratitude for what she has.

I guess it was always different for me I have always been taught to be very grateful and humble. Another classmate who is very Christian said I know that I have a lot of stuff and a lot of opportunity but I don't know how to be very grateful.

Carla made it clear that she is culturally very different from other Latinos, such as Mexicans and Cubans and that she is often accused as acting white by people from other Spanish speaking countries. Carla attributes her behavior and culture to her natural surroundings, the way she was raised, the fact that she attended a bilingual school, making her as fluent in English as Spanish and not necessarily as an act of assimilation. When comparing her life in Venezuela to her life in America, Carla sighted the physical dangers in her home country as one of the most significant cultural and experiential differences. A country of roughly with roughly 28 million inhabitants, crimes such as kidnappings, carjacking, muggings and murder have been a consistent and rising threat to much of the population. Carla grew up in this dangerous environment and expressed her appreciation for the improved security situation she now finds herself in since moving to the United-States. Carla believes that she is culturally very different from Latinos who originate from other South-American countries and Mexico. She felt that she is often being homogenized with other "Hispanics" based on race; however, although there are similarities among

Venezuelans, Colombians, and Chileans, the differences among them are not merely “sub-cultural.” Rather, they are broad, extensive, and genuine cultural differences, reflected in almost all aspects of her life.

I have friends here who are “Hispanics” from other countries and it’s completely different. We can’t even talk to each other without misunderstanding many words. So yeah, it’s a culture on its own. Everything, the accent, the way we act towards each other the way we treat people is completely different from let’s say Colombia (which is right next to Venezuela) Puerto Rico or the Dominican republic.

Since coming to the United States, Carla has met students from other South American countries. She doesn’t deny that she is Latina, and states that there are cultural similarities among Latinos, but also feels that the cultural differences between them are significant, and that these sometimes feel all but insurmountable. She reported often feeling isolated and frustrated when her friends laugh about something and then criticize her for not laughing with them. When they asked her why she isn’t laughing she replied that: “Because I didn’t grow up like that.” They seem to assume that all Latinos share the same sense of humor. Although she doesn’t think her friends are angry with her for not laughing, they definitely seemed to be irritated by her response. They seem to expect her to think and feel like them because she is also Hispanic.

In the case of microminorities such as myself and Carla, whose culture is different or opposite from what most people expect based on our race, the concepts of nationalism and assimilation could be reversed. To me, embracing my culture means to embrace white European culture, the culture I grew up in, the culture I have been immersed in for a large part of my life. Conversely, because I have very little in common culturally with the African American population, embracing its culture could be considered assimilation.

People have a tendency to believe that individuals with certain racial characteristics are culturally similar by default; however, my findings reflect a different reality. For example, Paul grew up in the northern part of Nigeria, largely populated by members of the Hausa tribe. As a result, Paul understands the Hausa culture and can communicate in the Hausa language. Although in modern times there are Western cultural influences in Nigeria, Paul made it clear that this cultural overlap wasn't enough to prevent him from experiencing what he described as culture shock. He believed that the cultural differences between Nigeria and North Carolina are significant. Paul attributed this to fundamental differences in day to day experiences.

Beset by civil unrest, tribal and religious conflict, political corruption, Paul remarked that Nigeria can be a dangerous place to be. Consequently, many Nigerians live in heightened state of awareness and are very conscious of their surroundings comparable to the state of awareness many Americans were in after the events of 9/11. With a slight grin on his face, Paul started reminiscing about his first trip to Black Mountain with a couple of friends. They were hiking and came up on a quiet and isolated area. He remembered walking for about an hour and even though there were three of them he remembered experienced feelings of anxiety and fear. Thoughts of being ambushed raced through his mind making him break out in a cold sweat. He was baffled because his new friends didn't seem too worried at all about the fact that they seemed to be completely cut off from civilization. Half-jokingly he admitted that the thought of running back to the car crossed his mind more than once. His smile widened when he explained to me that after walking for about an hour some lady seemingly out of thin air came walking towards them from the opposite direction. "Alone!" Paul exclaimed. "She didn't even have dog to protect her." Something like this seemed

unfathomable. Paul felt that most African Americans, a group he is sometimes homogenized with, wouldn't have this type of heightened sense of awareness about their surroundings unless they were gang members or drug dealers, and even then Paul felt that their experience of growing up in a country where entire militia fight each other with military-grade weapons does not compare to growing up in innercity ghettos.

I think real Africans will have experiences that most African-American won't have. I've seen people die I've seen people being slaughtered, I've seen terrible things. That kind of experience; when I talk about those certain things people here cannot even fathom it.

Throughout the initial stages of the interview Paul referred to both Africans and African Americans as Africans. Although I never learned why he did this (although I sensed that it was an attempt not to offend me), terms such as "Real Africans" signaled to me that he was making a fundamental distinction between the two populations.

Similarly, Carla, for example, believed that many people assume that she's culturally similar to Mexicans, a population she does not identify with at all. She reported that often people would ask her "what she was." She is unsure if they were referring to her race, ethnicity, or nationality, so most of the time she would simply tell them: "I'm human."

Unlike Franco, who managed to blend in with white America because of his appearance, Dinh (from Vietnam) would not be mistaken for Caucasian. His dark-brown skin, heavy accent, and Asian features instantly lead people to categorize him as a foreigner. Thus his ability to blend into white society seamlessly, and benefit from white privilege, is limited. Nonetheless, Dinh seemed very interested in assimilating in American society to some extent, although perhaps for other reasons than his Italian counterpart. Dinh theorized that because minorities who are part of larger minority groups have a greater tendency to exclusively interact with each other, microminorities, because of their diminutive numbers,

have less opportunity to associate with people from their own minority group. As a result, Dinh reported that he felt motivated to interact more with the mainstream population and other types of minorities. He felt that having too many people from his own country to socialize with would have been counterproductive for him. He stated that one of the main reasons he came to this country, besides advancing his education, was to learn English and immerse himself in American culture. He believed that this type of integration and exposure was essential to his quest to become an international businessman.

If there were too many Vietnamese here you won't learn a lot because you only hang around with Vietnamese and speak that language, and that's something I don't want to do. I'm here to learn; why would I want to hang out with a bunch of Vietnamese? I could just go back to Vietnam because there are millions of Vietnamese there.

Race vs. Culture

Quintyn (2012) maintained that people tend to believe in what they can see; and in the streets of America, people see race. Unfortunately, race and culture are frequently entangled not only by the average person on the street but also in the educational literature. This means that people often assume that there is a tight association between these identity dimensions. In other words that race causes culture or that specific cultures are the product of race.

Although, Franco the participant from Italy claims to have been less affected by being a Micro-Minority, racism and homogenization based on race. He concurs that most people see through racial lenses and; he believes that people make assumptions and have a set of social expectations based on what they see. Contrary to those people Franco does not consider race to be the primary dimension of his identity.

My nationality and culture, of course, is a big deal. I take pride in being Italian and my diversity I try to expose my friends and whoever I come across to what being

Italian sort of means. I guess you could say I can't change my skin tone. There is nothing I can do about that. So I guess you could say my culture is what I focus on.

This is an example of when, being homogenized based on race can be beneficial to a cultural minority. Like most of the other participants, Franco reports that culture is central to his identity. However, since he is being homogenized with the white majority he is also able to reap the benefits of white privilege.

Although Susan has strong cultural ties to Thailand and Laos she was born and raised in the United States. She remarked that even though she speaks fluent English without any accent, many people at the institution assume that she is a foreigner and an international student. In this example culture (which is a higher human-order trait) was of completely juxtaposed with race by her peers. She also believed that people try to avoid international students because they are afraid these students will not be able to proficiently communicate with them. Susan believed that the focus of the institution was primarily on race, as reflected in the following remarks: "It's definitely not culture. I think that people are just ignorant about other people's culture. They definitely focus on how you look."

Delgado and Stephancic (2012) maintained that although no science supports this practice, American society prefers to place its citizens into boxes based on physical attributes and culture simply because it is a matter of habit and convenience. However, it is important to understand that Whites and African Americans aren't the only ones who engage in these types of simplistic thought processes and behaviors.

On several occasions Susan has encountered women from Asian countries other than Thailand or Laos (the countries her parents are from). She explained that these women tend to assume that her national and cultural background is the same as theirs, and that this assumption is based on their perception of her as an attractive Asian female with light skin:

It gets on my nerves sometimes. Because they just go off speaking whatever language they speak. Sometimes I just have to stop them and, I'm like, I'm sorry, I can't understand you.

Susan explained to me that having lighter skin is considered to be a very positive attribute in most Asian cultures. Even an old Chinese proverb, loosely translated as “The lighter the skin the prettier the girl,” speaks to this phenomenon. Susan believed that she has been privileged because of her light complexion, and because she receives a substantial amount of positive attention from individuals from a variety of Asian nationalities and cultures. Susan also felt, however, that she is often homogenized by individuals from various Asian countries based on her racial characteristics.

Stereotyping vs. Homogenization Based on Race

Although I believe that the two are not the same phenomenon, stereotyping (though more cognitive and deliberate) is closely related to homogenization and therefore must be discussed. Susan recalled attending a class in which the students had the opportunity to conference, via Skype, with people around the world. She was stunned by some of the stereotypes held by some of her classmates:

For example, we conferenced with Thailand and Taiwan and some of the eggheads in my class just have such low exposure to Asian people. It was really surprising to me that they all admitted that they believed in all the Asian stereotypes and that all they can think about is Kung-Fu when they look at Asian people. And then, after they have the class—then they realize that they are wrong. But, you know, I think that's like the majority of the population, because it was like six people from my 15-person class that believed in these stereotypes, so that's a pretty large percentage.

When I asked Susan if she thought that people often homogenized Asians because they lack exposure to specific Asian cultures and nationalities and they believe that Asians share a collective culture, she replied:

Yes, which is why they lump people together in the first place, because, you know, they don't really know any better. Because if you think Taiwan and China are the same country, then, you know, you're going to think that all Asians are all Chinese.

Dinh, from Vietnam, preferred to express his opinions in percentages and believed that the institution sometimes focuses more on his race than his culture. This study was not designed to measure or verify any percentages, and Dinh's responses should therefore be only viewed as opinions and estimates. He felt that about 25% of people he encountered ask him if he is Chinese, but that roughly 75% made no such assumption, asking him where he is from. He further speculated that, compared to faculty and staff, students in particular may have had less exposure to various Asian cultures; consequently, they would have a tendency to focus on race, as opposed to culture or nationality.

Dinh believed that some of the students he encountered definitely tried to learn more about his culture, but that roughly 50% of students have no clear idea how different Chinese, Japanese, and Thai people, for example really are.

I mean, if they ask me if I'm Chinese, I say "Actually I'm—not all Asians are Chinese," and they be like: "I'm sorry; I'm sorry, man, I didn't mean to say you're Chinese." I'm not in the professional workforce yet so I don't understand. I have never talked to those who are higher up, and I mostly talk to students, I mostly hang out with other students. I think students don't understand the difference between Asians; they classify all Asians simply as Asians. I think there are more race-oriented than culture.

Delgado and Stephancic (2012) argued that the black/white paradigm which permeates American society allows people to simplify and make sense of a complex reality. They further contend that consequently non-black minorities run the risk of not fitting into the dominant society's idea of race in America and can therefore become marginalized, invisible, foreign and un-American. This perception is one that can lead to misunderstanding, miscommunication, and conflict between microminorities and members of larger minority groups.

Minority and Microminority Conflicts

Most of us have heard the idea of “black-on-black” crime, which really refers to African American on African American crime. Less has been written about members of racially similar minority groups who discriminate against each other because of cultural differences. For example, an Asian person from Korea may not only experience discrimination from whites, because of race, they may also be discriminated against by other Asians because of cultural differences. The data suggests that, under certain circumstances, the oppressed themselves can become the oppressors. In the current study, Carla believed that not only whites but Latinos have a tendency to homogenize Venezuelans with other Latinos, such as Dominicans: “I think it’s just everyone who is not part of that culture, and to be completely honest with you even members of the Latino community lump us together.”

One of the greatest challenges facing microminorities can be their attempts to remain authentic to their cultural heritage. These attempts are often misunderstood and misconstrued as “selling out” by their peers. Carla expressed that she gets frustrated when, because of her appearance, other Latinos expect her to act same way they do. She believes that when she fails to fulfill their stereotypical expectations they get confused. She expressed her confusion as to why some Latinos complain about being homogenized and stereotyped frequently, yet also criticize her for being culturally different. “Like, why are you complaining to me about being called Mexican when you’re the first one to tell me that I act white?”

Susan felt strongly that her struggle in this country resulted not simply from her being racially different from the majority, but rather from cultural differences and barriers, which seem inescapable to her. For example, Susan expressed that, in her experience, various

groups of Asians, despite being racially similar, tend to voluntarily segregate themselves from each other.

If they are Filipino they hang out with a large group of Filipinos and they'll go to the same parties. For example, my cousin married a Vietnamese guy and the wedding was totally weird. My family stayed on our side and his family stayed on their side. Like, they even left early—it was really weird, and our countries are right next to each other. You would think we would get along better.

Judging by the literature review of this study, the concept of minorities being discriminatory toward members of other minority groups, based on culture seems to be less extensively explored in the literature. Quintyn (2010) suggested that we accept the existence of racial classification and educate others on the complexity of biological diversity. Tsui et al. (1995) acknowledged different levels of diversity, but they say little about how the ability to perceive or not to perceive various levels of diversity affect minority on minority dynamics. Similarly, Berrick et al. (1998) and Blair et al. (2004) noted the automaticity of racial labeling and classification, but have less to say about minority vs. minority conflicts. Awakoya and Clark (2008) seemed to be the only researchers I could find at the time to confront some of these issues head on. Their research discussed cultural differences, differences in perception and conflicts between individuals from African countries and African Americans. As a result of this lack of dialogue about minority vs. minority dynamics and conflicts, many people on the outside have no clear understanding of the dynamics between various cultural and subcultural groups among people of the same race or ethnicity. Contrary to what much of the literature in higher education would have us believe, homogenization and discrimination, based on race, culture, and nationality, originates not only from the majority population (European Americans), it originates from members of other minority groups.

I believe that the lack of focus on minority vs. microminority issues derives from a historically dichotomous perception in the United States and the notion that forms of discrimination and racism can be understood by understanding the struggle of African Americans. Historically, the discourse about race in this country has most often been based on a black-and-white dichotomy.

Racial Labeling

In order to examine the participant testimony more thoroughly, we might well consider a brief history of the origins of racial labelling. According to Gates (1997), the practice of racial labeling in this country dates to the early 19th century when it was employed by primarily-white emerging power structures for the purposes of spreading and sustaining comprehensive racial ideologies. Staum (2003) contended that both intellectual and socioeconomic contexts caused the impulse to racially label and classify.

Staum (2003) also noted that throughout history some dominant groups have deliberately focused on external physical features of others in order to classify them accordingly. The preferred norm became the attributes of the dominant groups, in this case Europeans. Racial labels not only perpetuate racism, they also promote the homogenization of minorities based only on race. In the United States, being black became synonymous with being African American, but for some dark-skinned minorities nothing could be further from the truth; their experience significantly differs from the African American population—those who are descendants of the African slave trade, suffering from years of systematic oppression through some progress in the civil rights movement.

Racial labels such as Asian or Hispanic can give the false impression that groups of people of the same race are necessarily culturally similar. My findings suggest that there as

many cultural differences among people of the same race as there are similarities, and in some cases the differences are not just subcultural but cultural. This means that individuals of the same race may have very little in common. Furthermore, cultural and racial similarities are not always enough to bring individuals together. Although, people on the outside may think that race, in particular, unites people, cultural barriers and differences can prevent any real unity or harmony from occurring. For example, when I asked Susan how well people from different Asian countries generally got along, she replied:

They generally don't really get along that well. They are always judging each other. Like, East Asians may think they are better than Southeast Asians, and Pacific Islanders think that the lighter your skin is the prettier you are—things like that.

The phenomenon of homogenization based on race often seems to be driven by racial labeling, which manifests itself through the use of racialized language. The way in which the word “black” facilitates the homogenization of Africans and African Americans, words such as “Hispanic” or “Asian” can have similar generalizing effects on Micro-Minorities.

The data collected from Carla, and from my reflective journal, suggests that many people have difficulty separating race and culture. Carla reported that she has been accused by other Latinos of “acting white,” indicating their associations of certain racial characteristics with specific behavior patterns. They seem to entangle race and culture to such a degree as to have difficulty accepting behaviors they believe not to match the race of the person they emanate from.

Carla noted she used to think that the term “Hispanic” was primarily used in reference to Spanish-speaking people. Only later she realized that the term gave the impression of a homogenous culture to people who had little understanding of Latino diversity.

I would hear about a “Hispanic” television channel or something. . . I thought that was just because it was a Spanish-speaking channel, that's what I thought the word

Hispanic means. But no, it meant something completely different, like a singular culture to other people, to outsiders.

The positive and negative stereotypes associated with the groups into which these microminorities were homogenized also varied greatly. More negative stereotypes appeared to be associated with the African American and Mexican populations, compared with those of Asians and Europeans. Data collected in this study was too minimal to demonstrate a correlation between the negative stereotypes of homogenized groups and a resistance to homogenization. Rather, the data suggest that the reasons for not wanting to be homogenized with other groups are rooted more in a desire to stay true to one's heritage and culture. None of the participants voiced discrimination or sentiments of superiority towards the groups from which they aimed to distinguish themselves.

Two of the participants, Franco and Dinh, seemed less angry about being homogenized. On one hand, Franco wasn't upset because he didn't mind being homogenized with European Americans, which suggested that he enjoyed the benefits that come with white privilege in this country. On the other hand, Dinh had few problems about being homogenized with Chinese people. Instead he expressed a sense of disappointment for individuals who engage in this type of behavior. "To be honest I feel like . . . I don't know how to describe how I feel when this happens specifically. It makes me feel like people are kind of ignorant and I feel pity for them."

Unlike me, Dinh is still a student. As of now he has not embarked on a professional career. Therefore he has not felt the full impact of homogenization based on race in this country. It is possible that depending on his experiences, his perceptions on the matter could still change.

Educational and Professional Impacts of Homogenization

Racial labeling and homogenization based on race accounted, in part, for the sometimes poor relationship I have had with African American students and supervisors. On more than one occasion African American clients were deliberately routed to me because supervisors believed that black people can relate to each other because “we all face the same type of oppression.” There is no denying some truth to this. Sometimes African Americans seemed to feel more comfortable with me because of racial similarities and similar challenges with white racism; however, because of cultural differences, interactions didn’t always go smoothly, especially when it became obvious something was “un-black” about me. Usually, the first clue of the difference in me came from my accent. After some questioning usually they realized that my experiences were different from theirs. Consequently, credibility, rapport, and trust were sometimes compromised. When I worked at a predominantly African American alternative school, the students often rejected me as their counselor because in their minds there was no way that someone who grew up in Germany could understand the challenges that came along with growing up in an American Section 8 housing project. A further, disappointing example of this dichotomous black-white mindset, or culture blindness, occurred when my mentor quit because she felt that she had little or nothing to offer to me, a “black male.” She expressed that I would be better off with an African-American male as a mentor. In retrospect, I am more convinced that she was smarter than that, but succumbed to pressure exerted by the African-American leadership, who believed something to the effect that “only a black man could teach another black man how to conduct himself in a primarily white institution.” Because of these and similar experiences I turned down an invitation to become part of the African-American Male mentoring program. To the uninformed culture

blind observer, my decision not to work more closely with the African American was misconstrued as arrogance and not seen for what it was an attempt to protect myself for further ridicule and rejection.

Because most African-American educational leaders I have encountered have indicated to me that race is—or should be—central to my identity, they tended to ignore my cultural background, insisting instead that I should conduct myself accordingly. My attempts to explain that I was different either fell on deaf ears or were perceived as arrogant attempts to distinguish myself from the rest of the “blacks.” Their attitude significantly affected my relationship with supervisors, who were predominantly African American. This resulted in conflict, lack of trust, erosion of my morale, and ultimately played a large role in the decision to resign my position.

Constraints

In this section I examine findings that illustrate constraints of participants in terms of racial perceptions and behavior. The literature review for this study revealed that, although rare, there exist microminorities such as Europeans of African descent who then later immigrated to the U.S. Germans of African descent are most often the offspring of African immigrants to Germany and their German mates. However, for example, Camp (2003a) maintained that, although the experiences of African Americans initially served as a central point of reference through which the very different experiences of black Germans were articulated, Afro Germans as a population substantially differ from African American and British communities of color. The relevance of diaspora as an analytical tool for understanding the formation of German communities of color must necessarily be measured against the specific historical circumstances that gave rise to them.

Self-Reflexive Account of Constraints

I begin with a self-reflexive account of these kinds of constraints. Even among microminorities I am an oddity. Indeed, the term microminority fails to fully capture the gravity of my situation; the term “extreme minority” may be more appropriate. I came to this conclusion because of several key differences (beyond time spent in this country and the experiences gained here) that make me different from the students I have interviewed. First, most people I have encountered have never met a black German in their life—and most in America never will. Most attempts to identify myself as German are met with skepticism, disbelief, the occasional dismissal and occasionally with outright aggression. Unlike other microminorities, no matter where in the world I visit, the number of people who share my combination of racial and cultural background will be strikingly low. Furthermore, if the students I interviewed today would decide to return to their respective lands of origin, they would cease to be microminorities. They may have changed to some degree from their exposure to American society, but their ethnic, racial, and cultural roots would remain intact; thus, in that respect, they would be able to blend in if they chose to do so. If I returned to Germany tomorrow, I would remain a microminority. Not so much because of cultural differences but because of my perceived race.

According to Faymonville (2003), about 200,000 Germans of African descent live in Germany, a country with approximately 90 million inhabitants. When I was about 14 years old that number was estimated to be around 40 to 45,000. According to the 2012 U.S. census there are about 45 million African Americans, but because the American census homogenizes non-American “blacks” with African Americans, the true number of African Americans is

somewhat elusive. Despite that we might safely assume a number in the 40-million range, or almost 14% of the population, compared to the .5 percent representing Germans of African descent. In the 25 or more years I have lived in Germany, I have met fewer than six Germans of African descent, and I have only gotten to know two personally. This seems to me very extreme. However, the situation has improved in recent years. I have seen black Germans on TV and in the media, something I had never experienced as a child or as a teenager.

Constraints in Participant Findings

As part of the interview process, I explained the microminority concept to participants. Instead of complicity labeling interviewees in a manner that they may not agree with, I explained the microminority concept to them to discover if they could identify with the idea. Four out of six participants were able to identify with the concept on some level. These four out of six participants reported having only a small number of peers (less than five) with cultural and national backgrounds similar to their own. The three students who were able to relate most strongly to the concept were Dinh (Vietnam), Carla (Venezuela), and Fatima (Saudi Arabia). On one hand, two of the participants, Fatima and Carla, believed they were one of a kind. On the other, Dinh knew a small number (four or five) of other Vietnamese students on campus; however, he believed that being part of a small group made him sometimes feel small and that he could imagine someone who is part of a larger minority group would feel more empowered and secure.

Fatima (from Saudi Arabia) described her experience of being isolated and “different” from the majority of the population as “feeling like an alien.” After clarifying, she revealed to me that she was not just referring to feeling like a foreigner from another country, but rather like an alien from outer space.

When I was in Arkansas there was a language center. So there were like a lot of people from my country so it wasn't a big deal if I can say that. So when I moved here it's not the same story. I have met another girl from Saudi Arabia, but I am working on my undergraduate degree but she's in a master's program and there is another girl from Pakistan, so what makes me different and special is wearing a hijab (traditional Muslim head dress). The American people are very tolerant so I appreciate it and I am happy that they are accepting me.

After explaining the microminority concept to Fatima, I asked if she was able to relate to it at all. She replied:

Actually, I felt the same way that you described when I found that here there are no mosques or Arab majority or Muslims even. Maybe there is but I was very busy so I didn't look very carefully. I miss, like, when I was in Arkansas there were, like, two mosques so I don't feel the same way now here. Sometimes I feel like I'm the only one that came from outer space.

Similarly, Carla described her experience among other Latinos (without prompting) as a "minority among minorities," a phrase I pondered as I sought to define the concept of a microminority. Carla reported that although similarities exist between her and other Latinos, the cultural differences between them—including food, dress and language—are significant and sometimes virtually impossible to bridge. She remarked that she often felt frustrated and isolated when people from other South American countries talked about things she could not relate to or understand. Sometimes, she said, they use unfamiliar words, which she feels she ought to know.

The data suggest three important aspects of homogenization as experienced by these six participants. First, Carla, Dinh, and Susan perceived a difference in the manner in which they identify and categorize themselves, compared to the ways in which they are categorized by their peers, including other students. I found it particularly noteworthy that a majority of participants (Susan, Paul, Dinh, and Fatima) thought that the institution believed that minorities primarily relied on race for purposes of identifying and categorizing themselves.

Except for Fatima, who felt that her religion was central to her identity, five out the six participants I interviewed reported that they viewed culture or nationality—rather than race—as more central to their identity.

All of the participants saw themselves as part of a very small minority group, or as minorities who were “one of a kind.” When I ask Paul how many Africans he thought were on campus, his response, as noted below, indicated he was still homogenizing Africans and African Americans. Even so, his estimate of the combined number of Africans and African Americans who were enrolled at this university was very low.

I think that minority groups here Africans generally on this campus only represent 3% of the population. Although I’ve met a couple of Nigerians, I think for now I’m the only Nigerian grad student here.

Paul was able to identify with the microminority concept on some level, but didn’t perceive it as a major problem.

It should be a challenge, but I don’t really see it as one. It depends on how you see it. I’m not in need for anyone to help me, so I’ve never been in that kind of position where I wish there were more people like me. But I think that’s a good point. It’s a good observation. But I haven’t had that experience yet. But I think the potential for that to happen is there.

Paul’s responses indicate that the microminority condition might be subjective in nature and perhaps depends on personality and experience. Considering that Paul grew up in a very dangerous environment, it is possible that he is happy just to be in a safe environment in which he can pursue his educational goals. Over time, as his experiences accumulate and his environment changes from educational to professional, his perception of the microminority condition may also change.

Carla strongly identified with the microminority concept. She explained that although a small number of Venezuelans matriculated the university, they were students from other

South American countries and were very different from her culturally. She had not met anyone else from Venezuela at that point. “I can identify with the microminority concept you’re talking about because I’m the minority within the Hispanic minority at this school.”

Similarly, Dinh was able to identify some potential drawbacks of being a microminority. He believed that being part of a small group would limit the amount of support an individual could receive. In other words, if one was part of a bigger group like the Chinese or Hispanics, of course, “you feel bigger.” Conversely, Dinh reported that when he is around his Vietnamese group of peers, which consists of four to five “real Vietnamese” (meaning Vietnamese who were born and raised in Vietnam), he feels “rather small.”

Similarly, Susan, the American with Laotian and Thai cultural ties, responded that she had only met five individuals at the university with cultural backgrounds similar to her own.

Although, Franco managed to blend in with the white majority on campus, because he appears as European American, he admitted that—based on culture—he was one of a kind.

Similarly to Paul, Franco was able to identify with the microminority idea conceptually, but felt little of its affects because of his ability to blend in with the majority population. Table 4.1 better illustrates the findings of how participants categorized themselves in terms of their identity.

Table 4.1. Participants Self-identification

	Viewed culture as central to identity	Identified with microminority concept	Perceived themselves as “one of a kind”	Significantly affected by homogenization
Paul	x			
Carla	x	x	x	x
Fatima		x	x	x
Franco	x			
Susan	x	x		
Dinh	x	x		
Researcher	x	x	x	x

Effects of Homogenization

Some of the effects of racial labeling and homogenization based on race, including levels of emotion, are described here, from little effects to the most powerful: irritation, annoyance, frustration, and anger, as well as feelings of isolation in being homogenized based on race. It is important to note the finding of a wide range of the degree to which microminorities have been affected by the phenomenon of homogenization. Other effects included lack of trust, frustration, strained relationships with peers, and lack of motivation. When asked, the participants responded to questions about their emotional states. The following subsections describe the study's findings.

Lack of Trust

Carla was concerned that being homogenized—with a group often perceived negatively by whites—could lower her chances of finding employment after graduation and affect her future professional life in unforeseen ways. She feared that if potential employers read her name they might assume she was Mexican and view her as a “typical Hispanic.”

I would just hope they would give me the chance to at least interview me they would realize that I'm not [“typically Hispanic”]. Honestly, I think they could discriminate against me because of the name on my resume, but then again I wouldn't even know; they wouldn't even call me. Once I get in, I would explain myself, try to make them understand, and just act normally, and hopefully they would realize that I'm not a stereotypical Mexican. I have nothing against Mexicans, by the way; I'm just using them as an example here.

Anger

Although, Carla did not consider herself prejudiced against Mexicans, she became visibly agitated when she explained to me that she is often homogenized with this particular population, based on race, because she felt she had very little in common with this

demographic aside from race. This insistence of repeated pigeon-holing occasionally caused her to lash out at fellow students and peers: “Like, NO! I am not Mexican. . . It just makes me angry.”

I was inclined to believe that Carla’s prejudice was not directed against Mexicans and that her efforts to be distinguish herself from that specific demographic were rooted in a desire to be authentic to her own heritage. Her body language and comments, however, also gave me the impression that she was disappointed or dissatisfied with the way in which some Mexicans behaved, and are consequently perceived by the majority.

I have also had personal experiences with anger. In this regard Carla’s experiences mirrored my own more than any of the other participants. This insane combination of being expected to behave like a black man acceptable to a white organization, the intolerance and criticism of my cultural identity by segments in the African-American community, and the insistence that I champion being black over being German in my personal life infuriated me more than anything.

At last I understand what it meant when I was told that I needed to learn how “A black man should behave in a white institution.” It was a call to present myself in a manner that is acceptable to a hegemonic system. Luckily, unlike Carla and my career-advancement-oriented co-worker, I am much less concerned about how the majority perceives me, or if those perceptions could negatively influence my opportunities for social and professional advancement in this society.

Alienation

Fatima believed that, in her classes and her studies, she had no need for other girls with similar backgrounds as her own around because she came to the United States to study and

improve her English skills, and to learn more about the culture. She also expressed that she would love to have someone who is culturally similar to her and her husband, that they could socialize with during her free time or on vacations. She also feared discussing certain regional issues in the Middle East, except with people who have lived in there. She also mentioned that she lived in Texas prior to moving to North Carolina and that more people from Saudi Arabia lived there. Because Texas had more mosques, there were more places for her to worship and socialize with other Muslims. For that reason she was considering a move in the future back to Texas, or at least to a place where more Muslims lived.

Although most students report no potentially life-threatening symptoms, such as severe depression or thoughts of suicide, most experienced significant emotional distress on the scale of irritation to anger at being homogenized with groups they did not identify with. If left unaddressed, there is a possibility that these negative emotions could lead to more serious conditions.

Possibilities

In this section I discuss possibilities and opportunities that emerged or might in future emerge in the lives of the participants and myself as a result of our microminority experiences in this country. The data for this section originates from three participants: Franco, Dinh, and myself. I incorporated the concepts of assimilation vs. separation and exceptionalism in this section, aspects of critical race theory, in order to inform my findings.

Exceptionalism

Although some aspects of CRT seem to homogenize minorities based on race, other aspects leave room for a subjectivity of minority identity. Delgado and Stephancic (2012) described exceptionalism as a concept within CRT, which holds that a particular group's

history might justify treating it as unique. Microminorities such as Afro Germans, whose histories lie outside roots of any of the most prominent minority groups in the United States, fit this description. However, Delgado and Stephancic (2012) describe the concept of exceptionalism in ways that may help explain why many scholars and professionals in higher education tend to fixate on larger minority groups.

In reflecting on Delgado and Stephancic's example, I agree that not all discrimination is based on race, but one might not necessarily understand—or know how to deal with—discrimination toward some minorities simply by looking at the experiences of another. There is an upside, however. Because I tend to be discriminated against by the African American community because of my cultural difference, and by the European American community because of racial differences, I am rarely affected by many of the sociocultural pressures that individuals who form part of larger minority groups are subjected to. Unlike the participants of this study, I propose that I have no ethnicity, nor do I belong to any ethnic group. This latter proposal in particular has been difficult for many people to understand, perhaps because, for them, race and ethnicity are one and the same. Nevertheless, all of the definitions I have found for “ethnicity” suggest a combination of race and culture. As I explained earlier, I possess no African cultural background—in that my father left before I was three—so no recollection of him or influence of his cultural background resides in my self-identity. Although I do not deny that I have been influenced by American culture, it is my German culture that most strongly defines me. Because ethnicity supposedly includes cultural aspects, it follows that I am not ethnically African. Similarly, many Germans still believe that being German heavily depends on racial characteristics and bloodline, which would most likely cause them to reject the notion a black ethnic German.

Summary of Key Points

Assimilation and separation are two concepts in CRT that describe how African Americans make choices about positioning themselves in American society. This aspect of the theory is limited because it homogenizes microminorities such as Euro Germans, whose culture may be completely different from African American culture, based on race. For example, when I first came to the United States I was unfamiliar with the black stereotypes I was subjected to. To the best of my knowledge, most of them exist only obscurely in Europe. For example, I was expected to be good at basketball, to like chicken and watermelon, and to be opposed to donating blood—just to name a view. These likes and dislikes had never crossed my mind, and I actually had to explore these stereotypes over time to understand their meaning and origin. Most people, dominant and minority alike, tend to be surprised when I inform them that I dislike certain foods and activities, and so on. One of the more humorous moments during my research occurred when one of the participants and I listed and compared Asian and Black racial stereotypes. (At the end of that discussion the participant declined my offer to trade places.)

The cultural interests I had seemed equally perplexing to some. I played tennis, table tennis, soccer, and have a very eclectic taste in music, including rock and heavy metal. I was never opposed to dating African American women, but was rejected more than once on the grounds of acting “too white” or for not possessing the attributes of a “real black man.” (I am still trying to work out what attributes those are exactly.) After repeated strike-outs, I decided to eliminate that demographic from my list of potential mates and began looking elsewhere.

Although it may be difficult, it may be possible for some microminorities to assume a third, more neutral position which involves seeking associations with a more multicultural and international demographic. For example, I do not consider myself part of the European American community, nor do I consider myself part of the African American community. Rather, my circle of friends consists of individuals from a variety of cultural, national and ethnic backgrounds.

Exceptionalism, another aspect of CRT, holds that the history of a group can justify it being treated as unique. Although, microminorities who choose not to assimilate or remain separate may have difficulty fitting into mainstream American society, the experience can be liberating, relieving them of social pressures and constraints. Because of the phenomenon of homogenization and their small numbers, the struggle of microminorities differs significantly from that of more recognized and populous minority groups.

Conclusion

Throughout the data collection process I kept a journal of my own reactions to the collection process, the actual data collected, and the recollection of relevant experiences. I related the data from my reflective journal to the participant data by identifying commonalities and differences. As a result, I was able to explore in detail how the experiences of the participants either mirrored or diverged from my own. This allowed me to produce a set of data that better informed the study and provided an additional perspective of the phenomena I set out to explore.

The process of collecting, transcribing, and reflecting on the data was an emotional experience at times. I experienced frustration, sadness, and, at times, anger. On one hand I experienced moments of elation and happiness, as my experiences have helped me to clarify

my own identity and caused me to embrace my Germanic cultural roots even more closely. On the other hand my refusal to live up to African-American cultural norms has led to conflict and friction. But I do not regret that because I would rather stay authentic to my German cultural heritage. At the same time, I attempted to remain as objective as possible, in collecting and interpreting data, so that personal experiences would not taint my findings. I attempted to remain keenly aware that the experiences of other Micro-Minorities, particularly those of participants of the study, could differ emphatically from my own; in many ways they did.

The data collections process was often an emotional event for me as it brought back memories of oppression and marginalization. According to Drapeau (2002), subjectivity can make the research process more complicated, especially when the time comes to analyze anxiety-provoking data. Unfortunately, the more I noticed these emotions beginning to surface the more I tried to suppress them, but was never able to do so completely. The most prevalent emotions I experienced were frustration and anger. I have felt frustrated over the years because of the inability of people around me to see beyond race. Prior to coming to the United States I had dealt with racism. Germany has its own brand of racism, with its own set of stereotypes. Because I was born and raised there, I was able to blend in with the mainstream population on a cultural level.

Although I have the education, training and social skills to navigate many American cultural, subcultural and professional environments, I am not willing to compromise my identity. Yet many people I have encountered have insisted I adhere to black or African-American cultural norms. It has been easier to tolerate these types attitudes from the average person on the street and although they sometimes annoy me, I am usually able to brush them aside; however, being subjected to this same type homogenization based on race by

supposedly educated and professional individuals, who exuded an air of arrogance and superiority, has greatly angered me. Although I sometimes felt uncomfortable, reflecting on these emotions throughout the writing process was a cathartic experience. I therefore decided to embrace these emotions, reflect on them and channel them positively towards the writing process.

The findings of the study indicate that all of the participants except for one believed that, at one point or another they had been homogenized based on race—by their peers—with minority populations whom they do not identify with. Although clear similarities existed between me and the individuals interviewed, I also discovered significant differences. All of us except for Susan were born overseas and thus, are culturally different from the majority of Americans. Most of us—except for Susan—speak English as a second language and six out of seven of us came here to further our education and to expand our minds through new experiences. All of us appreciated the opportunities this country has offered us, and have tried to adapt to our new environment, with varying degrees of success.

All interviewees demonstrated differences from each other, and from me, in various ways, such as gender, age, and race, but also in cultural and religious beliefs. It is important to note that I have lived in this country much longer than any of the participants of the study. Consequently, my experiences with the discrepancies in perception and my exposure to the phenomenon of homogenization have been greater. None of the students who reported negative impacts by these phenomena have started their professional careers yet. In contrast, I can say my struggle with this phenomenon in the work place has been extensive. The findings imply that there are individuals in this institution whose unique stories and situations may go unnoticed. Thus, I stress the importance that no minority demographic, no matter how small,

go unnoticed or be underserved in this study's campus or any American institution of higher learning.

Other Notable Findings

Although none of the participants felt that race was central to their identity, some data suggested the participants were homogenized based on race by their peers as well as people who worked at the institution. Furthermore, attitudes toward the phenomenon of homogenization were split. Two of the participants and I seemed to be more affected by the phenomenon than the three other participants. Two participants (Carla and Susan) believed that most people they encounter care little or not at all about the details or complexities of their backgrounds. Two of the participants (Dinh and Susan) believed that homogenizing attitudes of some individuals can vary and shift according to the level of exposure to foreign cultures. Most of the interviewees were able to identify with microminority concept. Carla described herself as a "minority among minorities," and Fatima described her experience of isolation as "like an alien from outer space."

All participants were affected by the phenomenon of homogenization and categorization based on race in a variety of ways, including strained relationships with other minorities, anger, frustration, and mistrust. Carla worried that potential employers would discriminate against her, based on her last name, which could lead them to assume she is Mexican, a population she does not identify with.

These findings have the potential to offer much to the literature and practice of dealing with diversity in higher education. I will explain in more detail what implications these findings have for minorities, the professionals in the field, and the discipline of higher

education leadership in Chapter V. I will also provide some reflections on the impact of my findings on the professional literature and theoretical constructs in this area.

Chapter V: Implications

This chapter starts with a review of the conceptual framework and the three questions that guided my study of homogenization of microminorities based on race and how my findings may add to current theories related to issues of diversity. I evaluated how the information gained from my findings can benefit current and future students, and educational leaders. Finally, by exploring topics for future investigation, I indicate the importance of leaning more about minority identity, the complexity of diversity, and the types of discrimination that can result from ignorance of these issues.

As noted above, I have been in this country significantly longer than any of the participants of this study. Thus my experiences with the phenomenon of homogenization based on race and differences in external vs. internal perceptions have been more extensive. Furthermore, my background is considerably unique even among microminorities; therefore the study needed information about my own experiences to further define its implications.

Review of the Conceptual Framework

The United States census groups minorities into a finite number of broad racial categories. This broad race-based categorical thinking is also reflected in educational literature, the way some leaders relate to the people they are leading, and the way college students interact with each other. From perspective of some students which could be considered microminorities, the internal perception of their identity can be significantly different from external institutional perceptions. Furthermore, research, training and initiatives related to minorities and diversity are conducted from a racial perspective. As a

result, minorities who may have very little in common culturally are homogenized based on race and the essence of those microminority experiences is lost.

The core concept of this study was based on the premise that in the area of minority identity, not all minorities identify and categorize themselves primarily based on race; nor do they necessarily unite with other minorities based on racial similarities. This premise was supported by the data, which indicate that professionals and researchers in higher education need to be cautious when they literature that primarily focuses on race. For example, Awokoya and Clark (2008) argued that while mainstream sociological theories have aimed to capture the social and economic experiences of first generation African immigrants, not much is known about their day-to-day experiences because such studies often group these individuals with the African-American populations based on race. The design of this study was conceptually different from other research studies as it avoided imposing racial labels and categories upon its participants; instead, the study was designed to explore how students who consider themselves to be part of very small minority groups or who consider themselves to be the only minority of their kind experience issues related with the various facets of their identity.

It was especially interesting to learn more about the impact of discrepancies between internal perceptions of students who could be considered microminorities and the external perceptions of their peers, and how these differences in perceptions affected their everyday lives. Awokoya and Clark (2008) observed that recent research supports the notion that some first-generation African immigrants are underserved in U.S. schools due to cultural misunderstandings, often related to a lack of familiarity with educational policies and practices. These findings suggest that many challenges face foreign students in the U.S. as a

whole, and few if any of these challenges are fully understood. Additionally, Awokoya and Clark (2008) argued that as a result of racialization in research practices, the emotional, social, academic and professional health of first-generation immigrants is being challenged.

The findings of this study suggest that several of aspects my conceptual framework had merit. Like the American Census, the educational literature and some professionals in higher education view minorities in the simplest terms and group them into the most convenient definition, such as black, Hispanic, and Asian. There was some evidence in the study to suggest that microminorities are boxed into these simple racial categories because of a lack of interest and because it takes less effort; however, CRT indicates that microminority identity is far more complex. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) argued that the concepts of intersectionality holds that no person has a single, easily defined identity and that the traditional displays of oppression within society, such as sexism, racism, and discrimination based on religion, do not act independently of one another. Instead, these forms of oppression interact, creating a system of oppression that reflects an intersection of multiple forms of discrimination (p. 10)

However, the findings of my research added another layer of complexity to the concepts found in CRT, a theory that is, of course, almost exclusively focused on race. These findings paint a picture in which the concepts of diversity and minority identity aren't dominated by race. I found that from the perspective of the participants there was indeed a significant discrepancy in external and internal perceptions of identity. The data suggest that the participants perceived their identity primarily in terms of culture and nationality, but believed that the institution, especially their peers, perceived race as being central to their identity.

Having said that, some participants noted a correlation between the level of exposure some people had to other cultures and how much they focused on race. Thus they believed that the less an individual had been exposed to people who are racially similar, yet culturally different, the more likely it would be for them to engage in to homogenization based on race and stereotyping.

Response to Research Questions

In order to expand the existing body of knowledge on minority issues, I conducted this qualitative and critical study of the experiences of microminorities in an institutional setting. I have organized this section around the three questions used to guide my research.

1. How do students who are microminorities describe the dimensions of their social identity?

My research has demonstrated that there are minorities who resist and defy categorization based on race. To them identity is very subjective. They want to determine the nature of their own identity and how much value they place on the various aspects of it. All of the participants I interviewed perceived themselves primarily as a product of their nationality and culture and not their race.

Many of the participants described a variety of cultural and experiential factors that they felt differentiated them from the mainstream American population. These differences ranged from the way in which they interacted with their elders, to the dangers they had faced in their home countries such as very high levels of crime, military conflicts, and social unrest. Furthermore, several of the participants said that at one point or another they had been homogenized based on race with populations they did not consider themselves to be part of or could identify with. For example, when I asked Carla if Venezuelan culture is very distinctive

from other South American countries, she replied: “It is actually, but I feel like they group us together all the time but it’s completely different”.

Most of the participants felt that a significant number of people within the institution not only perceived them through a racial lens but assumed that race and not culture was central to their identity. Since minorities exist who describe culture and nationality and not race as central to their identity the stage for potential misunderstanding is set. Sensing some discomfort on the part of the participants when asking them about how they had been treated by professionals at this institution I decided to focus more on their interactions with their fellow students. The little data I was able to uncover along those lines suggested that comments that homogenized them with other populations originated primarily from their peers and not faculty or staff. One participant in particular remarked that her experiences with staff and faculty had been largely positive and that some of them had gone out of their way to make her feel comfortable and welcome.

2. What conflicts, constraints, and possibilities emerge as a result of interactions between these personal and institutional descriptions?

Although one of the participants seemed less bothered by being homogenized based on race, the rest didn’t particularly enjoy it and some were outright annoyed, frustrated, and angered by it. Some participants felt that most people do not care about the details of their background and instead homogenized and stereotyped them simply because it is easier. One of the participants in particular strongly believed that homogenization based on race doesn’t always occur because of laziness or ignorance: “They (some of her peers) don’t confuse race and culture; they do it on purpose.” This insistence on microminorities identifying themselves according to race is something I have also experienced on more than one occasion. Based on

participant and personal data the data, microminorities are not only homogenized and discriminated against by whites. Instead, they are put under pressure to behave in a stereotypical manner from individuals of their own race or ethnicity. This can create friction and conflict among them. As a result microminorities may isolate themselves from individuals of their own race, which is not necessarily an indicator of arrogance or feeling of superiority on their part.

3. Do the experiences of microminorities differ from the experiences of other minorities? If so, in what ways are they unique?

Most of the participants I interviewed were able to relate to the microminority concept. Very few, and in some cases none of their peers on campus had similar backgrounds as they did. None of the participants reported encountering more than five individuals with backgrounds similar to their own. Some of the participants considered themselves part of very small minority groups; others considered themselves to be one of a kind and some like a participant from Venezuela, considered themselves “minorities among minorities.” Although some of the participants felt that being part of a smaller minority group would encourage microminorities to interact more with the majority population, some of them felt that being part of a smaller group, or being one of a kind, is challenging in unique ways. Some of the participants reported feeling “small,” “alien,” and “isolated.” Several of the participants were able to identify with the microminority concept and believed that being a minority of one or a few was a different experience than being part of a larger minority group. Differences ranged from feeling small and powerless to lacking a support system, to having someone to talk to about issues that only people with similar backgrounds could understand.

Identification With the Microminority Concept

Prior to conducting the study, I explained the concept of microminorities to the director of the International Student office, who remarked that the international student population at the University is rather small, but diverse. Consequently, she believed there might be a good chance that most of the minorities could be considered microminorities. This is relevant in light of the data I collected because it is quite possible that the experience of the international student population at this institution is different than, for example, minority students at a nearby major research university, which has a growing number of Chinese students. The data I collected certainly support some of the literature that argues identity as subjective and internal. The data also support the theory that the influence of very small minority group experiences on singular minorities can be significantly different from that of individuals in larger minority groups. I believed this to be true for some time, even before coming to the United States; this study confirms that other minorities have had similar experiences, although perhaps not to the same degree.

Implications for Current and Future Leaders

The following section explains the implications my study has for leaders and professionals in the field of higher education. Leadership development is vital because the way organizations are perceived by their employees and the public can be directly influenced by the personality and actions of their leaders. Furthermore, appropriate leadership training and development can improve productivity, shape a positive culture and promote harmony among employees.

My own experience as well as the data from this study suggest that exposure to a variety of cultures among people who are racially similar may be more effective than reading

about cultural differences from a college or graduate school text book that homogenizes individuals from different cultures based on race. Aspiring leaders need to realize that there can be as many cultural differences within groups that are racially similar as there are cultural differences between groups that are racially dissimilar.

For example, Fatima (from Saudi Arabia) reported that her instructors had on more than one occasion gone out of their way to make her feel comfortable and that she had never experienced any discriminatory behavior from them. She felt that most Americans she had encountered did not know much about Saudi-Arabian culture, but those who had been to places like Oman, Palestine, or Israel had a better image of her part of the world, and Muslims in general.

Relationship Between Homogenization and Power

When Africans were first brought to this country as slaves, they originated from a variety of countries and tribes and had distinct cultures and customs. Emergent white power structures utilized homogenization based on race to undermine their identity and cultural heritage. Africans were no longer allowed to speak their native tongues or practice their cultural customs. Instead they were given slave names by their masters and labeled as “Niggers” across the board. According to Hill (1996), racist ideologies and practices (which includes homogenization based on race) against indigenous and African-American peoples strengthened the founding and expansion of Euro-American states in the colonial Americas (p. 5). Similarly, today homogenization based on race, racialized language, and the imposition of racial labels—such as black—strip away the identity of microminorities, undermines their cultural heritage, and ultimately seeks to reduce their power to be self-determinant.

Strategies for the Enhancement of Cultural Competency

Leaders in the field of education need to make sure that their teachers and staff receive multicultural or diversity training that is culture- and not race-based. Thus the training program should not entangle race and culture as if there was a cause-and-effect relationship. Training programs that use broad racial terms to describe populations should raise a red flag in the minds of leaders, because more than likely these types of trainings homogenize certain groups based on race. Similarly, professional who are sent to attend these types of seminars and training should consume their content with a healthy dose of skepticism. Using words such as Blacks, Asians and Hispanics, should prompt caution. The trainees should remember, for example, that not all blacks are African American and that individuals from Asian and South-American countries could have been born and raised in the United States and may have had little exposure to their cultural heritage. Students should not be afraid to communicate with peers who look different from themselves. One of the participants noted that she believed her peers are afraid to talk to her because they think that her English may not be proficient. Teachers should remind their students that cultural diversity is on the increase in this country and that in today's job market, their ability to communicate effectively with individuals from other cultures is a valuable skill.

Teachers of courses in multiculturalism should incorporated the following concepts into their curriculum: (1) the CRT concept of intersectionality, which states that the identity of individuals is comprised of multiple intersecting dimensions and that some minorities may be discriminated against based on a multiplicity of these dimensions; (2) the concept of microminorities, which stipulates that uniquely overlapping identity dimensions can result in membership in very small groups or in no group at all, and that the experiences and

challenges of microminorities can differ from those of minorities who are part of a larger group; and (3) the concept of homogenization based on race, which can be a precursor to stereotyping and holds that individuals who look similar are part of the same group. The data in this study suggest that minorities do not always group themselves together based on racial characteristics.

Open discussions about diversity are important, especially in programs that train and prepare future leaders. Teachers in such programs need to be trained to facilitate and encourage discussion that deals with issues of multiculturalism and diversity. In my experience as a doctoral student, some teachers and students tried to change the subject whenever these issues came up, or they tried to avoid the conversation altogether. Once when such a discussion was raised, one of my peers remarked that he wanted to get back to issues that matter, such as student retention, which in my opinion is directly related to issues of diversity. It may be difficult for universities to retain student populations they do not fully understand or at least seek to fully understand.

External vs. Internal Perceptions

Considering the history of racial discrimination in the United States, the continued attention that race receives by the media and my belief that racism is still alive and well in this country makes it understandable that most people have been conditioned to first and foremost see and respond to race. However, humanity has become increasingly complex and although, my findings are not meant to be generalizable, they suggest that there are minorities who focus less on race than people around them expect them to. Current and future leaders in the field of higher education may miss important information about less visible minority populations and can run the risk alienating microminorities if they view the world simply through racial lenses.

Professionals in the field should be particularly careful not to prejudge individuals who first and foremost categorize and identify themselves based on culture or nationality without fully understanding the complex intra-racial dynamics that categorize their existence. For example, just because an individual may distance themselves from people who are racially similar does not necessarily mean that they think they are superior. For example, my reflective data revealed that one of the reasons for distancing myself from much of the African-American community is not because I feel superior to this population. Rather this decision is rooted in the expectation that I relinquish my German culture (which is seen as an attempt to be white) in favor of what is considered to be black culture. I think in certain circles this is known as “keeping it real.” This study revealed that microminorities can be homogenized, and subjected to criticism and discrimination based on cultural differences by individuals of their own race.

The problem is three-pronged. Not only are microminorities homogenized with minority groups they do not identify with based on race, they are also subjected to the often negative but sometimes positive stereotypical ideas people have about these broad racial groups. Lastly, due to the historically black-and-white dichotomy in this country, many people, including other minorities, seem to believe that race is the most important aspect of minority identity and that people always connect and relate to each other because of these racial similarities.

Racialized Language in the Literature

Current and future leaders in the field need to be careful when consuming and engaging in race-based research that makes broad statements about Blacks, Hispanics and Asians. These broad terms are catch-all descriptors and should raise red flags. They can homogenize and omit certain populations. There was evidence in this study to suggest that descriptors such as

Hispanic, Asian, and black exacerbate the phenomenon of homogenization based on race as they lump microminorities together with populations they do not always identify with.

Delgado and Stephancic (2012) contended that the CRT concept of structural determinism holds that our society has a tendency to use only one word for phenomenon that is vastly more complex. For example, although most people speak of racism as a simple concept, there are several types, including biological racism, intentional racism, unconscious racism, micro-aggression, nativism, institutional racism, and white privilege, i.e., the reservation of favors, smiles, kindness, the best stories, one's most charming side, and invitations to real intimacy for one's own "kind" (p. 31). Similarly, my findings suggest that the word "minority" is inadequate in describing the complexity of the types of minorities that exist. Although occasionally the literature makes a distinction between racial minorities, cultural minorities, and dual minorities, this study also makes clear the addition of microminorities, arguably the most ignored minority of them all.

Furthermore, it appears that broad racial terms have a tendency to transcend their traditional meaning and become synonyms for the largest minority groups in the country, such as Mexicans, Chinese, or African Americans. Scholars should try to avoid those terms or at least acknowledge their limitations. Evidence in this study's findings suggest that all of the participants had been homogenized into broad racial groups at one point or another. The participant from Thailand and the participant with a Thai/American/Laotian background had been homogenized within the Chinese population; the participant from Venezuela had been homogenized with the Mexicans; the participant from Italy had been homogenized with the European-American population; and I have been homogenized with the African-American population.

Positive Effects of Homogenization

One of the participants I interviewed had a much different experience from the other participants. He was the only one who did not complain about being homogenized based on race. The tendency of Americans to view foreigners through racial lenses did not seem to affect him negatively as he reported that he does not mind being perceived as white. He has actually made a conscious effort to adapt the behaviors and traditions such as football in order to better assimilate with the European American population in this country. Delgado and Stephanic (2012) explained that an aspect of the construction of whiteness in this country is the way in which certain groups have moved into and out of the white race. For example, in early American history, the Irish, Jews, and Italians were considered nonwhite, meaning they were on par with African Americans; however, Delgado and Stephanic argued that, over time, they had earned the prerogatives and social standing of whites by a process that included labor unions, alignment with the Democratic Party, and acquiring wealth, although sometimes by illegal means (p. 86).

Although most literature in higher education is still overwhelmingly race-based, I note that in recent years more literature and research has surfaced that has acknowledged the complexity of human diversity to a higher degree. For example, LaBaron (2003), believed that culture and not race is central to our identity and the ways we make meaning. This literature teaches us that minority identity goes beyond what external entities decide it should be; rather, it can be subjective. For example, LaBaron (2003) postulated that misunderstanding and conflict can occur when our identities and meanings feel threatened. The research I have conducted supports this notion, also adding an important aspect to identity subjectivity.

Microminorities

There are categories of minorities, not simply in terms of types—such as racial, cultural, and dual minorities. There are also varying degrees of being a minority that might be defined by small numbers, degrees of experienced isolation, and access to resources and support. In simple terms one might be more or less of a minority.

Smaller minority groups can be subject to a different set of challenges (including oppression from members of their own racial group) than larger minority groups. The background of some minorities transcends the broad racial categories we have come to rely on and that their various identity dimensions may not only be fluid in nature but subjective and counter to expectations. Leaders in the field should be aware that people have a tendency to ascribe identity to others and that this tendency can lead to a discrepancy between external and internal perspectives, which can ultimately lead to organizational conflict, lack of trust, and loss of valuable employees. Although Quintyn (2010), has argued that racial categorization is automatic, inevitable, and should therefore be tolerated, my research has demonstrated that we live in an era of ethnic and cultural complexity, and also within an identity subjectivity in which a racial world view, however timesaving, may no longer be practical. If people can take the time to understand the various intricacies of their favorite football teams, surely they have the capacity to understand that people can differ culturally despite similar appearances. If the civil rights movement was conceived to fight for racial equality then perhaps it is now time to fight for the right of individuals to categorize and identify themselves in the ways they want. This means that higher education must produce and employ leaders who can get beyond subscribing to the black-and-white dichotomous paradigm and understand the subjective nature of minority identity.

Because microminorities may not identify with a minority who is racially similar, they may not have the access to or support from certain minority organizations, such as the NAACP or the national Arab League. They may feel misunderstood, isolated, pressured to compromise their cultural heritage, or to assimilate and conform. They may experience conflict with leaders with race-based mentalities, who expect them to align themselves based on racial similarities. These minorities feel deprived of the freedom to identify and categorize themselves in the way they want and may decide to leave this country altogether.

Effects of Homogenization Based on Race

Current and future leaders need to be aware that students can be negatively affected by homogenization based on race. Although my research does not directly reflect Awakoya and Clark's (2008) observations, which suggest that first-generation African immigrants are underserved in U.S. schools due to cultural differences, I found some evidence that suggests that professionals as well as students often rely on race as a means to make inferences about minorities. My research suggest that grouping individuals by race and trying to understand them that way can be can be a slippery slope since there are some minorities whose background sharply diverges from what is commonly expected of them. These minorities although rare, may have little or virtually nothing at all in common with the minority groups they are often homogenized with. Although race may not be central to their identity, organizations may also loose valuable employees because they may insist that microminorities identify and align themselves according to race. Misunderstanding employees due to racial fixation ignores the fact that certain minorities have little in common with the populations they are hired to work with and that race alone does not necessarily make them a good fit. The fact that minorities do not always unite, get along or are able to relate to each other needs to be a

warning to professionals in leadership who may be in a position to hire or train employees for this very reason.

Because I have had more work experience than the students I interviewed, the phenomenon of homogenization based on race has affected me professionally more than it has them. Clearly there were instances in my early career where I was hired not only because of my credentials but because of some type of racial quota that needed to be met, or the notion that the clientele I would be working with would be able to relate to me because we shared similar racial characteristics. One such instance occurred when I was hired for a counseling position at a middle-school alternative program for adolescents unable or unwilling to remain in a regular classroom setting due to inappropriate behaviors. About 95% of these 90 or so students were African American and came from a lower socio-economic background.

Of course I was happy to be offered a position considering that I just recently graduated from my master's program in Counseling. In this respect racial homogenization can work in one's favor. It became evident rather quickly that I did not live up to the cultural and behavioral expectation of the children or the staff. Once the children picked up on my accent and realized my differences, they began to doubt that I could relate to their problems. After all I was "just a foreigner who knew nothing about life in the hood." Similarly, some of the staff were not happy with the way I conducted myself as a counselor, not because I did anything illegal or unethical, but because my counseling style did not match their expectations of an authoritarian and disciplinarian "black" male, who was supposed to intimidate these students into submission and cooperation. Thus I would confront these students about their behavior but I remained unfrontational in the manner and to the degree expected of me. I was therefore accused of not knowing what I was doing.

The feeling that others wanted me to conform in that new environment became overwhelming at times. Not only was I stereotyped, the racial homogenization manifested itself in cultural blindness motivated by apathy; it also manifested itself in a conscious insistence on racial and cultural assimilation. It was as if people were saying, “How dare you deny your blackness?” In reality nothing could be further from the truth; I never have nor will I ever deny the fact that I am black, nor do I regret that I am; however, I am not an African American.

Multicultural Training and Sensitivity

It is important for professionals to understand that not all training around multi-cultural sensitive is equally effective or appropriate. In my experience multi-cultural sensitivity training can still predominantly focus on race. This becomes evident when training manuals and PowerPoint presentations rely on broad racial terms such as black, Hispanic and Asian. These terms ignore significant cultural differences among individuals who are racially similar. But our understanding of minorities cannot end with awareness that their identity is subjective and perhaps differs from the way we categorize them which can lead to conflict. It is also important to understand that the experience of minorities who view culture and nationality rather than race as central to their identity can be significantly different and more complicated. On one hand these minorities may be racialized, stereotyped and miss-categorized by society on the other hand they may be pressured and discrimination against by other minorities.

It is unlikely for professionals to become sufficiently culturally sensitive unless they realize that in the case of white Africans, Asian Americans or Black Germans the relationship between race and the culture may be very may be unexpected. Multicultural training may be based on the notion that people of similar races share cultural traits and therefore have similar

needs. Professionals in the field of education need to be aware that their training in multicultural sensitivity may have blurred the lines between race and culture and did not acknowledge that race and culture, as is the case of some microminorities, can be very independent from each other. In other words, leaders need to be aware that there may be cultural minorities among racial minorities and they may have little in common other than race and do not identify with race.

Furthermore, professionals in the field of education need to be aware that identity is not only subjective, but that there can be a significant difference in the experience of being a minority of one or a few compared to being part of a larger minority group. One positive aspect of this is that a minority of one may be less likely to “hide” in his or her community of peers. They may learn English faster and become more familiar with their host country cultural norms in less amount of time. Conversely, they may have less community support if they do not find a way to find a way to fit in or choose not to assimilate because they do not want to compromise important aspects of their identity. These individuals may be less likely to trust employers who want to force their race focused perspective onto them.

From the Frying Pan into the Fire

This section is a collection of thoughts about the implications the existence of someone like me may have for current and future leaders in the field of education. I need to first say that I am not trying to portray myself as a victim of these experiences. Although highly unpleasant at times, I believe they have given me important insights into how some educational institution work or do not work. It is doubtful that the things I have seen and experienced could have been learned from any text book. Furthermore, learning from the mistakes of those I have worked for and worked with will make me a better leader. Lastly, these experiences have helped me

understand myself better and brought me closer to my Germanic cultural roots than ever. As a result, I am more secure about who and what I am than ever before, and this is something I am thankful for.

Because I have been in this country I have experienced racism, and been homogenized and stereotyped based on African-American stereotypes by European Americans. Some people I have encountered seem to believe that because I am primarily perceived through a racial lens by whites and subject to racism, my attempts to distinguish myself from African Americans are more than futile; they are evidence of arrogance and disrespect to the collective “black” struggle, perhaps even an act of racial treason themselves. I was once told by a professional in higher education that no matter how much I tried to distinguish myself from the African-American community I would always be perceived as part of it. Such comments do not only reflect the historical tendency of Americans to view foreigners from a racial perspective, they are also indicative of a lack of awareness that I have also been homogenized and discriminated against by African Americans. This discrimination was based on cultural differences, their interpretation of blackness, non-centrality of race to my identity, and the fact that I am in an interracial relationship and that I am the proud father of a multiracial child. Because of this, the African-American population has not been nor will it ever be a demographic that I will be able to identify with or consider myself to be a part of. Although I respect the struggle-filled history of African Americans in this country, the collective experience of racism at the hands of European Americans is not enough to make me feel like a “brother.” Current and future leaders must be aware that race is not necessarily a bonding force among minorities.

The reflective data I have collected suggest that instead of trying to gain a better understanding of these dynamics, some people rush to judgment about the motivations of minorities who wish to distance themselves from other groups and dismiss their effort of maintaining their identity as arrogance. One theme that emerged from the data was that students were sometimes homogenized, stereotyped and discriminated against by other minorities. This seemed particularly true for the two young women from Venezuela and America (with a Thai and Laotian racial and cultural background). The student from Venezuela reported being lumped together with other “Hispanics” especially Mexicans not only by various European Americans but also by other Latinos not familiar with her distinct Venezuelan culture. She clearly resented this and reported feeling frustrated and annoyed when other Latinos expected her to act in what she called a “stereotypical Hispanic” way. Similarly the student with the Thai and Laotian background found that Asians from other countries such as China or Korea tend to assume that she is whatever they are, and often try to communicate with her in their respective languages.

Limitations to the Study

One of the biggest obstacles was the small numbers of students who responded to my participant recruitment attempts. The downside of exploring the world of microminorities is that by definition their numbers are very small. Initially I had planned to conduct a series of focus group interviews to help select the most appropriate participants for more in-depth one on one interviewing. Glesne (2006) argued that focus group interviews can be particularly helpful in action and evaluation research, where participants can express multiple perspectives on similar experiences. Unfortunately, I was unable to reconcile a time and place for this small number of respondents and was forced to abandon the idea. Future studies on this topic might

include several universities within a given area. This approach may yield a larger pool of respondents that fit the microminority criteria. It may also allow the researcher to conduct multiple interviews, something several of my respondents were unable to commit to because of time constraints. Using a multiple research site approach might enable the researcher to conduct multiple interviews with a number of respondents, which could provide greater depth in the data.

Conducting a focus group in advance of the one-on-one study would have prepared me to deal with the language barrier that I encountered more effectively. I could have constructed the interview questions in a manner that would have been more easily understood, or allowed for more time in each interview. Future studies might use a different type of recording device, such as video, instead of audio. Lipreading participant responses may have made understanding and interpretation easier. Perhaps using some type of written survey in combination with the one-on-one interviews would also enable better circumnavigation of language barriers and speed up the data transcription process.

Drapeau (2002) argued the great importance for researchers to understand and to “own” our subjectivity. He observed that our subjectivity may not influence our work, but that it may lead us into finding nothing more than what we were specifically looking for, sometimes without even knowing it. With the help of reflexive journaling, and of friends who reminded me that the study was not primarily about me, I was able to manage my subjectivity fairly well. I was less well prepared for how the study affected me emotionally. It brought back many memories, many of them unpleasant. These memories triggered a variety of feelings, such as sadness, anger, and frustration. Future researchers interested in this topic should have a clear understanding of how closely they are connected to this topic and be prepared for the

emotions it might trigger. Depending on their predisposition to depression or anxiety, reflexive journaling may not be enough to deal with these emotions. They might devise a more comprehensive plan in order to deal with these emotions, enlisting the support of friends and family, or even the help of a professional counselor.

Suggestions for Further Research

The evidence of this study illustrates that microminorities are perceived differently by the institution than they perceive themselves. Furthermore, the findings indicate that homogenization based on race can result in damage to self-esteem and identity. Therefore, more research needs to be conducted into the emotional impact of homogenization on microminorities. Based on the data of my personal experiences, microminorities exist in the professional world. They may be our co-workers, leaders, or employees. More research needs to be conducted about the experiences of microminorities in the professional world. Homogenization may lead to feelings of isolation, lack of trust, and anger, which in turn lead to conflict and loss of valuable employees. Considering the increasing global competition to American businesses and institutions, the United States can no longer afford to lose highly skilled workers because of a lack of cultural sensitivity.

More research needs to be conducted around how minority groups interact on the college campus. Little is known about how various minority groups interact (or fail to interact) on college campuses. Research on the ways international students are housed and roommate assignments are made may also yield valuable data about day-to-day experiences of microminorities and how services could be improved for them. Furthermore, research on how international student support groups, such as clubs, are structured and designed could yield insights into how to better support microminorities. This research would be especially useful if

it includes the voices of microminorities themselves, which could give direct input into the type of support they need. For example, when I asked Carla one of the participants if she thought if there was a difference between being part of a small minority group versus a larger minority group, she replied:

I would like to live more within my culture. It's really hard because there is only one other person that is where I'm from. But if you are Dominican—I have Dominican friends and they get together and talk and do things that they would regularly do in their countries. Like if you go to the Hispanic Student Association, they are all, like, Dominican and Puerto Rican, and then there is “us.”

So let me make sure I understand. They have a Hispanic Student Association?

Yeah, they have a Hispanic Student Association. But those students are from everywhere (different Spanish-speaking countries). Yeah, from everywhere but, like I said, they tend to generalize us with the Dominicans or with the bigger populations of Hispanics.

Because I was unable to collect direct data from faculty and staff on how they perceived microminorities, future research should focus on teacher and staff perceptions to discover whether they are adequately trained to deal with a more and more culturally complex student body, one that likely includes microminorities. Lastly, the idea of larger minority groups as a source for oppression of smaller minority groups or singular minorities is a controversial concept that not many scholars seem to be willing to tackle. Nonetheless, as the population of students and professionals become more culturally and ethnically complex, it is important to explore this area if we want to better understand how minority groups interrelate in higher education institutions.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval

IRB <irb@appstate.edu>

Mar 19

To: Tony Banjoko

CAMPUS MAIL

From: IRB Administration

Date: 3/19/2014

RE: Notice of IRB Exemption

Study #: 14-0203

Study Title: ASCRIBED VERSUS SELF-DETERMINED IDENTITY:A CRITICAL INTERPRETIVE INQUIRY INTO THE SUBJECTIVITY OF MICROMINORITY IDENTITY

Exemption Category: (2) Anonymous Educational Tests; Surveys, Interviews or Observations This study involves minimal risk and meets the exemption category cited above. In accordance with 45 CFR 46.101(b) and University policy and procedures, the research activities described in the study materials are exempt from further IRB review.

Study Change: Proposed changes to the study require further IRB review when the change involves:

- an external funding source,
- the potential for a conflict of interest,
- a change in location of the research (i.e., country, school system, off site location),
- the contact information for the Principal Investigator,
- the addition of non-Appalachian State University faculty, staff, or students to the research team, or
- the basis for the determination of exemption. Standard Operating Procedure #9 cites examples of changes which affect the basis of the determination of exemption on page 3.

Investigator Responsibilities: All individuals engaged in research with human participants are responsible for compliance with University policies and procedures, and IRB determinations. The Principal Investigator (PI), or Faculty Advisor if the PI is a student, is ultimately responsible for ensuring the protection of research participants; conducting sound ethical research that complies with federal regulations, University policy and procedures; and maintaining study records. The PI should review the IRB's list of PI responsibilities.

To Close the Study: When research procedures with human participants are completed, please send the Request for Closure of IRB Review form toirb@appstate.edu.

If you have any questions, please contact the Research Protections Office at (828) 262-7981 (Julie) or (828) 262-2692 (Robin).

Best wishes with your research.

Websites for Information Cited Above

Note: If the link does not work, please copy and paste into your browser, or visit <https://researchprotections.appstate.edu/human-subjects>.

1. Standard Operating Procedure

#9: <http://researchprotections.appstate.edu/sites/researchprotections.appstate.edu/files/IRB20SOP920Exempt%20Review%20Determination.pdf>

2. PI

responsibilities: <http://researchprotections.appstate.edu/sites/researchprotections.appstate.edu/files/PI20Responsibilities.pdf>

3. IRB forms: <http://researchprotections.appstate.edu/human-subjects/irb-forms>

CC:
Leslie Bolt, Leadership And Educational Studies, Les

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Thank you for coming today. My name is Tony Banjoko and I am a Doctoral Candidate from the Reich College of Education at Appalachian State University, conducting research for my dissertation.

This is a study about how college students with diverse cultural, national, and racial backgrounds (“microminorities”) identify and categorize themselves. I am particularly interested in learning about how college students are affected by being categorized by peers and school personnel in a manner they may not agree with. Please treat this as a discussion, with no right or wrong answers.

Before I begin, I want to share this information sheet with you on the research study and give you a few minutes to read it and confirm you are interested in participating. If you are, I'll ask you to sign a consent form which you will receive a copy of.

At this point I would like to reemphasize a few key points from the information sheet.

- 1. You may share only what you wish to share. If you would rather not respond to a particular question, you can simply indicate so.*
- 2. You are free to choose not to participate in all or any part of this study. At any time, you can excuse yourself without any consequences.*
- 3. I am asking your permission to tape record the interview(s). When I transcribe the dialogue, I will insert pseudonyms for each of you in order to protect your identity to the best of my ability. You also have the right to listen to these audiotapes before I erase them and request that specific information be edited or deleted from the study.*
- 4. You can email me at tbanjoko@triad.rr.com if you have any further questions about my project.*

Interview Questions:

1. How long have you been in this country / Student at this institution?
2. How would you describe your cultural, national, and racial background?
3. Do you consider your background to be unique compared to most minorities? If so, in what way do you think that it is unique?

4. Do you consider yourself part of a minority group or multiple minority groups? If so, what group (groups) do you consider yourself to be part of and why?
5. Are you being or have you ever been categorized or labeled by your peers or by school personnel in a manner that is contradictory to how you identify and categorize yourself? If so how has this affected you personally and how has it affected your relationships with your peers and educational institutions?
6. Do you think there is a difference between being part of a smaller minority group vs. a larger minority group? If so, how do you think these differences manifest themselves?
7. Which dimension of your identity (culture, race, or nationality) do you think your peers and personnel focus on the most? What are your feelings about this?
8. Which identity dimension—nationality, culture, race, or nationality—is most central to your identity and why?
9. A microminority is a person who is a part of a very small minority group, or he or she may be one of kind considering the nature of their identity dimension. Can you relate to this concept?

Vita

Tony Olaniyi Banjoko was born in Viernheim, Germany, to Anthony and Lilo Banjoko. He graduated from Nibelungen Schule (in Germany) in June 1986. In the autumn of 1991 he entered Winston-Salem State University to study Psychology and in June of 1996 he was awarded the Bachelors of Arts degree. That following autumn he entered the North Carolina Agricultural and Technical University and began his study towards a Master of Science in Education degree. The MS.Ed was awarded in December of 1999. In August of 2007, Mr. Banjoko commenced work toward his Ed.D. in Educational Leadership at Appalachian State University. Mr. Banjoko continues to reside in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.