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# ASSUMED TO BE BLACK: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF BEING ASCRIBED A RACIAL STATUS ON A PREDOMINATELY WHITE CAMPUS

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ASSUMED TO BE BLACK: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF BEING

ASCRIBED A RACIAL STATUS ON A PREDOMINATELY WHITE CAMPUS

BY

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN

EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND

AND

RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE

2014

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY DISSERTATION

OF

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AND
RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE
2014

**ABSTRACT**

Colleges and universities continue to add diversity and internationalization as major components of their strategic planning efforts. Students from various racial, ethnic and national backgrounds are expected to live and work together in an intellectual environment while bringing with them various views of race and culture that are maintained through varying myths and misconceptions. This study looked at the technical and cultural definitions of what it means to be 'Black' in the U.S. and the stereotypes of being classified within that racial category.

The goal of this research study was to understand the experience of students from the African Atlantic Diaspora (Africa, Caribbean, the Americas) whose primary way of identifying racially/ethnically is different than the racial classification of 'Black' that they are ascribed in a predominately white college setting. The participants have had the experience of being categorized as 'Black' based on physical features such as skin color and hair type.

The racial designation of 'Black' used in the study is based on the current U.S. legal and cultural definition (Davis, 1991) from the 2010 Census that states, "A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. It includes people who indicated their race(s) as 'Black, African American, or Negro' or reported entries such as African American, Kenyan, Nigerian, or Haitian". (Humes et. al, 2011). The Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the federal government department responsible for maintaining racial categories, states, "The racial categories included in the census questionnaire generally reflect a social definition of race recognized in this country and not an attempt to define race biologically, anthropologically, or

genetically" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).  Contradictions arise from this classification because for a number of people, including the participants in this study, 'Black' has a varied meaning depending on ones' cultural frame of reference (Davis, 1991; Ròman & Flores, 2012).

Nigerian author Chimamanda Adichie highlights the experience of race and class in the U.S. and the social implications of being classified as 'Black' in her new book *Americanah*.  In a recent radio interview about her award winning novel, Adichie stated, "in Nigeria, race is not a social reality.  It is not an identity marker", because most people are 'black'.  (Adichie, 2014).  Like the main character in Adichie's novel, the participants grappled with the differences between what it meant to be 'Black' here in the U.S. and in their home countries/communities.

To understand the essence of their experiences with race, I employed phenomenology.  I used the semi-structure format for conducting in-depth phenomenological interviews (Seidman, 2006,) to examine how my participants view their own racial identities (life history) interpret multicultural encounters (contemporary experience), and investigate what they understand being 'Black' represents (reflection on meaning).  The results were analyzed using a critical race and racial formation theoretical lens.

The findings confirmed that the way in which the participants defined 'Black' was in conflict with the cultural definition of 'Black' in the U.S.  The data yielded information that suggests the participants felt that 'Black' in the U.S. had a negative connotation and was synonymous with African-American – an ethnic group they did not identify with and held preconceived notions about.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

In the process of completing a doctoral degree, I perused previously published dissertations for inspiration. When I began this journey, I dreamt of the moment when I would be writing this section. I knew that it would be filled with emotion and standard notes of acknowledgment. But I never anticipated just how special this would be for me.

Since my undergraduate college days, I was told and eventually accepted the fact that I am a pioneer. The word pioneer embodied an image of someone who was not afraid to chart new territory. My journey has taken me from urban New Jersey, to Maine, Alaska, Rhode Island and around the world. As a pioneer, there is a passion that overtakes your thoughts and actions and there are special individuals who help you navigate your journey. I would like to use this space to thank those individuals who helped fuel the passion in me.

First and foremost I want to acknowledge God who is the head of my life. He has guided me through many marvelous journeys and obstacles. I give Him the praise, the glory and the honor. I would like to thank my major professor, Dr. Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban for her unwavering support through this process. Her commitment to my doctoral work was evident in her immediate availability in providing me ongoing feedback despite her own major life events (retirement, international travel, the wedding of her daughter, and birth of her first grandchild).

A special thanks to my doctoral committee, Dr. Pete Adamy, Dr. Vanessa Quainoo, Dr. J. Andrés Ramirez and previously Dr. Alexander "Sasha" Sidorkin as well as the chair of my defense, Dr. Peter Mendy, the program co-directors and

members of the program faculty as they have all played a unique role in helping me get to this point and for that I am grateful.  To the members of my doctoral cohort – I am appreciative  of our in class discussions, parking lot chats after a 3 hour class and opportunities to work together and support one another over the years.  A special thanks to Marissa and Adam – I am grateful for the additional support and friendship you have provided to me.  I look forward to sharing many more life events with you.

I must recognize another very important member of the Education scholarly community, Dr. Phyllis Brazee, retired faculty from the University of Maine.  We met many moons ago in Maine and she instantly became a mentor and friend.  Miss Phyllis, I thank you for our long conversations, the peaceful quiet moments, and to bearing witness to the note card I filled out listing my passions and goals, one of which was to complete a doctoral program.  You will always hold a special place in my heart for your shining example of peace, your ability to 'flink' (feel and think) for and with others, and your commitment to bringing multicultural education to predominately white environments.

This journey would not be possible without my family.  To my dear grandmother, Florine Donald, may you rest in eternal peace.  I love you more than words can express. While you were living, I know your prayers and support helped me triumph over many obstacles.  I miss you dearly and I know you would be very proud of me.  To my aunts and cousins  – I love you all and thank you for everything you have done over the years, seen and unseen, to help me get to this point.  To my sister Kim, only we know the details of our childhood, so I share this triumph with you.  To my mother, Shirley:  I love you and I thank you for your guidance.  I get my thirst for

knowledge and scholarly nature from you.  From a young age you taught me the value of education and so many other life lessons that have prepared me for this moment.  I would not be here without you.

To my husband, my best friend, and the person who knows me most intimately, Vinald Francis.  I love you Pop!  You have been my biggest ally on this journey and I thank God for your love and support.  You took care of me, Kiara, and the house through this entire process.  I share this moment with you.  To my brilliant, loving and patient daughter Kiara – my girl.  You provided me with the motivation to see this process to completion.  Thank you for all of your notes of encouragements, hugs, kisses and prayers.  You are the best cheerleader a mom could ask for.

Last but not least, to all of the participants in my study.  Thank you for your honesty and trust in me. Your stories have given me inspiration to continue this work and make connections for youth across the African Atlantic Diaspora.

# DEDICATION

*To my husband Vinald and daughter Kiara,*
*Thank you for your sacrifice.  I pray for God's blessings upon us all.*


*To my late grandmother, Mother Florine Donald, may your prayers and wisdom*
*continue to manifest themselves in your children, your children's children*
*and many more generations to come.*


*To all of the poor wayfaring strangers, never give up; you are a pioneer*
*whose bright light shines for those who come after you.*


*To all of the students of color in predominately white settings*
*who have been the 'only one'; your experiences are not in vain.*


*To all of the young women of color working to persevere through life's challenges,*
*remain steadfast and allow God's grace to help you*
*Leap Into Your Destiny…*

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the notion of 'Blackness' in a U.S. context and to hear first hand accounts of being categorized in a way that contradicts the participants' way of self-identifying. This research was designed to examine the experiences of students from the African Atlantic Diaspora who study at a predominately white university for whom others assume are 'Black' yet they do not self-identify with that U.S. racial categorization. To understand this phenomenon, I looked at how the participants interpret being 'Black' and investigated how they reflect upon race. In addition, I hoped to find out whether or not they have a 'single-story' concept of race when it comes to being referred to as a U.S. 'Black' person.

Since I explored with my participants a shared experience of what it means to be an assumed member of the U.S. 'Black' race and their perceptions of what being 'Black' entails, my study is phenomenological in scope. "A phenomenological study investigates various reactions to, or perceptions of, a particular phenomenon…Data are usually collected through in-depth interviewing. Researchers search for the essential structure of a single phenomenon…" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009, p. 429). Specifically, interpretive phenomenology is used to contemplate the meanings the participants make of their shared experience (Van der Mescht, 2004, p. 2).

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**Personal Connection to the Study**

I identify racially as Black and grew up in a predominately Black neighborhood in New Jersey. Although my personal identification aligns with that of the Black/African-American culture in the U.S., my father was a native of Haiti. My parents divorced when I was two years old and I did not grow up with a sense of pride or the language of the first independent Black republic in the Western hemisphere. My only understanding of Haiti was the media's negative representation of a poor, destitute country ravaged by poverty and disease. It was not until college that I met a Ph.D. student from Haiti (Wilner) who provided me with a positive narrative of his and my father's home country.

After high school, I was awarded a full tuition scholarship to study at the University of Maine in Orono. I eagerly accepted the opportunity to pursue my undergraduate degree in Maine not realizing that there would be an emotional price to pay for being black in a place that was the whitest state in the country according to the 2000 U.S. Census. In Maine, whether you were of African-American/Black from the U.S, Caribbean or an international student from the continent of Africa, you were lumped into the category of 'Black' by faculty, staff, administration, and your peers based on outward appearance of skin color and hair type. Not much attention was given to the diversity of experiences among the perceived 'Black' student collective.

When I left for college I had never been outside of the country and only traveled outside of my native New Jersey to other U.S. states a handful of times. Attending college in Maine forced me to contemplate my own lived experience as a Black person in the U.S. and the experiences of people all over the world. Prior to

going to Maine, I had never used terms such as 'diversity' and 'person of color'. Now as a professional, I travel extensively for work and pleasure and continue to be intrigued at the notion of being 'Black' on a global scale.

In addition to my college experiences, my role as the mother of a 'mixed race' child also deeply connects me to this work. My daughter's father is racially white and like me, she is not growing up with her biological father. Throughout my time doing this research, her identity has shifted from exclusively being Alaskan (the place of her birth not her race, skin color or ethnicity!) to proclaiming 'bi-racial' according to a 'Who Am I' essay she recently wrote. She admits feeling a closer connection to her Black cultural roots as I am remarried and her stepfather is racially and culturally Black and Montserratian.

It has been amazing to watch how complete strangers treat her based on her physical features and the color of her skin. At the age of one, she was in a daycare where several of my students at the time were volunteers. Two of my students brought it to my attention that several of the staff at the daycare would 'cater' to my daughter – more so than the other children. They would change her diaper more often, play with her more, brush her hair and remark how beautiful she is. To hear that your child is being well taken care of would naturally make any parent happy. The students knew however, that in treating my daughter 'better' because of the lightness of her skin was a form of discrimination (colorism) that I would not support. Several participants in the study spoke about colorism within their communities and the connection to race and identity.

In the beginning of my professional career I worked in college admissions. While my goal was to ensure the recruitment of a globally diverse class, it was difficult to ascertain what individual students knowledge of race was prior to matriculating. Somehow, the ever increasing diverse student body was supposed to lead to the development of informed graduates who would go out into the world with the skills to work with a variety of people from different backgrounds. Through their commitment to diversity, institutions must take into consideration how students individually and collectively define and experience 'race' relations in the U.S.

I currently work with students from all over the world (including the countries in my research study) and know that doing research that theoretically stretches beyond the borders of the U.S. is not only significant but also necessary in understanding the connections and misconceptions of the broad categorization of people worldwide with origins from and throughout the African Diaspora. The interaction with those students and my own experience with race is what make this research significant and worthy of investigation.

I have been fortunate enough to travel throughout the Caribbean, including Haiti, Dominican Republic and two African countries (Ghana and Botswana). My travels solidified a need to study the experiences of students from throughout the African Atlantic Diaspora. We have all been socialized under a master narrative that dates back to colonization where lighter skin is better. This misrepresentation of an entire people rarely gives the true picture of our experiences – both similarities and differences.

**Statement of the Problem**

Students from Africa and those with family origins throughout the African Atlantic Diaspora who phenotypically look 'Black' (based on U.S. racial categorization) find themselves in the contradictory situation of being ascribed a racial status that they do not identify with. "Definitions of who is black vary quite sharply from country to country and for this reason people in other countries often express consternation about our (U.S.) definition" (Davis, 1991, p.13).

Colleges and universities rely on race as a means to determine if an incoming class or campus community reflects "diversity". Racial categories in the U.S. are fluid and change over time yet the policy of collecting racial demographic data, based on decade's old US Census-derived categories of race/ethnicity, remains the key way in which to quantify racial diversity. The mere labeling of students into different racial categories will not automatically lead to students engaging with and learning from one another. For the participants in this study, those categorizations generally do not match their own definitions and lived experiences.

It is important to note that the terms 'Black', 'Africa/African' and 'African Atlantic Diaspora' will be used throughout this dissertation. For the purposes of this study, these terms will be used in the following way (formal definitions are located in the latter part of this chapter):

Black – referring to the skin color of the individual participants and the social definition of what it means to be 'Black' in America. In terms of skin tone, the participants identified as medium to dark brown. Historically in the U.S., this was referred to as the 'brown paper bag test', an antiquated phrase that is now

all but condemned, where an individual who was darker than a brown paper bag was considered 'Black' and could not pass for white.  The social definition refers to the stereotypes connected to the Black/African-American race in the U.S. that the participants may or may not identify with.

Africa/African – referring to the origin of birth and/or having citizenship in a country in Sub-Saharan Africa.  Some of the participants in the study are international students who are studying or have studied in the U.S.  By way of this definition, they are not immigrants as their student visa status requires that they return to their home countries upon completion of their studies.

African Atlantic Diaspora – referring to family origins from the continent of Africa, the Caribbean or the Americas.

The number of college students from Africa in the U.S. decreased by 3.8% in 2011/12 to 35,502 students with Nigeria being the only location in Africa in the top 25 list of countries where international students are coming from and only 5.5% of U.S. students going abroad to African nations (Open Doors, 2012).  With so little mobility of students to and from the Africa, colonial legacies and current media misrepresentations of 'Blacks' worldwide can trouble the experience of students from Africa and the African Atlantic Diaspora who study on predominately white campuses in the U.S.  Colleges and universities rely on race and nationality as a means to determine if an incoming class or campus community reflects "diversity" yet international students from the continent of Africa are one of the least represented international groups on U.S. college campuses.  They still lag behind that of Asian and Latin American countries (Constantine, et. al, 2005, p. 57).

African college students studying in the U.S. and those with family origins throughout the African Atlantic Diaspora are predisposed to what it means to be referred to as a Black/African American. The connotation is often negative and, "is predicated on the notion that dark skin represents savagery, irrationality, ugliness, and inferiority. White skin is defined by the opposite: civility, rationality, beauty, and superiority" (Hunter, 2007, p. 238). A contradiction exists because the participants selected for the study embodied a sense of ethnic, national and cultural pride but clearly did not like being associated with Black/African Americans based on the colonial and socialized measures of what it means to be Black in the U.S.

Although the participants in the study share similar phenotypic characteristics to those defined as Black in the U.S., college is a difficult time to sort through years of historical, colonial, institutional and systemic racism. During the undergraduate process, students are navigating the academic, cultural and social landscape of an institution. Many are discovering, affirming and/or redefining their identities. For the participants who shared the phenomena of being assigned a racial category they did not personally identify with and even held some negative assumptions about, their racial identity was being defined for them. According to Hunter (2005, 2007):

> Herein lies the contradiction: on one hand, dark skin is associated with being Indian or African and therefore backward, ugly, and low status. On the other hand, dark skin is evidence of being Indian or African and therefore, of being true and authentic.
> The current racial identity theories developed by such notable scholars as

William Cross (1971) and Janet Helms (1990) assumes a persons race at the onset. There is an added complexity to the racial dynamic when you may not consider yourself a particular race (i.e. Black) but others perceive you as being of a certain race.

There lacks significant research beyond the racial identity scales to further explore the lived experiences of individuals who have navigated in and out of environments where their racial identity was thought to be 'Black' and they themselves do not embrace that racial categorization and have varied understandings of what being 'Black' in the U.S. fully entails.

In an attempt to diversify, universities rarely, if ever, contemplate the personal narratives of these students and the potential disruption that occurs when they are faced with representing a group that they themselves have widely held negative beliefs about.

**Research Question(s)**:

What is the essence of the experience for students from Africa and the Caribbean who are assumed to be 'Black' in a U.S. context?

Sub-questions:

1. How do the participants racially/ethnically self-identify and how does this differ from how others identify them based on observable physical characteristics, such as skin color and hair type?

2. What contradictions exist between their racial self-identification and the racial ascription of 'Black/African-American'?

3. How is their racial identity impacted when they are in predominately white campus settings?

4. Prior to college, what informed the participants' racial/ethnic self-identity?

**Significance of the Study**

The goal of my research is to understand the experiences of students who study at predominately white college campuses and for whom their primary way of self-identifying racially/ethnically is in direct conflict with ascribed racial categorizations (US Census). To understand this phenomenon, I plan to examine how my participants interpret being 'Black', investigate how they reflect upon race, and question their own racial identities. In addition, I hope to find out whether or not they have a 'single-story' concept of race when it comes to being referred to as 'Black'.

Institutions and individuals use race to determine difference and make decisions based upon this limited information even though race is fluid and changes over time. This labeling and lumping of individuals into racial groups that they sometimes do not identify with can be a cause of conflict. The research study is designed to interpret and understand the lived experiences of students from Africa and the Caribbean - in particular those students who are perceived to be 'Black' based on phenotype.

On college campuses standard references such as diversity and cultural competency can sometimes obstruct the true exploration of individual identities. This study is relevant and significant in the field of education because, "despite long-standing efforts to pluralize our way of thinking about diversity, the field (of education) remains caught in a web of assumptions that are infrequently articulated or critically examined" (Lee, 2003, p. 3).

We are complex individuals, yet during one of the most crucial points of our identity development, college, students are sometimes mislabeled and often

categorized by outward appearance rather than be allowed to self-identify. In

education, the goal should be to foster healthy attitudes among individuals of different

racial and ethnic groups who live, work and study in an unprecedented multicultural,

multiethnic, and multilingual nation (Utsey et al., 2008). However, what students are

taught about the African Atlantic Diaspora tends to be from one perspective

(Agabond, 2009).

Research by Constantine, et al., (2005) revealed:

> Studies on international students' sojourns to the U.S. tend to focus on culture
> shock, confusion about role expectations, loss of social support, alienation,
> discrimination and language barriers. Such phenomena, is collectively known
> as acculturative stress. With regards to Kenyan, Nigerian, and Ghanaian
> international college students, who represent an elite group of Africans by
> virtue of having been selected to attend U.S. schools by their parents or their
> government, there is a *dearth* of studies examining their cultural adjustment
> experiences, or even the experiences of other international students from the
> continent of Africa (p. 57).

During a professional trip to Ghana, I met with a group of Ghanaian college

students and we discussed their understanding of what it meant to be Black in

America. They admitted limited knowledge in knowing the history of slavery and

oppression from Africa to the Americas. Many commented that Black Americans

were the lucky ones who got 'out' and had so many wonderful opportunities in

America that they rarely took advantage of. One student summarized it by saying, "if

there was a ship in the middle of the campus (University of Ghana – Legon) that said

'slave ship to America' on the side, it would be over-flowing with people". In that

moment I knew it was important as an educator to research the significance of what

being Black on a historical, personal, and global scale means.

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The interaction with those students, my own experience and the experience of my peers during my undergraduate career as well as my current work with international and domestic students of color is what makes this research significant and worthy of investigation.

**Definition of Terms**:

To understand the experience of the participants in the study, the following terms will be explored: race, racial identity, racial formation, colorism, racial categorization, one-drop rule, African Atlantic Diaspora, 'Black' in the U.S., and colorism.

The average student who takes a course on race in college can articulate that race is socially constructed. A more in-depth definition of race by Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban (2006) eloquently frames the central focus of this study:

> Race is now viewed as a social construction that is primarily recognized by physical appearance, or phenotype. In the United States this means that Americans are socialized first to identify a person's race by skin color, and second by hair form, by facial features such as shape of nose and lips, and eye form, along with other physical features like height (p. 1).

Racial identity is defined by Chavez and Guido-DiBrito (1999) as:

> a sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common heritage with a particular racial group (Helms, 1993, p. 3). Racial identity seems most often, however, to be a frame in which individuals categorize others, often based on skin color (O'Hearn, 1998). Racial identity is a surface-level manifestation based on what we look like yet has deep implications in how we are treated.

Racial formation as defined by Omi and Winant (1994) is the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed.

Racial categorization is different in various nations. In the U.S. where this study takes place, racial categorization or classification is dictated by the Office of Management and Budget. Currently, the five racial categories are: White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander and Some Other Race.

The one-drop rule states that if a person has a single drop of 'black blood' that makes a person black (Davis, 1991; Omi & Winant, 1994; Tatum, 1997).

One of the criteria of the study is that the participants be current citizens of an African Nation or has family origins from the African 'Atlantic' Diaspora and would be categorized as 'Black' based on phenotype and U.S. Census categorizations. Specifically, participants from Sub-Saharan African countries were interviewed and the definition in this study will be in reference to the following summation as found in the American Heritage Dictionary online (2013):

> Sub-Saharan Africa is defined as relating to, or situated in the region of Africa south of the Sahara. The demographic, political, and economic impact of the export of slaves and import of various European, American, and Asian goods is a subject of lively historical debate. It is estimated that at least thirty million slaves were captured as part of the Atlantic slave trade (although only eleven or twelve million were exported), with many more killed through slave-related raiding and warfare.

According to Colin Palmer (2000), there are at least five major streams within the African Diaspora. For the purposes of this study, I will focus on the fourth and fifth streams which he notes, "the fourth major African diasporic stream and the one most widely studied today is associated with the Atlantic trade in African slaves. The fifth major stream is characterized by the movement of peoples among, and resettlement in, various societies" (p.28).

The U.S. Census definition of 'Black' is used in this study. Beyond the definition provided by the U.S. government, there exist a complexity in how individuals, particularly those in this study, identify with the racial term 'Black' as it is used in the U.S

> According to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), "Black or African American" refers to a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. The Black racial category includes people who marked the "Black, African American, or Negro" checkbox. It also includes respondents who reported entries such as African American; Sub-Saharan African entries, such as Kenyan and Nigerian; and Afro-Caribbean entries, such as Haitian and Jamaican. Sub-Saharan African entries are classified as Black or African American with the exception of Sudanese and Cape Verdean because of their complex, historical heritage. North African entries are classified as White, as OMB defines White as a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa. (Rastogi, et al., 2011).
> Being referred to as 'Black' can elicit a narrow definition of what the

experience truly entails. In a TED talk in July 2009, Chimamanda Adichie spoke about the 'danger of the single story'. From my interpretation of her talk, the 'single story' is when the same story gets told and heard over and over again about a people or a place from a single perspective. The danger is that it leads to stereotypes and to half-truths not the full truth (Abagond, 2009).

For many of the participants in the study, color was a more prominent way of self-identifying in their home countries than racial categories. Because of this, it was important to explore the concept of colorism and its connection to the experiences of the participants. "Colorism is the process of discrimination that privileges light-skinned people of color over their dark-skinned counterparts. Colorism is concerned with actual skin tone, as opposed to racial or ethnic identity" (Hunter, 2007, p. 237).

**Ethics and Anonymity:**

The participants in the study had to meet the following criteria:

- Currently attends or has attended a college or university that is predominately white (more than 50% of the population is white)

- Does not self-identify as being Black by U.S. standards of racial categorization

- From Africa or family origins from throughout the African Atlantic Diaspora (the continent of Africa, the Caribbean and the Americas)

As the criteria outlined for the study fit a very small demographic of the population where the research took place, I invited all participants to use pseudonyms to maintain their anonymity. At the conclusion of the interview process, some participants still had not chosen a pseudonym so I chose one for them. Also, for one of the participants, they were the only person from their country enrolled at the university at the time of the study. In the best interest of the participant, that home country was changed as well. The use of pseudonyms and change(s) in location when necessary will not negatively impact the participants or results of the study. Rather, the study served as a vehicle by which they could all share their stories.

**Summary and Outline of the Study**

In Chapter One, I provided an introduction and overview of the studies focus as well as my person connection to studying the experiences of students from across the African Atlantic Diaspora. A thorough review of the problem was explored and I discussed the purpose of the study and outlined my research questions. The

significance of the study was summarized and was followed by key definitions pertinent to the study.

In Chapter Two, my literature review covered the major themes associated with the study as well as the theoretical concepts used to frame the study. Chapter Three served as the methodological chapter where I discuss the research design and the methods used for data collection and analysis. In Chapter Four I present the findings of my study and finally in Chapter Five I discuss the implications of my findings relative to further research on students from the African Atlantic Diaspora.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study is to shed light on the racialized experiences of African and Caribbean university students in a predominately white college setting in the United States.  Specifically, I explored the experience of the participants being labeled as 'Black/African-American' when they did not personally identify in this way.  The study attempts to understand the contradictions they experience as phenotypically being 'Black' but not individually subscribing to the notion of what it means to be Black in the United States both in color and culture.

There lacks significant literature on the experiences of African and Caribbean students who study at predominately white institutions in the U.S.  Most of the research on international students focuses on those of European and Asian descent (Constantine, et. al, 2005).  While there is substantial literature that looks at race on the continent of Africa, the Caribbean, and through the Pan-African movement, the focus of this study is on the participants' experiences with race specifically in the U.S.  Therefore, the literature review focused on scholarly work that examined the meaning of 'Black' in a U.S. context.

Due to the dearth of scholarly work specifically on college students from Africa and the Caribbean, the review of related literature for this dissertation was derived from three main areas: colonialism through the African slave trade, racial categorization in the United States, and frameworks stemming from racial formation,

critical race theory, as well as acculturation. Recognizing that these topics are extremely broad, they were still necessary in getting at the heart of the research question: What is the essence of the experience for students from Africa and the Caribbean who are assumed to be 'Black' in a U.S. context?

The connections between these topics and their subsequent sub-topics directly relate to the lived experiences of the participants who have dealt with the contradiction of being labeled 'Black' (American), who do not self-identify in that way, and who have a particular view of what being labeled 'Black' (American) entails.

According to the Institute of International Education, over 800,000 international students pursued undergraduate studies in the U.S. during the 2012-2013 academic year with almost half coming from China, India and South Korea (See Figure 1). There are no African or Caribbean nations listed in the top ten of countries who have international students in the U.S. Student from Sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean constitute 5% of all international students in 2012/2013. The students from these countries who are 'Black' are put into positions to represent their assumed collective race. The issue is complicated when individuals from Africa or with family origins from the African Atlantic Diaspora internalize negative notions of what it means to be categorized as 'Black'(American).

*Figure 1 (2012-2013 Institute of International Education 'Open Doors' Annual Report – Places of Origin for International Students)*



With increased enrollment of non-white students, college campuses will be forced to become the places where students will gain cultural awareness and to have learned about racial identity, the affects of racial privilege on a global scale and how to engage in a process of life-long learning about themselves and the people around them. For the participants, having African Black ancestry is often falsely associated with being a Black American. This study looks to examine the paradox in the experience of racial categorization for the participants where in the U.S., "the nations answer to the question 'Who is black?' has long been that a black person is any person with any known African black ancestry" (Davis, 1991, p. 5).

**Colonialism: The African Slave Trade**

The participants in this study are citizens of or have family from countries that were colonized by white Europeans. Additionally, the university where the students study dates back to the mid-1800's. "Since the earliest days of colonialism in North America, an identifiable racial order has linked the system of political rule to the racial classification of individuals and groups" (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 79). Colonial

thought and mentality helps shape how participants currently view race and color in relation to the dominant paradigm surrounding racial formation.

Colonialism has a variety of meanings depending on time in history.  In the context of the U.S., where this study takes place, we will look at colonialism from a nation based paradigm where, "racial dynamics are understood as products of colonialism and, therefore, as outcomes of relationships which are global and epochal in character." (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 37).  In his seminal text on colonization, Memmi (1965) states:

> It is significant that racism is part of colonialism throughout the world; and it is no coincidence.  Racism sums up and symbolizes the fundamental relation which unites colonialist and colonized.  The colonialist are perpetually explaining, justifying and maintaining (by word as well as deed) the place and fate of their silent partners in the colonial drama…  Colonial racism is built from three major ideological components: one, the gulf between the culture of the colonialist and the colonized; two, the exploitation of these differences for the benefit of the colonialist; three, the use of these supposed differences as standards of absolute fact (pgs. 69-71).
> As a nation based theory, colonialism in the U.S. is directly connected to race

and economics.  In order to understand the concept of race in the Americas, particularly for those who may not have been raised in this country, it will be framed in the context of slavery where Africans were used as free laborers in deplorable conditions from the 16th to the 19th century.  Césaire (1972) meticulously argues that colonization actually has lasting negative ramifications unlike those who are in the business of colonizing would have us believe.  He states of those who colonize, "no one colonizes innocently…that a civilization that justifies colonization – and therefore force – is already a sick civilization, a civilization that is morally diseased…" (p. 4).

The Mid-Atlantic African Slave trade presents a varied meaning for different people.   Some view it as one of the most heinous crimes in modern history.  Some

hold the view that it was the fault of the Africans who sold their people into slavery and others contend the white Europeans misrepresented their intent and were cold-blooded murderers. Despite varied opinions about the events of slavery, there is evidence to suggest that the incidents have contributed to the economic and mental degradation of Africans across the Diaspora. (Slavery by Another Name, 2012). Due to the enslavement of Africans across the Americas, still today there lacks a strong unified connection of people of African descent in the Atlantic Diaspora.

Historians have noted a connection between the colonial mentality developed during slavery that Africans are inferior to whites to that of the rise of racism in the West where "Europeans came to characterize Africans as stupid, backward, and uncivilized" (Loewen, 2007, p. 143). A consequence of those characterizations were negative labeling of 'Blacks' on a global scale as inferior to 'Whites'. This phenomenon became crucial to the study because it helped to frame why individuals still hold on to negative views of what it means to be 'Black' – particularly in America.

**Racial Categorization**

Racial categorization is said to date back to the 16$^{th}$ century. It was a widely held belief amongst social scientists that racial categorizations had scientific validity. This notion of biological differences based on race has been discovered as untrue yet the lingering affects of the categorizations are still ever present today. In recent years the American Anthropological Association embarked on an extensive project entitled, *Race: Are We So Different* that has been exhibited in museums across the country and first debuted in 2007. In addition to the interactive exhibit, a website at

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www.understandingrace.org provides a researched history and glimpse into what race

means in America.  Understanding Race (2011) posits:

> In the 1758 tenth edition of Systema naturae (Natural System), Carolus
> Linnaeus, a European scientist, created the first formal, non-scientific human
> racial classification scheme. It included five varieties of Homo sapiens –
> "Americanus," "Europaeus," "Asiaticus," "Afer," and "Ferus" – based on
> physical and cultural descriptions that favored Europeans. Linnaeus' human
> classification system influenced the way race is conceptualized in the…Johann
> Friedrich Blumenback, a German professor, expanded on his work and created
> another non-scientific  race-based classification.  Blumenbach's five categories
> were: Caucasian, the white race; Mongolian, the yellow race; Malayan, the
> brown race; Ethiopian, the black race; and American, the red race. Although he
> retained geographical names for his categories, the change marked a shift from
> geography to physical appearance (Early Classification of Nature).

### *Racial Categorization through the U.S. Census*

Currently in the U.S., the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in the

federal government maintains the racial categories we use today.  Racial demographic

data is collected through the U.S. Census as a requirement of the law.  In Article 1,

Section 2, Paragraph 2 of the U.S. Constitution it states, "The actual Enumeration shall

be made within three years after the first meeting of the Congress of the United States,

and within every subsequent term of ten years, in such manner as they shall by law

direct" (Adams, power point).  Since its inception in 1790, the census has been the

system used to categorize people by race in the U.S. and is collected every 10 years.

There were six questions ascertained in the first census that called for inquiries on

gender, race, relationship to the head of household, name of the head of household,

and the number of slaves, if any (Census, 2013).

On the OMB website, the question of 'race' is answered in the following way:

> The data on race were derived from answers to the question on race that was
> asked of individuals in the United States. The Census Bureau collects racial

data in accordance with guidelines provided by the U.S. Office of Management
and Budget (OMB), and these data are based on self-identification.
The racial categories included in the census questionnaire generally reflect a
social definition of race recognized in this country and not an attempt to define
race biologically, anthropologically, or genetically. In addition, it is recognized
that the categories of the race item include racial and national origin or
sociocultural groups. People may choose to report more than one race to
indicate their racial mixture, such as "American Indian" and "White." People
who identify their origin as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish may be of any race.

Racial categories have changed over time.  The fluidity of the racial categories in the

U.S. since 1790 gives justification to the assertion that race is socially constructed

(Adams, 2010).  "The processes of racial formation we encounter today, are merely

the present-day outcomes of a complex historical evolution" (Omi & Winant, 1994, p.

61).

An example of this would be that for the first time in the year 2000, the census

added the category 'Some Other Race'.  Additionally, 'Hispanic/Latino' was

determined to be an ethnicity group and not a race.  The racial demographic question

was updated to reflect this change.  The illustration in Figure 2 below shows a

reproduction of the race question asked on the 2010 U.S. census (Humes, et. al, 2011):

**Reproduction of the Questions on Hispanic Origin and Race From the 2010 Census**

➡ NOTE: Please answer BOTH Question 5 about Hispanic origin and Question 6 about race. For this census, Hispanic origins are not races.

5. Is this person of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?

☐ **No,** not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin
☐ Yes, Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano
☐ Yes, Puerto Rican
☐ Yes, Cuban
☐ Yes, another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin — *Print origin, for example, Argentinean, Colombian, Dominican, Nicaraguan, Salvadoran, Spaniard, and so on.* ↙

6. What is this person's race? *Mark ☒ one or more boxes.*

☐ White
☐ Black, African Am., or Negro
☐ American Indian or Alaska Native — *Print name of enrolled or principal tribe.* ↙

☐ Asian Indian      ☐ Japanese      ☐ Native Hawaiian
☐ Chinese      ☐ Korean      ☐ Guamanian or Chamorro
☐ Filipino      ☐ Vietnamese      ☐ Samoan
☐ Other Asian — *Print race, for example, Hmong, Laotian, Thai, Pakistani, Cambodian, and so on.* ↙      ☐ Other Pacific Islander — *Print race, for example, Fijian, Tongan, and so on.* ↙

☐ Some other race — *Print race.* ↙

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census questionnaire.

As the collection of census data every 10 years is required by law, federally funded schools (K-16) are also required to submit annual reports regarding student demographics. The racial question administered by schools must specifically match the aforementioned terminology determined by the Office of Management and Budget. This data eventually feeds into the overall census data for the country. A snapshot of the Racial Demographics from the 2000 and 2010 Census can be seen in Figure 3 (Humes, et. al, 2011):

*Figure 3: Population by Hispanic or Latino Origin and by Race for the U.S.: 2000 & 2010*

**Population by Hispanic or Latino Origin and by Race for the United States: 2000 and 2010**
(For information on confidentiality protection, nonsampling error, and definitions, see www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/doc/pl94-171.pdf)

| Hispanic or Latino origin and race | 2000 | | 2010 | | Change, 2000 to 2010 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | Percentage of total population | Number | Percentage of total population | Number | Percent |
| **HISPANIC OR LATINO ORIGIN AND RACE** | | | | | | |
| Total population ................. | 281,421,906 | 100.0 | 308,745,538 | 100.0 | 27,323,632 | 9.7 |
| Hispanic or Latino ...................... | 35,305,818 | 12.5 | 50,477,594 | 16.3 | 15,171,776 | 43.0 |
| Not Hispanic or Latino..................... | 246,116,088 | 87.5 | 258,267,944 | 83.7 | 12,151,856 | 4.9 |
| White alone ......................... | 194,552,774 | 69.1 | 196,817,552 | 63.7 | 2,264,778 | 1.2 |
| **RACE** | | | | | | |
| Total population ................. | 281,421,906 | 100.0 | 308,745,538 | 100.0 | 27,323,632 | 9.7 |
| One Race ......................... | 274,595,678 | 97.6 | 299,736,465 | 97.1 | 25,140,787 | 9.2 |
| White ......................... | 211,460,626 | 75.1 | 223,553,265 | 72.4 | 12,092,639 | 5.7 |
| Black or African American ................. | 34,658,190 | 12.3 | 38,929,319 | 12.6 | 4,271,129 | 12.3 |
| American Indian and Alaska Native......... | 2,475,956 | 0.9 | 2,932,248 | 0.9 | 456,292 | 18.4 |
| Asian ......................... | 10,242,998 | 3.6 | 14,674,252 | 4.8 | 4,431,254 | 43.3 |
| Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander... | 398,835 | 0.1 | 540,013 | 0.2 | 141,178 | 35.4 |
| Some Other Race ...................... | 15,359,073 | 5.5 | 19,107,368 | 6.2 | 3,748,295 | 24.4 |
| Two or More Races[1] ...................... | 6,826,228 | 2.4 | 9,009,073 | 2.9 | 2,182,845 | 32.0 |

[1] In Census 2000, an error in data processing resulted in an overstatement of the Two or More Races population by about 1 million people (about 15 percent) nationally, which almost entirely affected race combinations involving Some Other Race. Therefore, data users should assess observed changes in the Two or More Races population and race combinations involving Some Other Race between Census 2000 and the 2010 Census with caution. Changes in specific race combinations not involving Some Other Race, such as White *and* Black or African American or White *and* Asian, generally should be more comparable.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, *Census 2000 Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File*, Tables PL1 and PL2; and *2010 Census Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File*, Tables P1 and P2.

Participants in the study discussed having to fill out the university demographic form and having some 'confusion' around why there was either no specific category for them or who 'Black or African-American' applied to.

As college campuses continue to diversify domestically and internationally, there is little conversation about how students are categorized solely on the basis of race. Students who self-identify as being African-American from the U.S., Caribbean with "brown skin" and African (Ghanaian, Nigerian, etc.) with "brown skin" are often lumped into the same racial category: Black. In conversations with students over the years that have family origins throughout the African Diaspora, they often reflect on the chagrin at being called out in class to provide the "Black perspective".

Haney Lopez (2000) suggests, "'race is a vast group of people loosely bound together by historically contingent, socially significant elements of their morphology and/or ancestry" (p.165). These individuals are forced to make meaning out of being

lumped into a racial category for which they do not identify and has for decades been

viewed as being inferior to whites.  For some of these students, ethnicity and culture

are their primary ways of identifying.

**Frameworks on Race in the United States**

> The existence of race and racism as human constructs creates social and
> political realities that cannot be overlooked as part of the American educational
> experience (Tatum, 1997).

The literature on race is grand.  However, there is a dearth of specific literature

on the way in which African and Caribbean students experience and interpret race in

regards to phenotype and culture.  The way in which race, ethnicity and culture is

interchanged is an important aspect of this study.  There are three theoretical

frameworks that were used to analyze the data in the study: racial formation, critical

race theory and acculturation.

### *Racial Formation*

One of the most widely cited texts that provide a contextual analysis of race in

the U.S. over the last 50 years is the second edition of Michael Omi and Howard

Winant's book "Racial Formation in the United States From the 1960s to the 1990's"

which was released in 1994 (20 years ago).  The text is seen as critical to examining

the "contradictions inherent in racial identity" (1994).  In the book, Omi and Winant

contend that theories of race relied on one of three categories: ethnicity, class or nation

and they provide a central view of race using what they framed the 'racial formation

theory'.

In the ethnicity based paradigm, "race was a social category…ethnicity itself

was understood as the result of a group formation process based on culture and

descent…culture in this formulation included such diverse factors as religion, language, customs, and nationality" (Omi and Winant, 1994, p. 15).  The ethnicity paradigm came into existence in the 1920's to counter the long-standing biological view on race.  Ethnicity was thought to represent the "modern sociology of race", with the introduction of assimilation and cultural pluralism.  The deficit to this approach is explained by the authors in so much that, "…the European immigrant analogy which suggested that racial minorities could be [equally] incorporated into the American life in the same way that white ethnic groups had been…" could not be validated for accuracy (p.12).

The latter two paradigms, class and nation, provided a counter view to isolated ethnicity view of race.    Class in this instance is seen from the racial inequality vantage point of the three areas identified by Omi and Winant: market, stratification, and class-conflict.  In the nation-based paradigm, the analysis of racial separation and white supremacy is a central component.  According to the authors, it is "fundamentally rooted in the dynamics of colonialism" (p. 37).  None of the three paradigms alone provide full comprehensiveness in the study of race and racial dynamics.

Omi and Winant (1994), through their work in racial formation, hope to provide a lens by which to "grasp the complexities of racial identity, politics, and social structure in the U.S." (p.50).  Racial formation as a theoretical frame does not look to discredit the three aforementioned paradigms linked to race but rather view it as a matter of both "social structure and cultural representation".  In order to frame this theory, the authors provided definitions for race and racial formation:

Race – a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies. It should be understood as an unstable and decentered complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle.

Racial formation – the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed.

In his work on the social construction of race, Haney Lopez (1994) provides his perspective on racial formation.  He surmises that racial formation is the "process by which racial meaning arise" and includes both "the rise of racial groups and their constant reification in social thought" (p. 168).  He contends that the word 'formation' is an "industrial term which carries the connotation of neutral constructions and processes indifferent to individual intervention".  In utilizing racial formation theory as a basis, he uses the term 'racial fabrication' in order to highlight what he sees as four important points of the social construction of race:

1. Humans rather than abstract social forces produce races

2. As human constructs, races constitute an integral part of a whole social fabric that includes gender and class relations

3. The meaning systems surrounding race change quickly rather than slowly

4. Races are constructed relationally, against one another, rather than in isolation

Haney Lopez contends that the term 'fabrication' "implies the workings of human hands and suggests the possible intention to deceive" (p. 168).  As this research study is focused on the assumption of race and racial categorization, the racial formation framework of Omi and Winant and work on the social construction of race by Haney Lopez provides a platform to understand the historical and cultural influences that impact the essence of the participants experience with race.

In between the publishing of the first and second edition of Omi and Winant's text, F. James Davis published "Who is Black? One National Definition" in 1991. Although it does not look to provide a theoretical frame, this text provides critical historical analysis and perspective on how race, specifically the roles of miscegenation and the 'one-drop rule' shaped how we view the 'Black' race in the United States. "Definitions of who is black vary quite sharply from country to country and for this reason people in other countries often express consternation about our definition" (p. 13).

Racial formation and the concepts found in "Who is Black?" are closely aligned with critical race theory in that they recognize "the concept of race continues to play a fundamental role in structuring and representing the social world" (p. 55). "The rearticulation of pre-existing racial ideology is a dual process of disorganization of the dominant ideology and of construction of an alternative, oppositional framework" (p. 89).

### *Critical Race Theory (CRT)*

Critical race theory (CRT) is an analytical tool used to apply a guided focus on the history, permanence and pervasiveness of race (Zamudio, M. M., Russell, C., Rios,

F. A., and Bridegeman, J. L., 2011, p.7).  The basic assumptions of CRT are that race

matters, history matters, voice matters, interpretation matters and praxis matters (p. 2).

CRT is one of the theories used in this study to help frame the conversation about race

– particularly people across the Black race.  CRT was born in the field of law and has

now made its way into social science fields such as education.  According to Delgado

and Stefancic (2012) there are six main tenets that critical race theorists believe:

1. Racism is ordinary – approaching situations from a racial perspective is
   the ordinary way society does business

2. Interest convergence – large segments of white society have little
   incentive to eradicate racism because of psychic and material purposes

3. Social construction – 'races' are categories that society invents,
   manipulates, or retires when convenient.

4. Differential racialization – racializing of groups at different times in
   history

5. Intersectionality – multiple over-lapping identities

6. Voice-of-color – minority status brings with it a presumed competence
   to speak about race and racism

In looking at the six tenets of CRT and exploring the experience of race in the

participants of the study, it is clear that race becomes more than the color of their skin

in the U.S.  Race has been found to lack biological significance and rather is a result of

meanings a given society has placed on it.  Some CRT proponents would argue that

race exists to fuel racism. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2012), "racism advances the interests of both white elites (materially) and working-class Caucasians (psychically), thus large segments of society have little incentive to eradicate it" (p. 8).

Critical race theory as a theoretical frame is considered fairly new having its origins dating back to the1970's. The late Derrick Bell, a former law professor at New York University, is referred to as the 'intellectual father figure' of the CRT movement. The movement has taken on new forms sub groups such as Asian American jurisprudence and Latino issues (LatCrit). Since its inception in law, it has branched to into a number of different disciplines including education.

The use of CRT in scholarly education movements have primarily focused on things such as high-stakes testing, affirmative action, hierarchy in schools, tracking and school discipline, bilingual and multicultural education, and the debate over ethnic studies and the Western cannon. One area where this study will add to the education scholarship using a critical race theory lens is in examining the intersection of race and nationality in a higher education setting.

Central to CRT is the use of storytelling to situate the experience of underrepresented racial groups in the U.S. "Naming one's reality, narrating one's personal experience, and seeking to counter the ideologies of racism, colonization, and oppression with narratives are of paramount importance in CRT" (Zamudio et al., 2011, p. 127). Critics of CRT challenge the merit of using the 'voice' as a means to gather scholarly data. In studies of phenomenological scope, the use of the participant voice is critical to maintaining the authentic essence of experience. In edition to their

stories, the dynamics involved in the participants leaving their home countries and cultures will be viewed through the lens of acculturation.

**Acculturation Among College Students**

As previously stated, the vast majority of studies done on international college students involve participants of European and Asian national origin. One of the most heavily researched areas of this subset of the college demographic is on acculturation. According to Ngo (2013), acculturation was conceived early in the 20th century in the fields of anthropology and sociology. It is used to explain the dynamics when, "people from diverse cultural backgrounds come into continuous contact with one another" (p.1). Theoretically, highly residential college campuses (such as the one in this study) are precise environments where these interactions would naturally flourish and can be studied.

The two major divisions of acculturation theory (unidirectional acculturation and bidimensional acculturation) are defined as:

Unidirectional acculturation: culture change is thought to occur in one direction – people move away from their cultural of origin and toward the dominant group during resettlement in a new country; inevitably leads to a weakening of one's original cultural identity and practices. This is most closely linked to assimilation.

Bidimensional acculturation: a more complex phenomenon that considers at least two cultural dimensions; a society characterized by individuals who are comfortable in various cultural settings. (Organista, P. B., Marín, G., & Chun, K. M., 2010, p. 101-102)

A major critique of the acculturation model, particularly the unidirectional lens, is that it is often situated in the 'melting pot' discourse. In this vein, individuals of various cultural backgrounds would come together and meld into one group; giving up pieces of their identity (language, etc.) to fit into the dominant group. The counter view to this outdated ideology is the 'salad bowl' where everyone brings a unique feature that could stand alone and also come together to produce a cohesive 'blend' of various components without having to sacrifice any parts of the whole.

Another critique of acculturation theory is that it does not take into consideration a critical lens in the way the critical race theory, feminist theory and other anti-oppressive theories do. Ngo contends acculturative theory is lacking a view of the "complex, multifaceted oppressive relations at the personal, institutional, cultural, local, national, and global levels" in the way that anti-oppressive and social justice perspectives do. He argues that these areas permeate all "physical, psychological, cultural, economic, political and spiritual domains of humanity" (p.1).

While acculturation studies are valuable, there was very little scholarly work done on the experience of students with family origins from the African Atlantic Diaspora utilizing critical race theory and/or racial formation. One doctoral study on African international student acculturation noted that, "African students reported experiencing the greatest prejudice on university campuses compared with all other surveyed international students…this may be due in part to that fact that African students are more visible as racial minorities compared with their European counterparts" (Chebbet, 2010 p. 9). A study done by Constantine (2005) and her colleagues on the cultural adjustment of African international students also noted that,

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"Black African students reported more difficulty adapting to their surroundings than non-Black African Students" due in part prejudice and discrimination (p. 57, 60).

New scholarly work is emerging on the history and culture of 'Afro-Latin@'s'. In a text edited by Roman and Flores (2010), the authors acknowledge the African ancestry of Spanish speaking people in the Americas. They recognize that the term is not widely accepting, they are working to bring more understanding around the notion of embracing both the African (Black) and Spanish (Latino) heritage. They define Afro-Latin@ as:

> People of African descent in Mexico, Central and South America, and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and by extension those of African descent in the United States whose origins are in Latin America and the Caribbean. It can also be viewed as an expression of long-term transnational relations and of the world events that generated and were in turn affected by particular global social movements.

Concepts from these various areas (CRT, racial formation, African student acculturation, and Afro-Latin@) are new having just emerged over the last 20-30 years. They are vital in phenomenological studies like this where the researcher must 'make sense of the participants making sense' out of their experience with race.

**Summary**

In exploring the experiences of college students from Africa and those with roots throughout the African Atlantic Diaspora who are thrust into the racial dynamics in the U.S., a review of literature on colonialism in relation to slavery in the U.S., racial categorization and the theoretical underpinnings of racial formation, critical race theory, and acculturation were used to frame the study. These conceptual frameworks coupled with a phenomenological methodology, allowed for me as the researcher to

stretch beyond what is taken for granted in terms of race in everyday life in the U.S.

Sokolowski (2000) states:

> Phenomenology is the science that studies truth. It stands back from our rational involvement with things and marvels at the fact that there is disclosure, that things do appear, that the world can be understood, and that we in our life of thinking serve as datives for the manifestation of things.

From the philosophically reflective stance of phenomenology, "we look *at* what we normally look *through*" (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 50). A combination of these frames, coupled with a review of literature on the relative topics were instrumental in analyzing the data (stories) collected for the study through the in-depth interviews and focus groups.

CHAPTER 3


METHODOLOGY


**Research Design**

In this research study, I sought to examine the experiences of college students

from Africa and the African Atlantic Diaspora as it pertained to their perceived race

and provide an analysis of the contradictions that exist between their notions of being

'Black' in the U.S.  Specifically, the study is aimed at exploring their lived experience

of being attributed the racial label of 'Black' in a U.S. context although they identified

more with their "home country" of origin or ancestry.  The study provides the

participants with a space to 'finally' (as described by members of the study) discuss

openly the experience of being thrust into a racial dynamic for which they had no

previous cultural connection.  A phenomenological approach was used to give voice to

the experience of this population of college students for which there is a dearth of

research available.

### *Phenomenology*

*Phenomenologists assume that knowledge is achieved through interactions*

*between researchers and participants. This engagement offered researchers an*

*understanding about a phenomenon not typically studied (Reiners, 2012)*

Phenomenological research methodology dates back well over 100 years.  The

father of phenomenology is considered Edmund Husserl.  His first true work in this

area is thought to be *Logical Investigations,* which appeared in two parts in 1900 and

1901 (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 211). Husserl used the philosophical approach to "study how people describe things and experience them through their senses" (Patton, 2002, p. 105). It is thought that Husserl believed, "phenomenology suspended all suppositions, was related to consciousness, and was based on the meaning of the individual's experience" (Reiners, 2012, p. 1). Intentionality is a term that is closely associated with phenomenology. In this tradition, it is not used in the manner that generally means to 'have the intention on doing something' but rather refers to the theory of knowledge and not that of human action (Sokolowski, 2000, p.8).

Over time, a number of philosophical and methodological approaches to phenomenology have been explored. For the purposes of this study, I examined two major schools of thought: Husserl (descriptive) and his student Martin Heidegger (interpretive). In the descriptive realm, Husserl felt that one's perceived experience is worthy of scientific study. His stance on "intentionality", which is one's directed awareness or consciousness of an object or event, is predicated on the experience of perception, thought, memory, imagination, and emotion (Reiners, 2012, p. 2).

A major component of Husserl's approach was that the researcher needed to be void of all prior expert knowledge and personal biases that could potentially influence the interpretation of the participant's subjective lived experience. The suspension of our beliefs and biases occur through a process called 'bracketing'. According to Sokolowski (2000), "we put the world and the things in it "into brackets" and after doing so, "we now consider it precisely as it is intended by" (p.49). Drew (1999) states as noted by Lopez & Willis (2004), "bracketing involves the researcher holding in abeyance ideas, preconceptions, and personal knowledge when listening to and

reflecting on the lived experiences of participants" (p. 728). While this is an important

component of the descriptive tradition, as Hycner contends, "this in no way means that

the phenomenologist is standing in some absolute and totally presuppositionless

space" (1985, p. 281).

Another primary component of Husserl's approach is the phenomenological

attitude or transcendental attitude. Sokolowski (2000) explains it as:

> the focus we have when we reflect upon the natural attitude [whereby the
> natural attitude] is the focus we have when we are involved in our original,
> world-directed stance, when we intend things, situations, facts, and any other
> kinds of objects…the one we start off from. When we enter into the
> phenomenological attitude, we crawl out of the natural attitude, rise above it,
> theorize it, and distinguish and describe both the subjective and objective
> correlates that make it up (pgs. 42, 50).

Martin Heidegger, a former student of Husserl, provided a different approach

to phenomenological inquiry. Heidegger rejected epistemology and rather chose to

adopt ontology, 'the science of being' (Reiners, 2012, p. 1). He is known for

developing the interpretive phenomenological tradition through the extension of

hermeneutics. Lopez & Willis (2004) states:

> In relation to the study of human experience, hermeneutics goes beyond mere
> description of core concepts and essences to look for meanings embedded in
> common life practices. These meanings are not always apparent to the
> participants but can be gleaned from the narratives produced by them (p. 728).

An important concept central to Heidegger's approach is that of situated

freedom. He posited that individuals are so embedded in the world that subjective

experiences are inextricably linked with social, cultural, and political contexts and it is

the interpretation of the participant narratives in relation to various contexts that is

foundational (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 729). Heidegger contended that bracketing

was not critical to the researchers approach because, unlike Husserl's descriptive

tradition, expert knowledge and presuppositions of the researcher are valuable guides

to inquiry.  He further believed that it is impossible to ignore or rid oneself of the

background influences that created the interest to pursue a particular area of research

in the first place.

Keen (1975) as quoted in Hycner's (1985) article, states "…unlike other

methodologies, phenomenology cannot be reduced to a 'cookbook' set of instructions.

It is more an approach, an attitude, an investigative posture with a certain set of goals"

(p. 279).  "Phenomenology helps us to think about the first and final issues and helps

us to know ourselves" (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 209).

For this study, the approach I took is apropos to what was expressed by Lopez

& Willis (2004) in describing Heidegger's interpretive phenomenology:

> The hermeneutic phenomenologist, rather than seeking purely descriptive
> categories of the real, perceived world in the narratives of the participants, will
> focus on describing the meanings of the individuals' being-in-the-world…this
> might involve the analysis of the historical, social, and political forces that
> shape and organize experience (p. 729).

This is evident in the structure of the research and interview questions for this

study.  This design allows for the participants to be given a voice while maintaining

the authenticity of their self-described lived experiences.  Although there are debates

that challenge the validity of phenomenology as a true qualitative tool, I contend that

there is an essence to shared experiences that can only be investigated by analyzing a

phenomenon common amongst a group of individuals (Patton, 2012).

A qualitative research methodology is the best approach for this study.  While

there are other qualitative methods that could be applied such as case study or

ethnography, phenomenology is best suited in this instance because it specifically asks

the questions, "what do people experience?" and "how do they interpret the world?" (Patton, 2012, p. 106). This allows for an inductive rather than deductive approach as found in many quantitative studies. I was able to engage with the participants about their experience of being categorized as 'Black' and analyze their understanding of that racial designation in the U.S.

Utilizing a quantitative methodology would not be appropriate for this study. A quantitative approach would test a hypothesis utilizing a standardized measure with a (sometimes large) group of people. In addition, a quantitative study would not allow me to *hear* from the participants as to what they have and are experiencing. This study sought to gain an in-depth, detailed insight into the topic with a small sample group, thus a qualitative approach was utilized.

Research Question(s)

What is the essence of the experience for students from Africa and the Caribbean who are assumed to be 'Black' in a U.S. context?

Sub-questions:

How do the participants racially/ethnically self-identify and how does this differ from how others identify them based on observable physical characteristics, such as skin color and hair type?

What contradictions exist between their racial self-identification and the racial ascription of 'Black/African-American'?

How is their racial identity impacted when they are in predominately white campus settings?

Prior to college, what informed the participants' racial/ethnic self-identity?

**Sampling Design**

The participants were selected for this study using purposeful sampling. Generally in purposeful sampling, the researcher determines the purpose they want the participants to serve and go out and recruit them (Patton, 2012). Specifically, I used criterion sampling as necessary in phenomenological studies. The participants in the study had to meet all of the criteria in a pre-determined list in order to later analyze for shared experiences:

1) Currently attends or has attended a college or university that is predominately white (more than 50% of the population is white)

2) Does not self-identify as being Black/African-American within a U.S. context

3) From Africa or have family origins from throughout the African Atlantic Diaspora (the continent of Africa, the Caribbean and the Americas)

While the aforementioned criterion were required for participation, purposeful sampling still allowed for variations within the sample population such as the reason for participating, age, gender, and socioeconomic background.

**Participants**

At the time of the study, I was an administrator at a small private college in the Northeast, USA. Over time, I have developed relationships with many students who fit the criteria listed above. All of the participants are from the institution where I worked and were selected because many had voiced interest in the study and snowballing, a process that allows participants to recommend others who are appropriate for the study, naturally occurred because of the small nature of the campus.

I initially sent a letter of recruitment (see Appendix A) inviting 10 individuals

to participate. Nine responded in the affirmative that they were interested in

participating in the study. Due to distance, two were unable to participate resulting in

seven total participants; some being current students and others recent graduates.

Demographic spreadsheets were created (see Tables 1-3) withholding certain details of

the participants to maintain their anonymity.

Table 1
*General Participant Demographic Information*

| Pseudonym | Age | Sex | Student Status | Country of Birth | Country of Ancestry |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| John | 18-25 | Male | Senior | Ghana | Ghana |
| Samira | 18-25 | Female | Senior | Ghana | Ghana/Ukraine |
| *Ruth | 18-25 | Female | Junior | Nigeria | Nigeria |
| David | 18-25 | Male | Sophomore | Chad | Chad |
| *Salina | 18-25 | Female | Alumnae | Dominican Republic | Dominican Republic |
| Xabi | 18-25 | Female | Senior | United States | Dominican Republic |
| *Oscar | 18-25 | Male | Alumni | United States | Puerto Rico |

*These pseudonyms were chosen by the researcher to protect the identity of the participants,
as they did not provide one for themselves at the time of the study*

Table 2
*Participant Racial Demographic Information*

| Pseudonyms | Race (based on U.S. Census categories) | Skin Tone | Skin Color | Word(s) to describe your color used in your country of ancestry |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| John | Some other race | Dark | No response | No response |
| Samira | Black or African American | Medium | Brown/Tan | Obroni |
| Ruth | Black or African American | Medium Dark | Brownish/Caramel | Yellow |
| David | Black or African American | Medium | Dark Brown | Nasara |
| Salina | Some other race | Medium | Brown, Tan | Morenita, India |
| Xabi | No response | Medium | Brown | Morena |
| Oscar | Black/White | Medium | Caramel | Trigenito |

Table 3
*Selected Participant Family Demographic Information*

| Pseudonyms | Skin Tone/Color of Mother | Skin Tone/Color of Father | Number of Siblings |
|---|---|---|---|
| John | No Response | No Response | 3 (all brothers) |
| Samira | White | Black | 1 (brother) |
| Ruth | Brownish Caramel | Orange Tan | 3 (unspecified) |
| David | Light | Brown | 6 (unspecified) |
| Salina | Medium Brown/Tan | Light/Tan | 1 (sister) |
| Xabi | Medium/Dark | Light | 5 (unspecified) |
| Oscar | Light White (Blanquita) | Dark Brown (Moreno) | 2 (full), 1 (half), 9 (stepsiblings) |

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All seven participants completed the study in its entirety. The in-depth interviews, as necessitated by a phenomenological method, served as the main data points for analysis. This approach allowed me to capture the essence of the experiences of each participant. To supplement the findings from the individual interviews, two focus groups - one planned and one spontaneous - were added to compliment the study.

After the initial contact with the potential participants, a formal consent letter (see Appendix B) was sent out to the final seven candidates outlining the nature of the study and procedures, the potential risks associated with participating, and pertinent contact information.

**Setting**

The study took place in the Northeast, United States. All of the students either were attending or had graduated from the same small, private institution that was predominately white (75% of the undergraduate population was white based on 2012 IPEDS data). The undergraduate population was roughly 3,000 students with over 50 countries represented. According to data compiled by the Office of Institutional Research, 9% of the population identified as international (that included students on visa's and dual citizens) and 16% as domestic students of color of which 4% self-identified as being Black/African-American.

**Timeline Overview**

In April 2013, I received approval from the Rhode Island College (RIC) Institutional Review Board (IRB) to proceed with my study. I contacted the IRB at the institution where the participants were students and was told the provision from

RIC would suffice.  I conducted in-depth interviews with each participant from April 2013 – July 2013 (this included an initial interview, second interview and follow-up if necessary).  In that same time frame, I conducted two focus group interviews; one with several of the participants of the study and one with a group of participant and non-participant students who all fit the criteria who happen to be congregating in a popular common area known for being a safe place for international students and domestic students of color to converse.

**Data Collection/Instrumentation**

*Individual Interviews*

Utilizing phenomenology as my research methodology required that I conduct in-depth interviews with each participant.  "A phenomenological study investigates various reactions to, or perceptions of, a particular phenomenon…Data are usually collected through in-depth interviewing.  Researchers search for the essential structure of a single phenomenon…" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009, p. 429).  Phenomenological interviewing allowed me to explore the concrete experience of the participants and the meaning their experience has on them (Seidman, 2006, p. 16).

> Telling stories is a meaning-making process where people select details of their experience from their stream of consciousness.  The process of selecting constitutive details of experience, reflecting on them, giving them order and thereby making sense of them makes telling stories a meaning-making process (Seidman, 2006, p.7).

I served as the primary data gatherer for the study. I utilized Seidman's (2006) phenomenological interview approach of two to three 90-minute interviews for each

participant whereby, "the method of in-depth, phenomenological interviewing applied to a sample of participants gives enormous power to the stories of a relatively few participants" (p. 55). All interviews were conducted in safe spaces familiar to the participant which also allowed for confidentiality. I followed Patton's (2012) general interview guide approach, also referred to as semi-structured interviewing, in that I prepared a list of questions that was used as a guide during each interview. This approach ensured that the basic lines of inquiry were pursued while simultaneously allowing for flexibility in the exploration of a specific topic (p. 343).

The sample size was seven, which fell within the suggested minimum of 6-8 participants in a qualitative research study of a similar design. Jonathan Smith (2007), a leading researcher of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), contends a homogenous, small sample size of five or six is recommended for research utilizing IPA (p. 56). Mason (2010) goes on to say,

> Qualitative samples must be large enough to assure that most or all of the perceptions that might be important are uncovered, but at the same time if the sample is too large data becomes repetitive and, eventually, superfluous. If a researcher remains faithful to the principles of qualitative research, sample size in the majority of qualitative studies should generally follow the concept of saturation (e.g. GLASER & STRAUSS, 1967)—when the collection of new data does not shed any further light on the issue under investigation (p. 2).

### *Focus Groups*

In addition to the in-depth individual interviews, I conducted 2 focus groups in an effort to hear from a varied cross section of individuals and their shared experience

with being categorized as 'Black'. The planned focus group consisted of three

participants from the study (Table 4). At the time of consent, all seven participants

stated they were willing to be a part of a focus group in addition to their individual

interviews. Due to time schedule constraints and distance (two of the seven live out of

state from where the majority of interviews took place) only three were able to attend.

This focus group enhanced the study by allowing those who had gone through the

individual interviews the opportunity to go even deeper into the topic with other

participants who shared the same phenomenon.

Table 4
*General Characteristics of the Focus Groups*

| Type | Size | Location | Length | Participant Demographics |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Formal (planned) | 3 participants | Conference room on campus | 51 minutes | 2 females 1 male |
| Informal (impromptu) | 7 participants | Student lounge on campus | 62 minutes | 6 females 1 male |

*In the formal focus group, the countries represented were Ghana, Dominican Republic and Chad.*
*In the informal focus group, the countries represented were Dominican Republic, Chad, Jamaica, China, Nigeria, Haiti and Ghana. Additionally, there were 4 participants from the study involved in this focus group as well as 3 participants who were not a part of the larger study.*

In addition to the participant focus group, I also held an informal focus group.

As stated in Kitzinger (1994), "Khan and Manderson recommend the explicit use of

informal as well as formal focus groups…" (p. 105). This group consisted of four of

the participants from the study as well as three students who were not in the study but who fit the criteria of the study (Table 2 above).  This turned out to be a spontaneous gathering of acquaintances that happened to be discussing race in the U.S.  "The fact that [they] already knew each other had the additional advantage that friends and colleagues could relate to each other's comments…" (p. 105).   I received their consent to record and use the discussion in my study.   The informal group gave me the opportunity to engage students both within and out of the study on a topic that is experienced but rarely researched and documented.  A combination of individual interviews and focus groups allowed for a greater depth of experiences to be explored.

### *Researcher as an Instrument*

In a qualitative phenomenology study, the researcher serves as the primary instrument.  Inherent in this is the fact that all researchers carry some form of bias.  The role of the researcher in this type of study is to relay those biases up front.  "Any credible research strategy requires that the investigator adopt a stance of neutrality with regard to the phenomenon under study" (Patton, 2002, p. 51).

My undergraduate experience in college was the first time I really explored the phenomena of racial categorization.  Like many in the U.S., I made assumptions about people based on phenotype.  I too would lump individuals into a box based on what I outwardly perceived them to be.  The participants in this study all acknowledged that assumptions were made about them based on their outside appearance.

I actually experienced a slightly similar phenomenon myself.  Many people would assume I was from Haiti or spoke French/Creole because of my maiden last name. It bothered me for many years because I did not have a cultural connection to

Haiti other than the fact that my biological father was from there.  Similarly, people have made assumptions about the participants in the study that contradict their lived experience.

As the researcher, I was able to empathize with the experience of being assumed something that you do not personally identify with (even if there is some element of fact to the assumption).  Throughout the research process, I stayed committed to maintaining an objective, nonjudgmental stance in an effort to create an environment where the participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences with me. I have devoted my life's work to exploring various cultures and connecting people from around the world on college campuses.  I believe my authenticity was apparent and my credibility in the field as a professional offset any bias.

**Data Analysis**

*Validation of Data*

During the data analysis process, validation is critical.  Specifically, the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was employed. Understanding people's lived experiences, and the meanings they attach to their experience is the central focus of IPA.  This mode of analysis recognizes the central role of the researcher in making sense of the experiences of the participants (Pringle, J., Drummond, J., McLafferty, E., & Hendry, C., 2011, p. 20).  The process is referred to as a 'double hermeneutic' because the participants are trying to make sense of their world and the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world (Smith and Osborn, 2007, p. 53).

The IPA approach involves a two-stage interpretation process whereby the

researcher attempts to interpret belief and accept participants' stories, albeit in an analytical way.  In adhering to the true *essence* and *shared lived experience* components of phenomenology, "implications stemming from IPA need to be firmly rooted in what the participants are actually saying, with direct quotes being used widely to substantiate finding" (p. 21).

The method used to analyze the data comes from the hermeneutic circle method. Reiners (2012) states:

> The basic tenet of the hermeneutic interpretive school of thought is that researchers cannot remove themselves from the meanings extracted from the text.  The researcher becomes a part of the phenomenon (p. 2).

During this form of assessment, there is a continual review and analysis between the parts and the whole of the data gathered.  "The hermeneutic circle is a metaphor for understanding and interpretation, which is viewed as a movement between parts (data) and whole (evolving understanding of the phenomenon)" (Rola and Higgs, 2007, p. 623).

With the aim being to understand the content and complexity of the meaning and not measure frequency (Smith and Osborn, 2007, p. 66), I adapted the following process to analyzing the data:

Stage 1: Organizing the text – all of the interviews were transcribed, printed on white paper, organized by each participant and put in a binder.  Then, another copy of the transcriptions was printed on color paper (a different color for each participant).

Stage 2: Identifying first order constructs – this step focused on the participants' ideas expressed in their own words (carefully reading transcripts and listening to audio tapes)

Stage 3: Abstracting second order constructs – at this stage I am, as the researcher, employing the double hermeneutic in that I'm applying my theoretical and personal knowledge to the first order constructs in order to make sense of the participants making sense of the phenomenon

Stage 4: Theme development – this stage requires moving between stages 1-3 by pouring over the data, using the color coded transcripts to arrange and rearrange into themes and sub-themes, and incorporating the literature on the topic

Stage 5: Illuminating the phenomena – at this point the themes are finalized and connected back to the research question and theoretical frame

***Phenomenology, Hermeneutics and Critical Race Theory***

This study was designed to position the participants as the master narrators of their own racial identity and experiences despite the societal habit of assigning a racial identity based on phenotype. Reiners (2012) as quoted from Dahlberg, Drew, and Nystrom (2008) contends, "[Heidegger's] philosophy makes it clear that the essence of human understanding is hermeneutic, that is, our understanding of the everyday world is derived from our interpretation of it" (p. 2).

Hermeneutics when combined with phenomenology allows the researcher to explore the essence of a phenomenon while interpreting stories from a historical and cultural context. "What something means depends on the cultural context in which it was originally created as well as the cultural context within which it is subsequently interpreted" (Patton, 2002, p. 113). For the participants, 'Black' has a meaning that was derived from their cultural context. Utilizing a critical race theory lens, I was able to approach the topic understanding the insidious nature of race in the U.S. and how

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the normative, oppressive aspects of race create a conflict for 'phenotypically brown' people with cultural experiences outside of the 'Black/African-American' U.S. frame.

The topic of race is considered insidious because it is a part of our everyday lives. Although race has been proven to lack biological significance, it still remains woven into how we operate in the U.S. on a daily basis. This study sought to analyze the shared experience of a group of individuals in an educational setting as it pertains to race. Critical race theory helps answer racial "experience" through the narrative of those who experience it daily (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012, p. 47).

Solórzano, Ceja and Yosso (2000, p. 63) posit,

> [CRT] represents a paradigm shift in the extant discourse about race and racism in education. CRT offers insights, perspectives, methods, and pedagogies that guide our efforts to identify, analyze, and transform the structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominate racial positions in and out of the classroom.

Coupled with phenomenology and hermeneutics, the essence (phenomenology) of the experience in a specific context (hermeneutics) is adequately explored.

Rola and Higgs (2007) sums up this form of analysis concisely:

> Phenomenology is concerned with the lived experience, and is thus ideal for investigating personal learning journeys. However, the main focus of phenomenology is with pre-reflective experiences and feelings. The use of hermeneutic phenomenology enables the exploration of the participants' experiences with further abstraction and interpretation by the researcher based on the researchers theoretical and personal knowledge. Hermeneutics explicate meanings and assumptions in the participants' texts that participants themselves may have difficulty articulating. (p. 616).

CHAPTER 4


FINDINGS


The purpose of this study is to explore the experience of self-identified African and Caribbean students who are categorized as 'Black' but do not personally identify as such. For some of the participants, they never identified as 'Black' while for others, they understood why they would be considered 'Black', but had a hard time with 'Blackness' in the U.S. being correlated with African-American culture. The ways in which we understand race and navigate in a racialized world are complex. Therefore, it is increasingly important to research first-hand accounts of individuals who have to navigate the contradictions, both positive and negative, of being 'Black' in the U.S.

Through the in-depth interview process, the participants were encouraged to take a historical look at their understanding of race. Seidman's (2006) phenomenological interviewing approach allowed for a meaningful discussion on the essence of their current experiences revolving around race, their interpretation of race and a reflection on the impact of race. The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) model that is being used in this study has a two-step process where the participants are trying to make sense of their world and the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

Chapter 4, the findings, is the first part of this process where the voice of the participants' are captured through the interconnected themes that were coded based on what they expressed during the interviews. Chapter 5 will lend itself to more of a discussion of the findings and include the latter part of the process where, as the researcher, I will interpret the participants' attempts to make sense of race. This current chapter is laid out in such a way to capture the essence of the participants' experiences through the research questions below without altering their experience in any way.

What is the essence of the experience for students from Africa and the Caribbean who are assumed to be 'Black' in a U.S. context? How do the participants racially/ethnically self-identify and how does this differ from how others identify them based on observable physical characteristics, such as skin color and hair type? What contradictions exist between their racial self-identification and the racial ascription of 'Black/African-American'? How is their racial identity impacted when they are in predominately white campus settings? And finally, prior to college, what informed the participants' racial/ethnic self-identity?

The analysis of the transcripts from the 14 individual interviews and two focus group interviews produced two major overarching themes, three superordinate themes and eleven subordinate themes (see Table 5). The findings within each theme will be organized using illustrative quotes from each interview. There is some overlap between and amongst superordinate and subordinate themes as evidenced by the participants' nuanced interpretation of race and its varied meanings. This complexity

provides an insight into understanding the essence of each participants experiences navigating race in and out of predominately white settings.

The major over-arching themes include: 1) contextual factors associated with race; and 2) contradictions of being 'Black' in the U.S. It was clear for the participants that the context in which they were situated (home with family, high school with classmates, dorm room with peers, etc.) greatly influenced their thoughts, interpretations and experiences with race. Additionally, the participants noted contradictions with race. They recognized that their skin color can indeed be interpreted as 'Black', but the meanings associated with the color 'Black' and the notion of being culturally 'Black' in the U.S. did not resonate with their own lived experiences. Furthermore, the contradiction of color and culture was marred by a negative narrative of what it means to be 'Black/African-American'; thus there was a desire to be disassociated from the U.S. 'Black/African-American' collective.

Table 5
*Master list of Overarching, Superordinate and Subordinate themes*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Overarching themes** | | |
| Contextual factors associated with race | | Contradictions of being 'Black' in the U.S. |
| | | |
| **Superordinate themes** | | **Subordinate themes** |
| Pre-College experience with race | | Experience learning about race in school |
| | | Media influence on perceptions of race |
| | | Views of Black/African Americans |
| | | Family influence on race |
| | | Color hierarchy |
| | | |
| Identity (race, color, ethnic background) | | Color and racial categorization |
| | | Personal identity struggles with appearance |
| | | Racial terms/jokes |
| Post-College experiences with race | | 'Black' as synonymous with African-American |
| | | Assumptions of race |
| | | Disassociation from Black/African-American |

**Superordinate Theme 1: Pre-College Experience with Race**

*It's interesting how race is different in different places... Participant #5*

The first superordinate theme captures the participants' experiences with race before coming to college at a predominately white institution. For the participants, race took on a different meaning depending on where they were geographically. Family, educational background, peer perceptions of race and the media also impacted the participants understanding and interpretation of race. The majority of participants expressed that race, in the way it is viewed in the U.S., was not how they understood it before coming to college.

Upon matriculating to a predominately white campus, it soon became apparent that race was a topic of discussion on college campuses and in the U.S. in general.

*First of all, race was something I never thought about until I came to America. I never thought about the fact that the colors, the different people matter...For me, the idea or issue of race and racism was alien until I came here.*

*Participant #1*

John was very clear at articulating his shock at how prevalent the topic of race was here in the U.S. He was used to being in an environment in his home country of Ghana where he was in the majority. He did relate that he had interacted with his father's work friends from around the globe, some of whom were White American, but he never knew until arriving here how much American people engage in conversations of race. He also attended an international high school and thus interacted with teachers and peers from many different backgrounds. Nonetheless, those experiences did not prepare him for the racial dynamics in the U.S.

*Well, back home I never really thought about race that much. I think about it*

*more now than I ever had in my lifetime because like it's constantly brought up*

*here. Participant #2*

Although Samira self identifies as being mixed race, (her father is from Ghana and her

mother is from the Ukraine), she noted that she did not think about race back at home

in Ghana as much as she thought about it here. Her mother was born and raised in the

Ukraine and speaks Russian. Her parents met in college and her mother has lived in

Ghana for over 25 years. Samira noted during the interview that based on her features

(skin tone and hair type) she was often asked about her racial mix at home but it was

"not a big deal". In the U.S. however, in her opinion, there was a negative connation

associated with the 'Black' race that will be explored later in this chapter.

*I never really thought about race too much until I really went to college and*

*then it was really in the forefront of a lot of conversations…Participant #5*

*Salina*

Salina was acutely aware of race in and out of the college experience as she was one

of the two participants who graduated and were currently still in the U.S. pursuing a

career. She noted that race was often made prominent when she was clearly the only

minority student in her various working groups in college. She always felt a level of

discomfort representing an entire group of people, particularly a group of people such

as Black/African-Americans that she had no connection to or awareness about other

than what she gained from the media.

*I guess it is weird because in the Latino community we don't have this big*

*thing about race. Participant #6*

Although Xabi was born in the U.S., she unequivocally aligned herself with her Dominican heritage. Being raised in a Dominican neighborhood in the U.S., initially she was surprised at the number and level of racial assumptions that were made about her outside of her immediate neighborhood. In her home community, Dominicans represent a variance of skin shades. She acknowledged that during her time in college she came to the realization that not everyone is exposed to different nationalities and cultures thus a brown-skinned Latina was an understandable foreign concept to many.

Underneath the superordinate theme of 'pre-college experience with race', there are four subordinate themes that emerged: experience with race in school before college; media influence on perceptions of race; stereotypes of Black/African-Americans; and racial hierarchy. Each of these subordinate themes will be summarized and explored through the lens of the participants.

**Subordinate Theme #1: Experience learning about race in school**

*In school, ethnicity was basically the different tribes in Ghana. And race, I don't recall even talking about race because it wasn't an issue to us….It's like it never really came up. Participant #1*

Outside of being with our family, school is the one of the places where we spend a bulk of our time. For some students, they spend more time at school on any given week than they do at home. As a major social institution, schools become a place where a student begins to shape their identity and incorporate, or override, the values they learn from home (Conley, 2011). Education then becomes more than academic book knowledge, but also a part of how we view the world and others in it.

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The participants in this study were asked what they learned about race in school prior to college.

For some, race was not a central topic of discussion in the classroom. They were not sure if it was because the large majority of people in their classes were the same skin color; therefore there was no need to talk about race or if there was some other underlying factor (more focus on color or tribal affiliation). In mulling over race in school Samira stated, "To be honest, I don't think we really thought about it [race] much in Ghana…and I don't know if it was because we were majority Black". John noted that in his classes "10% were foreigner" but if they were raised in Ghana they still identified as Ghanaian. In alignment with John's comments, Samira went on to say, "I was never really conscious about race…I never really thought about them [school peers] in the sense that they were Black. I just thought of them as being Ghanaian."

Although Xabi went to school in the U.S., she stated that most of the students in her school identified as Dominican. "Yeah, so like it [race] wasn't even touched upon or like even in my school; it's like you're either Dominican or you're not. That's about it". She said she believes, "it goes back to history of colonization…the history of influence of a lot of Spaniards in the Dominican Republic. The history that is taught in the classroom – how does it condition kids, Dominican people to think about their history?" Oscar, who also grew up in the contiguous U.S. but identifies as Puerto Rican, was not in the majority in his classroom (although he was the majority in his immediate neighborhood). Oscar was in advanced placement classes and can remember being the only person with "tan" skin in his class. His closest friend in was

also Puerto Rican, but had much fairer skin.  In regards to race in school he noted,

"there is a whole idea of like, they tolerated us, be we were not accepted".

Salina had an interesting experience learning about race because her mother is

a social studies teacher in the Dominican Republic.  This participant talked in-depth

about her experience learning about race from her mother.  She stated that she

attended a British school but within Social Studies they had a Dominican curriculum

and a British curriculum.  The topic of race was a part of the Dominican content,

particularly the relationship to racial mixing and views on Haiti, but she noted it never

really came up when they were discussing the British content.  The details of her

experience learning about race in school were captured below:

> So the way that they teach it is when they're teaching like whatever the Slave
> Triangle or you know, when the settlers came and all this stuff…then there was
> mixing and these were the different people. So that's how it's taught in terms
> of like there are the different races. So there was white, black, and there was
> the Taínos were the native people. …they would also be identified as different
> things. So then you have Mulatto, Zambo, the Mestizo. And we would always
> talk about them and my mom would always discuss how back in the
> Dominican Republic that Taínos really died out completely. Like we don't
> have any really, because it was like one of the first places where colonization
> happened and they were not used to that tough labor so they like died out
> pretty much from diseases as well and just hard labor.  So we don't really have
> that as a race that people would really identify themselves as. So definitely the
> biggest part of the population is Mulatto, which is African and white mixing
> and then back then there was even this other thing that was called like
> 'Criollos' and they were the kids of two whites, but that was born in the
> Dominican Republic. So they even have this other thing where it's like, well,
> you're not really Spanish, like from Spain, because you grew up here
> [Dominican Republic] and that actually you are a Criollo and then they
> [Criollo's] would mix with people.  So that's how you're taught race. I don't
> think we really talk too much about ethnicity or what the difference between
> race or ethnicity is or whatever, because I think because everyone is so mixed
> everyone's just Dominican. Everyone just ascribes to being Dominican.

In addition to Salina, other participants mentioned colonialism and the slave trade as a part of what they learned about race. Samira recalled when she was about 11-years-old she learned about the slave trade – specifically the names of the Portuguese and British explorers. At that time, she was in a Ghanaian school. They did not teach, as she described, "the gruesome parts" of slavery. They just learned the basics of being colonized, a little about the slave trade and then more about Ghanaian independence and Kwame Nkrumah. In 11th or 12th grade, where she attended an international high school, she learned more about the "gruesomeness of it all".

During one of the focus groups, a male participant noted that, "if you think about the whole colonialism era, the British and everybody else, they left Africa in shambles". A female participant followed but stating, "who colonizes you makes a difference". The male participant went on to say, "exactly…like if you take part of the Congo, the Congo was colonized by Belgium, and Belgium just exploited Congo and when they left it was like 'okay, I'm fine, we're gone'".

Ruth, who grew up in Nigeria, said she learned about the African Kings who were involved in taking money from the explorers who then took the slaves to the U.S. She said she also learned about "the people who enforced the freedom, mostly white men, some Nigerian…and where the slaves came back to and how they spread out". Most striking of her comments was that, "we didn't really learn about what happened in the U.S.; we just heard, 'oh, they were slaves', that is it". Specifically in elementary school, she recalled learning about race in more of a scientific way. "We had like Negro something [where] the features are, sooo…curlier hair, darker skin, bigger lips, nose; then we had Caucasian, and we had Mongolian, which is Asian".

**Subordinate Theme #2: Media Influence on Race**

*These images just get created unconsciously by all of these pieces of*

*information that you're getting from a very young age without necessarily*

*meeting someone that can break those stereotypes…Participant #5*

*The winner always writes the story, the loser will not. Male participant from*

*the informal focus group interview*

As we discussed race in an educational context, the participants would also tie

in their views of race outside of their ancestry group, specifically views on

Black/African-Americans.  Like family and education, the participants noted that the

media heavily influenced their views on race, particularly race in the U.S. prior to their

matriculation to college.  They voiced a collective sense of belief that the media was

very powerful and ever present in shaping how 'Black' people are viewed (within the

Black community and by others). Salina remarked, "from a very young age, you hear

[stereotypes] everywhere, so on TV, on movies, in jokes…they're just so engrained in

the culture in a sense, that people start thinking of these stereotypes as being facts…".

Study participant Ruth from Nigeria talked about the impact of the media on

self-image and beauty standards for women in her country. She explained that beauty

product ads are advertised using fair skin African women and sometimes even "light

Indian woman or a white woman who has nothing to do with Nigeria".  Ruth went on

to state, "I don't know if it comes from colonization or if it comes from media; I'd

probably say it's a combination of both".  A female focus group participant from

Ghana felt:

if you look back just five, ten years ago, the media also helped feed that lighter is better…just 10 years ago, all you saw in the media was skinny white girls with blonde hair and that was the image, that was what you would see, that's what models would look like…And I know even in Ghana, at least I used to always see these billboards of skin bleaching creams and lighter models and everything.

A female participant from Jamaica in the informal focus group exclaimed that the media manipulates what people see even by the actors that are cast in films. "In the media…they try to portray a different culture and they don't even use people from that culture". In essence there is a 'Black' actor and the person acting is not necessarily culturally connected to the place they are 'representing' in the film. In the other participant only focus group, a female participant noted, "The media itself doesn't give way for Black people being different or being like they have to fit into that stereotype of how a Black person is supposed to act".

During a focus group interview, a female participant from Ghana spoke about the media's role in representing what gets put into 'our' minds. She surmised, the media "is representing a mirror image of what people are thinking…like it's all embedded in our minds". A female peer chimed in and said, "the media is representing it but we're feeding into it, at the end of the day we're perpetuating it." A male participant joined by adding:

> the media is also very filtered…the media has been told on a perspective of a white man…and who is reading that? The black people are reading that as well. Obviously you start getting the same mentality as that. We don't really know ourselves…The winner always writes the story, the loser will not. So, so far right now you don't get a lot of stories from Africa.

A female focus group left her peers to ponder this thought, "Is it kind of okay for a white person to view us as inferior but why do we view ourselves as inferior?"

In addition to the conversations that revolved around media influence within their own communities, some of the participants spoke specifically about the media's role in shaping their view of Black/African Americans. "So, if you are a white person growing up in a white neighborhood, you hardly see any black people and you watch TV, you are going to think that's how every black person is like" (a female participant from the formal focus group). Salina noted that back home in the Dominican Republic, "I don't know that we really talk about Blacks in the U.S. other than what you would see in the news or movies or sitcoms or whatever…I get all the [U.S.] channels, we see all the sitcoms".

David, the participant from Chad, remarked about how stereotypes in the media are something that we "cannot run away from". He recalled watching an American television program a long time ago and, "the face of the criminals were always Black people, especially in L.A…All they [the media] are telling you is that the baddest people were like gangs and criminals so when an African will come [to the U.S.], they have this perspective of African-American to be like that".

**Subordinate Theme #3: Views of Black/African-Americans**

*We (Africans) maintain our true culture, we know who we are, we know our family, our ancestors and all that; we are still greater than you because you lost your family connection…'Who are you?' – you basically, you have no ties with the motherland…that's how everyone else perceives you. Cause in Africa we have this notion of (long pause) 'who you are is not you as individual, it's who came before you'. So that really – so when you see the person as an individual, like all of the African-Americans here, they see them as individuals. So, who do [African Americans] have behind them?* **They have the whole shame of slavery which are, it's nobodies basically (referring to African American ancestors).** *And that is another aspect of 'you are lower than us' because we have a status of this is my grandfather and 'he was that, he was that, he was that' – mainly, like we have our identity here (in Africa)…Participant #4*

*They were taken into a different environment and so they've adopted the culture of that environment and kind of forgotten the original culture they came from…Participant #1 speaking about Black/African-Americans*

As we progressed through the interviews and I explored the participants views of race before going to college, it was apparent that there was a strong consensus of negative stereotypes that plagued Black/African-Americans. "It's easy to associate negative things with them because that's what's depicted in the news; that's what you see on TV, the hip-hop videos" remarked John from Ghana. This very honest exploration of how they saw or were taught to see Black/African-Americans lent itself to understanding some of the widely held desires to disassociate from that group (this will be further explored using a critical race theory lens in chapter 5).

For the participants, the assumption of 'Blackness' in the U.S. meant being lumped together with African-Americans – something they did not want to happen. "Unfortunately, it's like the black culture [in the U.S.] that's at the bottom of the pole" remarked John. Xabi who was born in the U.S. and identifies as Dominican said when asked how she thought Blacks were viewed in the U.S., "I think they [other people] think they [African-Americans] are like the lowest on the totem pole".

John stated that he saw African-American's largely in a straightforward way: descendants of slaves. He said, "I didn't think of it any deeper". He posed the questions: "What culture do they have here? How are they promoting themselves? How are they promoting their image?" In summary, he saw it as "Black Americans were associated with hip-hop, crime or anything bad in the news". Similar to the other male participant from Africa, he expressed that the African-American lineage through slavery left them devoid of any real connection to the continent of Africa.

When asked about how African-Americans were viewed in their families and communities, the participants were surprisingly very forth-coming; even though they knew that I identified as Black/African-American and was born and raised in the U.S. They used descriptors that included: loud, ghetto, poor, dangerous, and uneducated. Oscar said the word 'ghetto' is defined as, "hood rat, ratchet, non-educated, just don't care about school…welfare checks".  According to the Urban dictionary online, 'hood rat' is a slang term used to describe "a girl who sleeps around the neighborhood" and 'ratchet' refers to "an over the top diva like personality of someone who lives in the ghetto".  (while Urban dictionary is not seen as a scholarly source, it is a commonly used reference for U.S. urban dialect).

Samira remembered interacting with African-Americans back home in Ghana. She agreed that the perception was that they are loud.  She and her friends had various interactions with Ghanaian "kids" who grew up in the U.S. and would come to Ghana to visit. "They were usually spoiled.  They seem to have kind of less moral values than we did".  Young people in Ghana were encouraged not to adopt what was assumed to be "negative African-American habits".

"We were always kind of told don't be like the Americans, you have to have morals".  For instance, if a teacher saw a student trying to "sag" their pants (a style generally associated with African-American and hip-hop culture), it was "completely frowned upon".  You would be reprimanded and asked, "Why are trying to be like them?"  She went on to say, "a lot of that was just considered being immoral and morality is really big in Ghana".

Ruth felt that luckily for her, she had Nigerian cousins who grew up in the U.S. and they had an American mom. Because of this connection she stated, "I knew obviously not all Black people are poor". She did say for someone from a 'typical middle class Nigerian family' who never traveled outside of the country, they had a certain view of African-Americans. The image associated with them were, "baggy clothes, long shirts, du-rags" for guys and "someone called Shaniqua in like very like ratchet clothes" for girls.

Furthermore, she said in regards to males in the U.S., "black men have guns, black men are poor, they have three kids from three different women, they have baby mommas and live in areas like the Bronx and Brooklyn". There were more positive images depicted in Tyler Perry movies (which she said were popular in Nigeria) of Black men in suits, but that person was usually "Black, but white inside, like an Oreo cookie".

Xabi said in her community there are a lot of negative stereotypes associated with African-Americans such as violence, lack of education and poor. While you can certainly have African-American friends, she stated, "we just don't marry them". In her view, mainly having to do with the stereotypes associated with them. "You wouldn't want to procreate with them because you want to better the race, like you want to lighten the race" (the concept "*mejorar la raza"/better the race* will be covered again in Chapter 4 under 'family influence on race' and discussed in Chapter 5). She went on to say:

> Dominicans who come here, they want their kids to have a better opportunity. They want them to like, be better and to be successful and to associate themselves with white people because white people equals success in this

country.  So, if they associated with African-Americans, it's like you're setting us back.

In regards to interactions in high school, the participants mentioned very little direct contact with a large number of African-Americans.   David recalled having an African-American in his class when his family lived in Niger. "There was an African-American, he was thought to be lower than the other students because he was from the United States of America".  He remembered an interaction between his peers vividly:

Nigerien Student: Where's your home?

African-American Student (living in Niger at the time): I live in America.

Nigerien Student: But within America everyone is supposed to be white.

African-American Student (with a confused look on his face): We look alike but you're rejecting me; I don't understand.

David felt that Africans who do come to the U.S. for college often put themselves higher than African-Americans because they see themselves as coming from higher socioeconomic statuses (they can afford a private U.S. education) and they do not exhibit stereotypical image the media portrays of Blacks in America. Samira noted, "when a lot of Africans move here and they get questions like 'oh, did you ride a camel here, how did you get here', they really get offended because they are definitely at a comfortable level in life…so they over-compensate. They would buy more designer stuff to show that I can afford this. When back home, they really wouldn't because it doesn't really matter that much…they would casually distinguish themselves from African-Americans because just to emphasize like 'I am not poor'…".

Mixed-in with the overwhelmingly negative view of Blacks/African-Americans in America, there were some aspects of the culture that were adopted (particularly by younger generations). Ruth talked about aspects of hair and the perception that Black Americans have "nicer hair and lighter skin" while Samira remembered a time when young people back home wanted to listen to rap music, hip-hop and adopt other aspects of Black culture. She feels like that has started to fade away. While adorned in modern styled Ghanaian earrings and bracelets, she said confidently, "I feel like now we're valuing our culture more – our generation especially".

### Subordinate Theme #4: Family Influence on Race

*There's this idea -- it was like 'mejorar la raza', you have to 'better the race'. It's basically saying that you can't date a black man, -- you can't even date darker than your skin color even in Dominican Republic. That's what a lot of people say because like in my neighborhood in the Dominican Republic, it's like wealthier than the average Dominican. They want you, even in my family, they want you to date Dominican or a European and stuff like that. Participant #6*

In addition to the other major institutions such as education and the media, family played a role in what the participants learned about race. Of all of the areas covered regarding race prior to college, I noticed that this was the area where the participants shared the least. This could be attributed to not wanting to paint their family in a negative light in terms race and perceived prejudice. A further study would need to be done to further substantiate that claim.

Although the content was not data heavy, it was rich in terms of revealing the complexity around race even within their families. The opening quote from Xabi, where Dominicans are encouraged to 'mejorar la raza' (better the race) led to many

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discussions regarding color and a hierarchy of race (covered in more depth later in this chapter). Xabi, said with hesitancy, "like my mom -- well, even in my mom's case, my mom is like, 'I don't want you dating a black -- I don't want you to have kids with a black guy'". When asked whether or not she would date lighter or darker she stated she prefers, "Latin men and they just happen to be lighter".

Salina recalled that one of her aunts would prohibit her cousins from going to school sometimes when the sun was strong because she didn't want them to get darker. In the Dominican Republic, being dark or 'Black' was associated with being Haitian – the antithesis of what a Dominican wanted to be. "There's this thing like they don't want to get dark or they don't want to be black…like if you're super dark, then people are going to think you're Haitian". As the conversations around race and color progressed, the Dominican students referenced the strong divide between being Dominican and being Haitian. Similar to the African and the African American experience, both Haitian lineage and African-American lineage were least desirable. This disassociation amongst the African Atlantic Diaspora will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Ruth (from Nigeria) said her mother made it clear that she could not attend college at Fordham University in the Bronx, NY which directly connected to the perceptions about Black males in U.S. cities like Brooklyn and the Bronx (as mentioned in the previous section). Another way in which race permeated family dynamics was skin color. Ruth's grandmother was appalled one time when her granddaughter wore foundation that she found to be too dark. "Oh my God why do

you look so black?" her grandmother exclaimed.  According to Ruth, her grandmother was "disgusted, seriously disgusted".

For Oscar, with a mother who is phenotypically white and a father who is phenotypically black, race and color was a highly contested issue in his family.  He could remember his little brother (who had fair skin) saying he didn't like their father because he was negrito (black).  He then shared, "even my grandfather, when my mom got pregnant with me, she got kicked out of the house and he flat out told her, 'I don't want to see him (Oscar) because he going to be a little monkey. He's going to look like his father' And then he saw me, fell in love with me, of course."

The very personal accounts of how the participants' families grappled with notions of color and beauty continued to reveal the complex and contextual nature of race.

### Subordinate Theme #5: Color Hierarchy

*I feel like in Africa, because it is one race, it's mostly Black people, we divide ourselves by the color of skin, so it's not really like how race is looked at here in America where there is a **real** division.  It's just more of like, kind of a hierarchy, like people think that people with lighter skin are beautiful or more affluent or something like that, but it's not really like a divide, like there is no history behind it or anything about that at all. Participant #3*
*As to your skin color...you don't want to be white; you don't want to be a gringo because you're going to forget who you are but you also don't want to be black because you don't want to be ghetto.  So either way, it's like, who am I? Participant #7*

All of the participants mentioned that there is a color hierarchy within their ethnic communities.  Several of the participants made note that the color hierarchy was different from, and not as bad as, racism in America.  Some of the participants made note of the color hierarchy to remnants of colonial mentality.  While they didn't necessarily agree with it, they acknowledged its presence in their communities.

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"In Ghana, the typical light skinned person, I would say, is viewed in a positive light…light skin people and mixed-race people usually have good hair", commented Samira, who is of mixed Ukrainian and Ghanaian race. "There is definitely a perception that if you are lighter skin, not white, but just light skin, you are prettier in some way". Ruth who is not of mixed race but lighter than some others in her ethnic group recalled how people would treat her because of the color of her skin. "Oh, she is light skin, that's why she is so pretty". She admitted that at times it bothered her. "I don't really understand the point of having a hierarchy because to me we are all one race".

The notion of lighter being better equated to wealth and affluence as well. A focus group participant stated, "in Africa, the darker you are, it means you work in the field. And the lighter you are, is like, you're that rich person – you don't touch the sun". Similarly, Ruth said, "the majority of people think that the lighter you are the kind of more affluent you are, meaning that you are not always in the sun. Like you are inside with AC (air conditioning), meaning you can afford AC". The correlation of affluence and skin color will be viewed against the background of American slavery in Chapter 5.

In speaking to Salina about her experience with color in the Dominican Republic, she said that the topic is very complex in her home country. "Everybody is so mixed…but there is definitely a sense of white being better in some regards". Xabi, who is also of Dominican descent added, "I think there is a notion that you need to procreate with light skin, you have to date light skin…Not to say that people like my skin color are ashamed…I don't think it's the case at all. I think it's (pause) It's just

the notion that it's better to do -- it's better to procreate and date light-skinned men because it refines the race". Oscar stated there is a sort of 'ranking' in his culture where people, "want to be considered white or don't want to be considered black…just because you're darker you may be uglier in some sense, but after everything, we're just Puerto Rican".

The next series of quotes from several participants shed direct light on the connection to slavery and colonialism in this notion of lighter and/or white being better. In chapter 5, I will further explore the concepts that they raise regarding the history of white/light/black by connecting back to the theoretical frame.

*Female participant during formal focus group*
I think it goes back to slavery and colonialism, because when you have White people move into your country and tell you that they are better and you should accept their ways and do things their way, and they kind of dominate you in that way, you are going to look up to them as being better.

Like in Ghana, if a White person is walking by, the local people will look at them as being rich and better and in that kind of positive light, they wouldn't look at them in a negative light, because it's years of that kind of influence and domination. And they would look up to America as being the best place. So, I really think it goes back to that and it just hasn't left us yet.

*Male participant during formal focus group*
So like people say, because the darker you are, it's basically the sun. I mean if you stay in sun a lot, then your skin is darkened and people who are used to working fields or like do chores outside were dark, and they are very dark and people who are in the shades are more like, you are like a rich person and kind of relaxed.
And definitely, I think we discussed about that a little bit in the individual interviews, like if there is a White person, it doesn't matter, he is like the poorest in Europe, and come to Africa, they are like, 'oh, he is White, he must have money'; that's the first thing any person like the common African will think, 'oh, she is rich, she has money'…it goes back to the oppression of the dominance that the western society had over African folks for a certain period of time.

*David, Participant #4 from Chad*

> You take an African woman and White woman, and both of them they go to a shop, they will favor the White woman because the African woman do not have that type of power.
>
> So automatically when you see a white American, you automatically put him in a high position and say, "He comes from a well-to-do family" even if you don't know his background. He might be the poorest person in America but because he is white, he'd be treated well. He has this, he has that, living conditions and all that because all the media and all we learned in history and all that, in classes, and you automatically place the white American higher than African-American.

*Male participant during informal focus group*

> And the lighter you are is like, 'Oh you're that rich person, you're like – you don't touch the sun and all that. That's how they identify you as a customer. Even if you walk into a shop or whatever, and your skin tone is fair you're being treated like, 'Oh this guy he has money, he's like – we need to talk to him…'

As skin color is a major part of the dialogue around race in the participant's communities, where for some over 90% of the inhabitants are phenotypically 'Black', there are products used to help lighten ones skin. While none of the participants said they have used skin-bleaching creams, it is something they heard of. David said, "in Africa, there's a lot of bleaching products over there. Like you have to be fairer, lighter, because you will look more appealing". He attributed this longing for fairer skin to the representation that the media puts into peoples minds. Ruth said of skin lightening products in Nigeria, "it's advertised and definitely talked about but at the same time it's kind of looked down upon. When people overdo it, it's kind of like plastic surgery".

In the analogy, she said when plastic surgery is done right then people are ok with it. But, when it goes wrong, it looks "terrible and fake", similar to bleaching the skin. Samira lamented of her home country, "in Ghana, I used to always see these

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billboards of skin bleaching creams and lighter models and everything". It leaves the question of what long term affect does it have globally, in a nation and it's individual citizens if you are treated differently and subjected to advertising to alter your skin in places where the overwhelming majority of people are 'Black'.

**Superordinate Theme #2: Identity (race, color, ethnic background)**

*Where you are from kind of defines you; has a characteristic about you. Participant #1*

*I think in Nigeria there is not much talk on race; it's more about ethnicity…like when I was in Nigeria I never said I was 'Black'. I know I'm 'Black' but I never said it…Participant #3*

The second superordinate theme looks at identity as it pertains specifically to race, color and ethnic background. While there are multiple overlapping intersections of identity (sex, sexual orientation, ability, religion, class, etc.) for the purposes of this study on race, I focused on that specific element. After an exploration of the superordinate theme, the subordinate themes in this section will further elaborate on the topics utilizing the voice of the participant through direct quotes.

As far as identity, all of the participants identified with their families nation of origin (regardless of how many times they moved or where they went to school). During the interview process when I asked how the participant and their families identified, some giggled while others gave me the impression it was a silly question. For them, it seemed obvious they would identify with their home country and culture – despite the racial dynamics in the U.S. Below is a list of responses from the participants when asked how they identified:

*I mean we just identify as Ghanaians basically…John from Ghana*

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*I would say we identify as Ghanaian, I mean even my mom…Samira from Ghana*

*Growing up, it was either you're Dominican or you're non-Dominican…Xabi from*

*U.S.*

*So, we definitely are just Dominican…Salina from the Dominican Republic*

*We're just Puerto Rican. Be Quiet. That's all we are…Oscar from U.S. commenting*

*on his family's response when he would bring up conversations of race*

When asked how his family identifies, Oscar said matter-a-factly, "Puerto Rican. Just Puerto Rican, that's it".  Salina responded more in-depth to the question of identity by saying, "My family identifies as Dominican (pausing and laughing); that's really all you identify to…I feel like we don't think as much in terms of like 'I am Black or you are White'".  She went on to say when they do think of this, it is not a main focus because so many families have "every color".

On this same topic, Xabi stated that her family identifies as Latino or Hispanic (not a surprising use of those terms since she grew up in the U.S.).  In further examining this identification, she was asked which aspect of Dominican identity stood out.  She exclaimed without missing a beat, "Oh definitely identify with Spanish, definitely.  Like, there's certainly no question about it.  I think people, I don't know, people think it's European – it's more prominent, it's better.  You don't want to be identified as African".  Given Xabi's confident tone, it appeared that she has an unwavering allegiance to her national identity and less so for her commitment to a specific racial identity.  To this end, national identity seems to take precedence over race.

David felt that for African nations, your identity is not just color (although it does play a role) but also social position and tribal affiliation. John said, in Ghana, you are identified with your father's tribe. "Where my dad is from, that's where the most hardworking people in Ghana are the most successful businessmen". As a business major John was confident he would someday follow in his father's footsteps (his father runs a company in Ghana). "I have been working with my dad since I was young and I knew what I wanted to do before I even started college".

According to Ruth, in Nigeria, you usually associate with your father's side. People often are connected to their village through the language (amongst other things). There are three major languages, Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa. Her father's language is one of the minor ones, Isoko and her mother a major one, Igbo. Back at home in Nigeria, if someone where to ask her where is she from she stated, "I would say I'm Isoko".

Samira, whose father is from Ghana and mother is from the Ukraine, said that while the tribal affiliation is with her dad, she was never fully immersed in that group likely because of her mixed race.

> Yes, my father is from a tribe in the eastern region. There is a place called Kwahu. My grandfather's father actually was one of the Chiefs there while my father was growing up. But now most of my family lives in the city, which is Accra. Yeah, I grew up in Accra most of my live. I visited Kwahu a couple of times, but the few times I visited I was never really accepted as someone from Kwahu, I think because I was lighter skin, I was always viewed as a foreigner. Yeah, especially when I went with my mom like it was just obvious that we were foreigners. So, yeah, I don't think I ever really identify much with them…
> This aforementioned example of identity connects to two other aspects of

identity that participants mentioned in their interviews: national identity and ethnic/cultural authenticity. In the section on 'Views of Black/African-Americans' the

participant David touched upon this subject. He made a clear distinction between an African person born and raised in Africa and an African American.

Participants used words such as 'real' and 'original' to denote their authenticity. For some, it had less to do with ethnicity and more to do with national pride. For example, John explained that 'foreigners' who are born and raised in Ghana are still Ghanaian. In referencing a college friend who is of Indian descent but raised in Ghana he stated, "Like (my friend) for example. He identifies as someone from Ghana; he's obviously Indian but he'll tell you he is from Ghana. I feel like he has the values and the identities of the people there…". Samira agreed that there were people from India, China and so on, a lot of whom identify as Ghanaians. "I know a couple of Indians that moved to America with us to study and you ask where they are from, and they say, 'I am from Ghana'. We are all identified as Ghanaians."

The sentiment from John was that unless you live in an African country you do not have a true connection to your African roots; with the exception of some Caribbean islands that, in his opinion, remained connected. He recalled having cousins who grew up in America. They were disconnected from African culture because they identified "as American hardcore". In reflecting on a visit with his cousin he stated, "The first time I came here (to America) was probably the first time she had had exposure to having *a real African*; someone straight from there". He went on to say there is a sense of pride knowing you are "the real deal, the original…unless you are surrounded by a constant reminder of your heritage, there is no way you're going to identify with it".

In the minds of some participants, the issue plaguing African-Americans is their disconnect from Africa due largely to slavery. The thought was that pride and values derived through history over time. To John, "it's like you have nothing to be connected to because I can't really call America a place…when you really think about the core founding principles that make and define your people, I feel like it's not here, it's not existing here". Samira stated that in her opinion those core principles revolved around two things "respect and discipline".

David further expounds on 'African identity and authenticity' in telling the story of how an African-American class-mate was looked down upon:

> I remember there was an African-American from the United States who came to our school. Other Africans looked down to him because they said he is not African in the sense that he is one of those people we gave away to slavery. They were looking at his ancestors because Africa is very rooted around ancestors – that's who you are. That's who like defines you. And to know that his ancestors were slave, so (pause) that trait is kind of like a stain, it never goes away. The stain kind of really stayed with you. You have with you this kind of a scar and it never leaves even though it heals. I really didn't expect such things (from my classmates)…people (other classmates) saw themselves like, 'I'm a higher black person and he's a lower black person'. **But to the world you guys are all black**. That's the thing…Black people who are in Africa think that the Black people who are in the Caribbean are closer to the Black people in Africa compared to the Black people in America because their blackness haven't been diluted especially in the case of Haiti. A lot of Africans think Haiti is the closest to Africans because there were not too much mixing between the white…

Ruth spoke about cultural differences that distinguish Africans from African-Americans. Like other participants, she felt it lacked authenticity:

> I barely ever relate to African American cultures, like I can talk to a Jamaican person and be like, oh, you eat plantains, you eat this you eat that and relate to them, and we can really go in (conversation about) our culture because those countries took a lot from African descent. People like from Haiti and all those other countries, they have a lot in common with Africans, but African American culture, I feel like they

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just built their own culture, and a lot of it has to do with the fact that society is so White dominated, they kind of built a culture upon that, whereas, like Africans or people from the Caribbean, they don't really have that issue. So our culture is mainly connected to African culture.

In a focus group discussion on African authenticity a participant stated, "(Africans) have a lot more cultural background behind us to support who you are as a person versus an African-American who don't have that backup". Another participant added, "When I think of African-American I don't really pay attention to the African part because the cultures are so different…you have a lot of very different values especially". Ruth attributes her upbringing to having more of an open mind in this regard. But she believes, "if you talk to like a traditional African", like one of her friends, "she will flat out tell you, African-Americans and Africans are not the same race".

Oscar experienced another aspect of national identity in the reverse. He said there was a distinct divide in college between "American Puerto Ricans and Puerto Ricans straight off from the island". He stated that he was friendly to everyone but they were not as welcoming to him. He said he got the sense that, "you're not really Puerto Rican. You weren't born there. You're from Massachusetts. You're white or whatever". In further probing why he thought it was this way, he could not articulate the reasons why, other than his classmates felt that in order to be 'authentically Puerto Rican' you had to be born and raised on the island.

The experience that Oscar felt is similar to what the participants who are from Africa said about African-Americans. For many of them, identity is connected to family, ancestors, values, language and literal homeland. The only way to fully experience this is to live there and be immersed in the culture.

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**Subordinate Theme #6: Color and Racial Categorization**

*In the United States I think race is such like a segregated thing. People have to put people in certain boxes, versus if it's (just) color of the skin…Participant #3*

A major thread in the themes thus far is the distinction between race and color for the participants. A part of the contradiction in the experience for them was, in part, due to how they racially (if at all) identified before coming to college and then being 'forced' to choose a box once here. This next section will shed some light on how the participants see themselves and choices they made regarding how to categorize themselves.

Ruth felt as though race and color are distinct characteristics where color has more to do with beauty (pretty eyes, pretty skin, etc.). In her opinion, "color doesn't necessarily divide us as a community". However, especially here in America, race is broken down into percentages and people are put into boxes. "When it comes to race they break it down 70% White, 5% Black, 2% Hispanic…the color of skin isn't broken down like that".

When asked about being categorized as 'Black', the participants noted that college was the first time that this really happened. While the African participants fully understood why they would be called 'Black', it was the cultural attachments to the use of that label in the U.S. that made them uncomfortable. For the students from the Caribbean, they had never referred to themselves as Black even prior to college.

At the institution where the participants attended, demographic data is collected every year. As required by law, every 10 years, demographic information is

collected from every home in the America through the U.S Census.  The Census has been in existence since 1790.  As a part of this massive data collection, annually, educational institutions in the U.S. are required to submit data on the student population.

School population statistics are managed by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).  Specifically for postsecondary institutions, the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) captures data for colleges and universities in the U.S.  As an integrated system, the information captured through IPEDS is designed to feed into the 10-year census.  Therefore, the racial categories that are used in the U.S. Census must be used for IPEDS.

The racial categories are managed by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB).  Currently, according to the OMB, there are 5 racial categories: White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.  These categories are fluid and have changed over time.  As the focus of this study is related to being ascribed the racial category of 'Black', the current definition from the OMB is: **Black or African American –** A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. When asked specifically what the participants' each checked on the racial demographic form (see Appendix C) the responses varied and are noted below (Table 6).

Table 6 – *Participant Recollection of What Racial Box they Checked on University Form*

| Participant | Response |
|---|---|
| John from Ghana | It had four choices I think. Caucasian, Asian, Black/African-American and other. So, I just ticked 'Other' and wrote African. That's it. |
| Samira from Ghana | I put 'Other' and then I put 'from Ghana'. |
| Ruth from Nigeria | I check the box as African-American, but I usually put African there. |
| David from Chad | So you have Asian, you have European, you have African-American and I was like, 'Where is my box'? Where is Africa? There is 'Others'. So for me I was like, 'I'm none of those'. So okay, I'm in 'Others'. |
| Salina from Dominican Republic | What I usually put down is I will put 'Other' and in the gap I'll put 'mixed'. |
| Xabi from U.S. (family from DR) | I put 'Hispanic'. |
| Oscar from contiguous U.S. (family from Puerto Rico) | I probably clicked 'Other' or 'None'…then I probably put Puerto Rican or Latino |

Salina had a strong opinion about racial categorization. She said that she knew of Dominicans who try to hide the fact that they have African roots but for her, it was a major part of who she is. "I'm Dominican and I am mixed and I am proud of my African heritage…" She did not like the label of Latino/Hispanic either. "When Latino/Hispanic was on the box then I was like, 'I refuse to put myself in that box because I'm not'. And that's where I picked the 'other' and I put 'mixed'." While the focus of the study was on the assumption of 'Black' race, it is important to note that for some Caribbean, Central and South American students and immigrants, the terms Hispanic/Latino, generated in the context of U.S. race relations, are foreign to them as well. This becomes compounded when phenotypically they are 'Black'.

In 2000, for 'Hispanics/Latinos', the U.S. Census racial question changed and for the first time in history you could check more than one race (Davis, 1994, p. 198). Prior to 2000, Hispanic/Latino was considered a race. It was determined that Hispanic/Latino, regardless of country of family origin, is an ethnicity and not a race. So, the question from 2000 Census and beyond asks, "Are you Hispanic/Latino – Yes or No" proceeded by "What is your race? (White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander)".

For Xabi, who was born and raised in the U.S., the racial identification is not clear. "That's something that is most confusing because like I always thought that my race is Hispanic and your ethnicity is Dominican or something like that. And my nationality is American, United States." Now that it has changed, she said if asked her race she would put "mixed".

The notion of the 'one-drop rule', which states that anyone with any known African ancestry is considered Black in the U.S. (Tatum, 1997, p. 169), was one of the most striking differences one participant experienced in regards to racial categorization. Samira, who is of mixed race (Ghanaian and Ukrainian), found it surprising that at home in Ghana she was jokingly called Obroni (White) and here in the U.S. she is Black.

> I mentioned how surprising that was to me because when I was home, I was always told how not Black I was, because I am a little bit lighter, and over here there is no exception. But here it was you have like a drop and like you are Black. That was hard for me to get used to.

Ruth was the only participant who said she checks "Black or African American". Although that is what she checks, she took issue with the fact that "Black

or African American" was on the same line.  Having grown up in Nigeria and traveled to the U.K. often, she said this was something she never encountered.   In the U.K., "it has a list of different countries.  So under ethnicity, you will see Nigerian, South American, you know, like all different countries listed".  She stated she prefers ticking "Black" if the country option is not available but does not agree with the term African American being listed as a race. "Another thing that offends me is the African American term…the thing is…you can't make that a race because a lot of Black people are not American; you have Jamaicans, you have people from the Caribbean, African people, even people who are Black but live in Europe, in UK, what are they supposed to identify as here?"

John said for him and his friends who were filling out the Common Application (an application used to apply to colleges in the U.S.), they "did not tick Black or African-American".  His reasons stemmed back to the notion of 'authenticity'.  "We tick other because we see ourselves being from Africa – as Africa being a race on its own.  The Black American, even though the same color, they are a different race because they had different experience".

Samira had never filled out racial demographic questions until applying to college and taking the SAT's.  She remembered asking her college counselor how to respond to that question and he said, "well, just put Black".  She said she was not totally comfortable with that so whenever she could put 'choose not to answer' she would opt for that.  She would then use her essay to elaborate on her background and where she is from.

For Oscar, the notion of racial identification shifted during college. He always identified as Puerto Rican, and still does. When first asked about racial categorization he responded:

> I'm Latino. That's what I would like to say. That's why the census sucks. It is like I don't consider myself black or white but I understand how it can be considered black or white. When you ask me, "What are you?" I'm Puerto Rican. That's it, straight up. I'm Puerto Rican. I'm Latino, that's it, but if I had to fill something out, I would fill black and white because I understand. On top of that, based on what I was just saying, this also goes on with me, I don't know what my African roots are and I don't know what my European roots are, I just know that I have a black dad and a white mom, so you know what, I am black and white by American standards, I guess.

When Oscar met friends in college who identified as bi-racial (in this case a Black parent and a White parent) he started to question whether or not he too was "bi-racial" (even though both of his parents were from Puerto Rico). He recalled filling out an application after college and checking black and white. He remembered thinking to himself, "I'm just going to do it…because that's really what I am if you really think about it; that's what I am". One of the questions this raises is when a Latino/Hispanic checks both Black and White for race, which racial category do they get counted under?

Another issue that was raised, particularly with the Caribbean students, was how to determine who is Black and who is White. Salina strongly believed that if Dominicans were forced to choose a racial designation they would choose "White over Black" because they have a view that "White is better". She said that back in the DR, things revolved more around your skin tone then 'race'. Salina has a sister who is lighter than her. As her sister got older, she did get a little darker but she was pretty confident that her sister would still self identify, if made to, as white. "So, those

people (in the DR) who are like my sister who are whiter would definitely put white; whereas people might see my sister here (in the US) and think she's Black because of her hair…They might think she's Black but she'll still probably put down White…there would be a lot of Dominicans that would check White that would probably be thought of as Black here".

In making an assertion about what may occur in the Puerto Rican community for those who are on the 'fence' of choosing black or white, Oscar thinks it boils down to culture. "Honestly, it will all depend on where you're from…white culture and black culture has such stereotypes associated with them that if you think you fit more of the stereotype of a black person or a white person that's what you would choose". When asked to elaborate on what those stereotypes were, he stated, "[for whites] educated, upper middle class, maybe eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner at a certain time and then you have the stereotype of the black community using the 'N' word, sagging their pants".

David felt that the racial categories for Blacks were limited in the U.S. He recalled thinking as he filled in the box, "There is something missing. Is it because Africa is not doing well economically so you're not going to put them there? Is it because the whole continent is lower in terms of advancements and stuff like that on development?...I was like is 'Black like the lowest form of human being?'".

**Subordinate Theme #7: Personal Identity Struggles with Appearance**

In the themes that have developed thus far, it is not surprising that for some participants, although proud of their heritage, there was a time in their life where they had varied thoughts about their racial/color identity. Xabi reluctantly spoke about thoughts of having 'lighter' skin. "Like sometimes when I was a younger, I don't know if I was confused…Sometimes I wonder what would it be like…I don't know, I always felt comfortable in my skin maybe because I'm more secure about it. *But I never wished, I just I wondered*…" She later proudly exclaimed, "I accept the way God made me so I don't feel any type of way about it".

Xabi said a part of her confidence was built around knowing there were lots of other Dominicans with skin color like hers. She felt like she never had to explain herself in Dominican settings. In other places however, she felt like, "they think they have an image of what Hispanic looks like and it's not me". She found herself often having to explain that there are brown-skinned Dominicans/Latino/as.

For Samira, who is of self-identified mixed race, her experience growing up was marked by a negative perception held of Ghanaian women with lighter skin. She stated that in her country, light skin was associated with being pretty and the belief that you are rebellious and/or 'bad'. She believed it was connected to the slave history of her country. As her voiced cracked (the only time during her interviews) she explained, "In the past a lot of light skinned girls came out of births with the colonial masters and Ghanaian women…and they usually turned out to be (pause) – I wouldn't say prostituted, but you know, more kind of negative things". She never fit into the stereotype of being "the bad girl type" and her mother had to, on occasion, come to

her school to be an advocate for her when teachers would treat her differently, because of what she felt to be her skin color.

When Oscar reflected on his experience in school, he remembered having thoughts of wanting to have what his peers had. He was in AP and honor's classes where the majority of students were white middle/upper class. He was a self-identified Puerto Rican who lived in the projects of his town. He recalled wanting to have what his white peers had but not give up his culture. "I wanted to be white so bad but not be white, if that makes any sense". For him, he loved his culture and heritage but wish he had more affluence to have some of the things his peers talked about like "trips to Disney and stuff". Oscar went on to talk about a time where he wanted to feel connected to a group, either white or black:

> In terms of race, did I ever want to be called white? Yes. Do I also want to be called black? I did because there was this time like being a Puerto Rican, 'what does that mean?' I feel like, if you're white, you know what that is. If you're black, you know what that is. That sense of assurance like what you are, that's what I wanted...then the whole white privilege part, like I'm lighter skin then automatically I'm going to get stuff or go places or not work as hard, that's why I wanted it. What I also want from the black culture was the struggle -- in the US, you get raised with this whole Black History Month knowing Martin Luther King...I don't associate myself with them because I don't consider myself black...but I wanted to identify with that struggle with them and that's why I wanted it because I don't know that much about the Latino struggle in the US...

John, of all of the participants, has the darkest skin. When asked what if anything he liked about his skin color he replied, "I have no idea. I've never thought about that". He was however able to articulate some of the challenges he faced being a dark-skinned male of color. "I feel it's like when you have dark skin, automatically, wherever you go is like they have a misconception about you." He recalled an incident that happened on campus. "I was walking to my [room] the other day and

there was this white girl walking in front of me. I'm just listening to my music but she kept turning to look so many times like she thought I was going to come after her or something."

**Subordinate Theme #8: Racial Terms/Jokes**

In interviewing the participants on the complex topic of race, one of the things that became evident was that there are descriptive words and terminology that are used to describe different groups (depending on where you are from). In addition, the participants commented that they felt that race is taken way more seriously in the U.S. than their home countries. Jokes based on race/color seemed to be a common occurrence for some of the participants – although they expressed that they were not harmful but just made in good fun.

First, I will review some of the terms the participants said were pretty common in their communities regarding race/color and then I will share their experiences with racial joking. Table 7 below displays the various racial/color descriptors. The list is not meant to be an exhaustive list, but rather terms the participants brought up when discussing the essence of their lived experiences around race.

The words provided by the participants during conversation folk expressions and are not meant to represent scholarly terminology. In fact, some of the terms may be used specifically within their community and serve as a form of slang. The purpose in sharing these terms is to provide deeper insight into how the participants talk about race and color in their countries/communities.

Table 7: *Terms used as racial/color descriptors by participants*

| Participant | Term(s)/Meaning |
|---|---|
| John from Ghana | Obroni/White or Foreigner |
| Samira from Ghana | Obroni/White or Foreigner |
| Ruth from Nigeria | Oyngbo/White or Light Skin |
| David from Chad | Masara/White person (regardless of income) |
| Salina from Dominican Republic | Blanquita/White<br>Indio/Native or Indigenous<br>Morenita/Tanned or Black<br>Mulatto/Mixed<br>Negrita/Darker Black<br>Zambo/Indigenous and Black |
| Xabi from U.S. of Dominican descent | Blanco/White<br>Cocolo/Term used for Haitian (negative)<br>Indigino/Native or Indigenous<br>Moreno or Trigeno/Mixed<br>Negro/Black |
| Oscar from contiguous U.S. of Puerto Rican descent | El Blaquito/White skinned<br>El Triguenito/Darker skinned |

Of interesting note, in the Dominican Republic, the skin color of each individual is noted on various identification cards. Salina pointed out that she had an "I" on her Voter ID card and "Mestizo" on her license under 'piel' (the English translation of piel is 'skin'). She believes Indio is a term reserved for Indigenous or Native People while Mestizo generally refers to a person of mixed Spanish and American Indian race. When asked did she choose these designations or were they chosen for her she said they were chosen for her. She thought it was interesting that, "they didn't put 'Black' on my ID". Although Salina does not identify as either, she noted that neither designation bothered her. "When you're being so stuck on being

politically correct and you're so hung up on language that it's preventing you from

getting to the root of the issue…I think that happens a lot here in the States."

In the neighborhoods of DR where Xabi's family is from, she noted that words

are used as descriptors for people.  The only degrading word she recalled is, "Cocolo".

There is a clear distinction between and darker skinned Dominican and a Haitian.  She

referred to the term as a "black cursing".  While visiting DR, she would see the

"darkest of the dark and the lightest of the light" and "see them talking and having a

good time".  She did point out that while "cocolo" was definitely a negative word, she

wouldn't compare it to the 'N' word in the U.S.  In her opinion, "it doesn't have the

same history behind it".

In Ghana a common turn of phrase is "Obroni".  During a visit there in 2009, I

was surprised when visiting a market in the town of Kumasi local people yelled out to

me, "Obroni, Obroni".  I detected in the tone of their voices it was not a term of

endearment.  According to John:

> The thing is for the local uneducated people, as long as you are from outside
> the country or you are from America you are automatically in that boat. It
> comes down to the whole culture thing again. People naturally push people
> into the bubbles whether they want to be in it or not. To them, 'obroni'
> basically mean -- even though it (technically) means white person, it basically
> encapsulates the whole of America because they see white people as making
> up America. You guys is like, the African-Americans here, automatically just
> get thrown into that group and not given a group because the Africans don't
> know what to call you…they kind of look down on their lifestyle and they kind
> of see it as contrary to their culture, something that is not approved or
> respected in society.

Samira, who also grew up in Ghana, said she too was subjected to being called

'Obroni'. "Because I was light skinned, people kept saying Obroni, Obroni, Obroni

and I kept saying, 'no, I am Ghanaian' but it was always a joke…[eventually] I

realized that in some ways, people never really saw me as Ghanaian…I wouldn't say it's [obroni] negative, it definitely isn't, unless somebody intends it in a negative way; but usually, people say it out of [fun]; they laugh when they say it."

In Nigeria, Ruth said that commenting on someone's color is not a big deal. "It's everyday talk…just more like people make fun of you". When reflecting on her own experience she said, "I'm not that light skinned but people will be like 'oh, yellow, yellow, yellow' every once in a while". In her experience, things were more about color than race. "The way they say it is almost like a positive thing. Like it's a good thing I'm yellow; kind of like I should be happy that I'm yellow or something like that."

Salina felt like the language surrounding color/racial differences are taken much more seriously in America than in the DR. "You have to tiptoe around all of these things whereas back home people just say whatever they want to say and people rarely, rarely would get offended…they would just give it right back to you." She felt that while people would feel free to joke about differences, they wouldn't necessarily discriminate against you. "It's not like I'm not going to give you a job or think you're dumb because you're Black. I might joke around because your hair is frizzy or I'll joke around because your nose is bigger than mine, but then you'll make fun of me because I have a pointy nose". Here in the U.S., "that would definitely be seen as that's a racist comment or that's discrimination. But to us [Dominicans], it's like well, we're joking…at least we are open to talk about it".

For Xabi, the racial jokes she was subjected to were geared more towards

Black/African-Americans.  She recalled a situation where a friend told a racial joke in

her presence:

> So like I have a friend…She's actually my best friend.  We grew up since we
> were younger and like her family would say jokes about Black people or stuff
> like that.  I don't know.  It was like a racist joke about Black people.  Then I
> was like, "Oh my God," like I was just like, "Oh my God."  She was like, "Oh
> but, you don't count because you're Dominican."  It was saying like even
> though you're dark-skinned, you're Dominican so you don't count.  I'm just
> like, "Wow!"  I don't know, like it's okay if you're dark-skinned Dominican,
> but it's not okay if you're like an African-American, I guess.

John stated that he would attempt to use jokes once in the U.S. to help

distinguish himself from African-Americans.  "I mean, with my friends…I'd say I'm

not 'Black' and they ask me why? And I'd say because I have a different culture, I

have a different mindset, different thinking. It's like we joke around and we say, 'Oh,

my ancestors were the ones who didn't get on the boat.' We just joke around and stuff

like that but it's an easier way and a more comical way for them to understand what

I'm saying."

**Superordinate Theme #3: Post-College Experience with Race**

> *I really didn't use to pay attention to race as much like I never really thought*
> *about it, but moving here, I am definitely more exposed to the different*
> *opinions about people's race and I never used to be conscious about the fact*
> *that I was Black, but over here for some reason I am…Female Participant in*
> *Focus Group*

The third and final superordinate theme in Chapter 4 captures the essence of

the experiences the participants had after coming to college. The participants stated

that they felt as if race was brought up here much more here in the U.S. than in their

communities at home.  The title of the study is 'Assumed to be Black'.  Their post-

college experiences lead into discussions that focused on three subordinate areas:

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'Black' as Synonymous with African-American, Assumptions of Race, and

Disassociation from Black/African-American.

Throughout the interviews, I heard from a number of participants that they were shocked at how much race is brought up in the U.S. John said, "the issue of race didn't really come up for me until I was in college". Samira also stated, "back home I never really thought about race that much. I think about it more now than I ever had in my lifetime because like it's constantly brought up over here". She felt that perhaps the difference was that since the majority of people in her country of Ghana were 'Black' there was no need to use that when referring to another person. Salina had a similar thought about her post college experience with race:

> …we [people in the DR] don't really think of race as much. We think more of color and that only comes up if you are describing someone. So whenever I see something I wasn't thinking about like, oh, this race did it versus that race, I think that was something that I started to notice more once I moved to [college] and it was more of a discussion topic and it was more everywhere and that's when I started to see things like, 'oh, well, yeah in the series the Black person is always doing this'…That's when I started to notice these things whereas before I wasn't really thinking about them or noticing them…so, I'm like analyzing it more when somebody makes a joke…

In thinking about race more since being in college, some of the participants started to also think about if in fact race is an issue in their home country – and if they were so immersed in it that they didn't notice before. "Now that I think about race more from being here, I'm starting to notice things back home as well", Salina remarked. It begs the question of the impact of being able to reflect on your lived experience from being able to step outside of your regular environment. Ruth mentioned during a focus group meeting that it was in the U.S. where she learned how to better take care of her skin and hair. "To be honest, the way they (women back

home in Nigeria) look at it is like 'oh black, dark, this is like ugly features' and stuff like this".

David recalled having a conversation with a peer who was also from an African country. He believed that it was important to get out of your country in Africa to be able to see how to make improvements. "For you as an African to see where the country is going, you need to leave the country and then come back. Otherwise you will not see what's happening. Like you will not."

For Oscar, it was the "realization of his skin color" compared to that of his family that came after college. He began to question 'race' and specifically ask the question of 'what makes someone biracial'? After meeting two friends who had one white parent and one black parent he asked himself:

> "Is that in my family?" I'm like, "Yes. I do have the black dad and the white mom". But, after everything, we're just Puerto Rican. We're just Puerto Rican, that's it. That's when it comes to the realization that I'm biracial. My father has African roots in there cause he's not only Taino, there's something else in there, and my mom has some European roots in her, so I'm biracial.

The participants' experiences with racial incidents varied. A synopsis of some of those experiences are captured below:

John spoke about an incident with a fellow African peer at a popular location on his campus:

> It's like you go into [the popular area], and if you want to know who the loudest people are you know it's the black people [from the U.S.]. A black international student said he found that quite embarrassing because automatically, because he's of that color and he's in the space at the same time, he will automatically be thrown into that bubble with them…Some people may take it as you're looking down on the black people while other people will look at it as you have a different sense of culture, different sense of ideals, upbringing and stuff like that.

Samira recalled being surprised at how things shifted for her as a mixed race person:

> But when I was moving to the US, I expected being mixed-race to be more common here, and because of that I didn't expect there to be any like really differences, like associations with whether you are mixed-race, because I just kind of assume that it would be more common here.

Ruth remembered an incident during the orientation program when she first arrived:

> Like my freshman year, during [orientation] actually, there was a family from Canada and I was like, oh yeah I am from Nigeria, and her mom was like, 'oh, you poor thing'. She literally like rubbed me on my back and said you poor thing, like she felt so bad for me. And I am like, I have a good life, like that is the reason why I am able to come here...also, like my roommate in freshman year pretty much didn't have anything do with me, because of the fact that I was Black.

Oscar thought back to a conversation he had with a peer about race:

> My senior year, I had a conversation with one of the international students, and she was just saying, "Oh, yes, the U.S. is so caught up in this whole race thing. That's not how it is in Latin America, this, this and that." I'm like, "Really?" If you look at all the international students from Latin countries, you guys are all white-skinned. I don't remember seeing any darker skin Latinos that are straight from South America.

A focus group participant was surprised that African-Americans were also ignorant about African nations:

> Also I found like when I moved here, I found that a lot of African-Americans were more ignorant about Africa than even like Non-Black people, where like in the conversation that I had like -- I was surprised when African-Americans would ask, oh, so you guys live in huts, blah, blah, and I am like, no, you don't know this? But I guess not, because when it comes down to it, like it's all about the school system...

The recollections of the participants showed a variety of experiences regarding race.

It seemed as though some of the same stereotypes they were told about Black/African-

Americans, others had about them such as being poor and/or lacking culture.

> ...every single person, the first question they would ask is, "How did you end up here?" It's like in their minds – they can't believe someone all the way from Africa ends up at [this] University. Then I would begin to explain...Then the ignorant questions come out sometimes..."Oh, so, that means you must have heard of [college] over the internet and stuff, you guys have internet, nice. So how did you get here," stuff like that. (John from Ghana)

For a campus population with so few 'Black' individuals, the participants found that

they were often all lumped together. While the participants wanted to help dispel

myths, they also voiced concern with being the spokespersons for large groups of

people.

> Well, in [college], we have a very small minority population. So, being the
> only color person in class is like almost all my classes, I am the only colored
> person. I don't even think about it anymore because I am used to it. But, when
> certain topics come up, people look to you to have an answer, especially when
> people found out I am African, I was in the Development Studies class and
> everything about Africa, people turn to look at me and I am like, 'I am African
> but I don't know everything and not everything applies to me'. Or if they are
> talking about something that has to do with black people, they would look at
> the black person which is awkward. I've had people ask me if I know how to
> twerk. No, I don't. This is not part of my culture…(Samira from Ghana)

> And so it's a very complex dynamic where yes, you want to portray yourself in
> the best way possible to break all those stereotypes but at the end of the day
> that's a lot of pressure for the -– I wonder for the average White student, who
> is going to [college] when they were going into class or saying their opinion it
> was like, well, yeah their opinion was their opinion and they said whatever was
> on their mind because I don't think those were -– like that they were concerned
> about all these other things that I felt like I had to be concerned with. (Salina
> from Dominican Republic)

It was clear that for the participants it was a juggling act trying to maintain who they

were, add a diverse perspective to the community, while also creating some

boundaries around what they could and wanted to actually represent.

### Subordinate Theme #9: 'Black' as Synonymous with African-American

*If you are African-American you are Black. If you're Black, you are African-American…Participant #2*

*So, with African comes the word 'Black' but in America it is like, everyone is like, if you are Black you must be African-American or something like that… Male participant in focus group*

A major recurring theme was the interchanging of the terms 'Black' and

African-American. For some participants, coming to this realization once at college

was a part of the contradiction for them around race.  Some said they would actually have been ok with the racial label, 'Black' if it wasn't so closely connected to the African-American experience in the U.S.  Ruth felt very strongly against being mislabeled.

> You just assume that every Black person is American…the term 'African-American' is what really kind of offends me other than Black. If I see Black, I would probably most likely tick 'Black' and not be offended by it, but when I see African American (shaking her head to disagree)…The African-American thing is what really, really gets to me, because it's like going to Nigeria and just calling everyone Igbo, when there are three other main languages and sub-languages under those three languages, so you can't just assume that everybody is one thing, you know, like you can't…

David summed up the sentiment for others in the study when he said, "If you're Black, you must be African-American.  That is how it seem like but NO!" Xabi added that people in the Dominican don't like to be called Black.  "When I think of the word 'black' I simply think of African-American…in the Hispanic community I've never heard someone saying I'm a black Hispanic".

John felt that part of the problem with interchanging the terms was that there was an automatic assumption that everyone Black was American.  He continued by saying that no one would even stop to ask, "you would have to tell someone or you would have to open your mouth and your accent would give it off".

The participants spoke to how they saw the differences in the terms.

> Truthfully speaking, I feel like I'm confused about them as well because I feel like people do sometimes use them interchangeably but they shouldn't. And I almost feel like the way that I would think of them is more like black is more based on skin color; whereas, African-American is more rooted to –- like it is supposed to be more rooted to race, specifically, or where you're descendents so I was like –- so I think there's a more distinct –- so African-American I think is a more distinct term but I wouldn't be able to explain it (Salina from DR)

Ruth from Nigeria added a similar point:
…just the fact that like being African American is seen more as a culture, than being a White. You know being a White person, it's just you are White. Your culture will probably be like you are an Italian White or you are a European White. You identify with some different place, that's your culture or you are Irish White or you are just the American White, but being Black – that whole race is almost like a culture; like a tribe almost, you know…
But when it comes to African-American thing, I think that African-American should be a culture under Black. So you can identify as, so let's say we have the checkmark box or something. You have White under White; you have like Italian White, European White all those kind of White. And then under Black you have African-American, you have your Caribbean, you have African. You know, all the different European, all the different types of Black that there is, instead of assuming everyone is just one type.

**Subordinate Theme #10: Assumptions of Race**

*On campus, I think people just assume that I am Black – Participant #2*
*…Just trying to understand what are all these perceptions that people already have before they even know me. It's almost like – creating double the work because you've been robbed of your first impression in that sense – Participant #5 Salina speaking about her experience navigating various academic circles when her racial and with ethnic background was under assumption*

At the heart of this study is the essence of the experience of being assumed something you do not identify with. For the participants, it is the assumption that they are 'Black' both racially and culturally. That assumption goes one step further because in their opinion, the assumption of 'Blackness' in the U.S. also correlates to the African-American experience and the negative stereotypes and baggage that comes along with that racial label.

The participants voiced that they wish they had the opportunity to express and share who they were and not have to deal with labels and stereotypes about who they are. Ruth said people would assume she was from Boston and say things to her like, 'yeah girl, yeah sister' and other "African-American stereotypes". David recalled a peer turning to him and saying, "Yo! What's up man?". He replied, "Yeah. How are

you doing? Why do you talk to me like that? I speak English".  He did not want people

making assumptions about him.  "Don't try to talk to me like there is a different

English for Black people and different English for White people".

Salina always felt like she had to work extra hard to remain above the

misconceptions.

> Yeah, the first impression was whatever stereotypes they got in their minds. So
> all of a sudden I'm not only trying to do the job that I normally would but all
> of a sudden I feel like I also have to overcome all these other stereotypes, like I
> can't just get to the place on time, I need to be there like 10 minutes early.
> [College] where you are that one person that is part of a minority group every
> time you're going to respond now you're speaking about how I'm even going
> to phrase it because all of a sudden my opinion isn't my opinion, my opinion is
> the opinion of thousands of other people that I did interact with or that I didn't
> belong to this group and the -- if somebody was thinking that I was Black in
> this particular case, all of a sudden, I'm supposed to speak about the
> experience of Blacks in the U.S. where I haven't really thought much of as
> Black and I definitely didn't grew up in the U.S. so I'm definitely not qualified
> to be speaking for these people.

Another major factor in the assumption of all Black students as being African-

American was also the juxtaposition of the Black Athlete (this applied particularly to

the male participants).

> Just take girls here for example, let's say you want to get one of these white
> girls. Automatically, you should know it's one of the toughest things to do if
> you are Black here and not an athlete. My friends and I, I'd say, we probably
> make up, there's probably about, say 20, 30 people of color, black people and
> out of them, we are probably the only six non-black people in our year who are
> not athletes. So in that, you keep, might as well just throw it out of the window
> because all these white girls, we believe, just go for the guys who are athletes.
> You can see it. So it's like automatically, you just need to close your mind off
> to it.

For David, he had to, on occasion, deal with the stereotype that he was an athlete:

> The first time when I came, people were asking me was I playing basketball
> but I'm not playing basketball, I'm not [college] athlete and so they're like,
> "You might play football if you don't play basketball."  I was like, "No, I don't
> play any sport.  I played basketball in high school but I don't play basketball

here." Those occur multiple times…One of the person came and said, "Oh, which team at [college] do you play for because I want to come and cheer for you guys." I was like, "I don't play for any teams. What are you talking about?" He's like, "Are you sure you don't?" He literally said, "But you're black". I was like, "What are you talking about?" I wanted to tell him, "Does every black person you see play a sport?" Like common now, be realistic.

**Subordinate Theme #11: Disassociation**
*I would immediately disassociate myself and say I'm African because I was proud of my culture…I would kind of look down on them (African-Americans). You know, which is not right. Because I feel like, even though people in Africa have a much lower standard of living than the black people here, we see ourselves as, even though we have a low standard of living, we're still living an amazing life. Life is easy and breezy. You don't care much about what's going on. But over here, it's like you hear crime, you automatically think of a black person. It's like automatically you don't want to be associated with that group because the way they act. Participant #1*

The participants voiced varying levels of discomfort with being misaligned with the Black/African-American group in the U.S. Understandably, they felt like they could not, and should not, have to represent a group for which they did not share a direct cultural connection or have first hand knowledge about. For some, they believed that Blacks in America collectively had a negative image that Blacks themselves helped to maintain. For others, it was less about the stereotype of Blacks, and more about not wanting to lose a sense of their own identity.

"In the States, the history of Black people is very dark, very violent and very rich in that sense, where that's why it takes a lot of this negative connotation that comes with the word Black" stated a participant in the formal focus group. Fast-forward to today, there is still a widespread belief that there are negative connotations associated with Black/African-Americans. The participants discussed situations where the assumption of their blackness was questioned because of the way they acted or talked. Samira said, "Here, I feel like people could either be referred to as ghetto, or as

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acting black, which for them is like a cultural, I don't know, like the way you talk or

whatever."

David also stated:

> sometimes I hear this thing, you are not being 'Black'. I don't know what that means. I kind of avoid that. I think people here have this mentality of like a Black person should be this way, talk this way, eat this way, and like, I remember someone who was like, well, why don't you talk like a Black person? I said, I don't know what you are talking about right now, because that's not what we have been talking like always…to the world – and not to us individuals – to the world, people think, "Oh, they must be the same"…

Ruth contends that there are certain behaviors that African-Americans exhibit that are

negative and markedly different from Africans.

> I feel like they (African-Americans) just built their own culture, and a lot of it has to do with the fact that society is so White dominated, they kind of built a culture upon that…Africans or people from the Caribbean don't really have that issue…our culture is mainly connected to African culture.

The negative perception of Blacks Americans was so pervasive that one participant

had a friend tell her to be mindful of the friends she kept.

> So, like my freshman year, as you know we all came like made friends with different people, like I never really thought about, oh! I got to make friends with white people, oh! I got to make friends with black people. I was just working and talked to like whoever I related with, you know. And I became close to this one friend and I remember him telling me like, you don't have enough white friends, you are friends with too many black people. And I am like, I am not making a conscious effort, I'm just talking to whoever I want to talk to. And I am like why is that such an issue? He was like, you don't want to be associated with **those people**. You don't want people to think you're ghetto, like with my friends I always have to emphasize that I am not ghetto. I'm like, that's the problem. I actually have like a full blown-out conversation like that's a problem of why do you -- you are part of the problem because you're also assuming that everyone that's black is ghetto. Meanwhile, you don't want people assuming that you are ghetto.

Samira attributed her upbringing with a mixed race family as one of the reasons she

was able to see past the stereotypes of Black/African-Americans.  Other participants

felt strongly about the disassociation that stemmed back to the dilution of their own

ethnic, authentic cultural heritage. "If you accept that identity, it becomes yours", said

one of the participants in the formal focus group study.

> …when I come here people will think, "Oh, you're black, you're African-American." That is like I lose who I am; like I'm not African-American. I'm African, I have this background, I have this, I have this, I have this…Yes, it's a correlation and yes, there are no correlations. So it's complete different entities. For me to be put in one group where I lost the rest of my older background is frustrating. You get emotionally angry, so that's what happens…David

> Someone would be like, "Oh maybe I thought you we're black American." I'm like, "No, I'm different from that. I'm African." I feel like that's how it goes and there's a pride in that. Because we kind of disassociate ourselves, because we feel like the cultures they've adopted are too American and kind of dilute to the true African in them…John

> I definitely don't like it (being referred to as 'Black' in the U.S.). My problem isn't really with being referred to as Black because (pause) I kind of understand like -- I have gotten to understand the way the U.S. society is like; everyone kind of has to be put in some kind of category, like I get that. But I don't get why there has to be negative connotations applied to that – you know? On one hand it's like 'I'm African'; that's kind of what I see myself as. So, if you call me Black and in your mind you are referring to me as African, that's fine. But, if you're placing me in the category of African-American, I don't identify as that. You know, not that I see anything wrong with that (being African-American), but it's just not how I was brought up, because I don't feel like it's part of my culture…Samira

Throughout Chapter 4, the participants shared their views on race from a

variety of vantage points (context and contradiction). At the core of the study, the

researcher hoped to gain an 'insider view' (Smith & Osborn, 2007) of the participants

experience with race as they made sense of it after coming to college. What emerged

was that a number of factors prior to college impacted their current views on race,

specifically the views of what it means to be 'Black' in America. Utilizing the

theoretical frames outlined for the study, the findings from the participant experiences

with race will be explored and implications for further research will be discussed in

Chapter Five.

CHAPTER 5


CONCLUSION


**Summary of the Study**

The purpose of this research study is to examine the lived experiences of

participants who attend(ed) college in the America and for whom their primary way of

self-identifying racially/ethnically is in direct conflict with ascribed racial status

imposed on them in the United States.  The participants self-identified as being from

the African Atlantic Diaspora (countries in Africa, the Caribbean and Americas).  The

racial categorization of 'Black' created a contradiction between the way in which they

identified themselves and the way they are categorized by others.

As the study was phenomenological in scope, the essence of this shared

experience was explored.  Through a series of semi-structured individual interviews,

the participants were encouraged to reflect on their experience with and understanding

of race prior to college and after matriculating to a university. This style of

interviewing allowed for me to probe interesting and important areas as they arose

(Smith and Osborn, 2007).  The individual interviews served as the primary data set.

In addition to those interviews, two focus groups were conducted to allow for

additional insight into the phenomenon of the racial construction of being categorized

as 'Black' in the U.S.

The information collected during the interview process yielded a number of shared thoughts and feelings around race, ethnicity, color and what it means to be 'Black' from the various participants' perspectives. Through a process of extensive thematic coding, several major themes (superordinate) and subthemes (subordinate) emerged and the key findings will be discussed in this chapter. The overarching themes that connected the participants stories were, 'the contextual factors associated with race' and the 'contradictions of being assumed 'Black' in the U.S'.

In the first overarching theme, geographical and social context played a large role in how the participants expressed their insights about the topic of race. Factors such as geographical location of where they grew up, their peers in high school and college, as well as family influences impacted their perception of race. As for the lived contradictions, the participants grappled with the interconnectedness of race, color and ethnicity in the U.S. The definition of 'Black' in America had a different meaning and was, in their opinions, a synonym of being African-American.

**Core Essence of the Phenomenon**

The core essential feature of the phenomenon studied was the assumption of 'Blackness'. In order to get at the core of that assumption, I allowed the participants to share what they felt 'Blackness' encompassed. This required an examination of their definition of 'Black'. The analysis revealed a strong correlation of what is meant by 'Black' in the U.S. and the assumed cultural representation of African-American. Further exploration of the meaning of 'African-American' uncovered a resounding negative image of this group.

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The process of unpacking 'Blackness' for the participants was reached by relying on the initial research questions and sub-questions that were used to frame the study. The primary question and sub-questions and their connected themes can be found in Table 8.

Table 8
*Research Questions and Connected Themes*

| |
|---|
| What is the essence of the experience for students from Africa and the Caribbean who are assumed to be 'Black' in a U.S. context? |
|      o   Contextual factors associated with race |
|      o   Contradiction of being 'Black' in the U.S. |
| Prior to college, what informed the participants' racial/ethnic self-identity? |
|      o   Pre-College experience with race |
|      o   Experience learning about race in school |
|      o   Media influences on the perceptions of race |
|      o   Family influence on race |
| How do the participants racially/ethnically self-identify and how does this differ from how others identify them based on observable physical characteristics, such as skin color and hair type? |
|      o   Identity (race, color, ethnic background) |
|      o   Color and racial categorization |
|      o   Personal identity struggles with appearance |
| What contradictions exist between their racial self-identification and the racial ascription of 'Black/African-American'? |
|      o   Color hierarchy |
|      o   Racial terms/jokes |
|      o   Views of Black/African-Americans |
|      o   'Black' as synonymous with African-American |
| How is their racial identity impacted when they are in predominately white campus settings? |
|      o   Post-College experiences with race |
|      o   Assumptions of race |
|      o   Disassociation from Black/African-American |

The remainder of this chapter will be a discussion of the findings from Chapter 4. In a phenomenological study, the goal is not to manipulate the participant experience, but rather to interpret the core essence of their experience by using scholarly concepts and theories to frame the discussion.

**Discussion of the Findings**

> *Critical race theorists have built on everyday experiences with perspective, viewpoint, and the power of stories and persuasion to come to a deeper understanding of how Americans see race* (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Utilizing a critical race theory lens, I captured the stories of individuals who were attempting to navigate the American racial landscape in a university setting. The participants stated that this study opened up a safe space to talk about the experience they had before college with race and how it changed once they were in college. Outside of their immediate friend groups, they revealed that there were no real opportunities to talk about the assumption of 'Blackness' in a historical, personal and reflective way. Utilizing the superordinate and subordinate themes as a guide, I will connect key findings from the study to the theoretical concepts and frames discussed earlier in Chapter 3.

One of the theoretical frameworks reviewed in Chapter 3 was Critical Race Theory (CRT). Having its early beginnings in race, racism and the law, CRT has expanded to disciplines such as education. Studies in education utilizing a critical race lens tend to focus on such issues as school inequality, testing, and achievement gaps while few deal with the phenomenon of racial identity. The aspect of CRT

summarized by Zamudio et. al, (2011) as described by Brooks (2009) is relevant to this study in that:

> …dominant social messages or master narratives are the central focus of analysis…focus is on the super-structures that are used to justify racism such as ideologies, stories, master narratives (those narratives heard most loudly given that those, mostly whites, in control of the media also control the volume levels), public images, attitudes, Western canon (valued knowledge), hate speech, census categories, quotes, movie dialogue, commercial jingles, song lyrics, snatches of overheard conversations, etc. Stereotyping is a primary mode of promoting ideologies in this regard since it serves to create images and discourses intended to subordinate people of color.

The other theory used to frame the discussion in this study is racial formation.

In their widely referenced text on racial formation in the U.S., scholars Omi and Winant (1994) describe it as:

> …the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed… it is a process of historically situated *projects* in which human bodies and social structures are represented and organized…racial formation is linked to the evolution of hegemony, the way in which society is organized and ruled.

In the aforementioned definition, the term *projects* refer to what they have deemed 'racial projects' which are "interpretations, representations, or explanations of racial dynamics". They assert that racial formation as a theory leads to the facilitation of understanding "contemporary controversies and dilemmas involving race" including but not limited to "the dilemmas of racial identity today" (p. 55-56).

**Superordinate Theme #1: Pre-College experience with race**

*Prior to college, what informed the participants' racial/ethnic self-identity?*

The participants in this study self-reported coming from homogenous environments where conversations of race within their immediate communities were all but non-existent. Most commented that they, "never really thought about race" until college. This new ever-present awareness of race the participants experienced

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can be attributed to a basic tenet of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in that 'race is a central structure in society' in the United States (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012).

The fact that the participants reported that they rarely, if ever, thought about race does not mean that a racial dynamic, albeit different from the U.S., did not exist in their community. Communities of color, even within the U.S., can be sheltered from a daily conversation of race if the vast majority of contact is with others of the same race/ethnic background. In a book chapter on Latino Ethnicity, Darity Jr., W. A., Dietrich, J., & Hamilton, D. (2010) contends, "Latin American understanding and conceptualization of race is dramatically different from that [of others] in the United States" (p. 488).

I went to a predominately white college in Maine and grew up in an urban area of New Jersey, where at the time, more than 80% of my town and high school identified as black. It was not until I went to college where the university, town and state was over 98% white that I was constantly having conversations about my race. I can recall hearing for the first time the terms 'diversity', 'multicultural' and 'student of color'. When I went home on break and used that language, my friends laughed at what they thought were silly words for what was obvious. Their thoughts at the time was, "Why is it necessary to refer to yourself as 'Black' or a 'person of color' – we know what you are". Just because race was not a topic of conversation where I grew up, it didn't mean that the sociological construct of race was not impacting my life before college.

The participants equated the perceived lack of racial conversations before enrolling in college as a sign that there were more racial issues across the United

States than in their home communities or countries of origin.  What is likely to be fact

is that the way in which we see and experience race, particularly our views of what it

means to be 'Black' change over time and geographical location.  "In fact, definitions

of who is black vary quite sharply from country to country and for this reason people

in other countries often express consternation about our definition" (Davis, 1994, p.

13).  Davis (1994) offers the longstanding Census Bureau definition as being, "all

persons with any known black (African) ancestry" (p. 11). This does not account for

the social and cultural attachments associated with what it means to be 'Black' in

America.

A part of the burden expressed by participants with the constant conversation

of race was the discomfort felt from suddenly being one of only a few people of color

in a new environment. To go from being in a place where most people look like you

and not having to explain why you are a 'dark skinned' Dominican, to suddenly being

thrust into an environment where a social system decides your race was disconcerting

for the participants.  These contradictions will continue to be explored in this chapter.

*Subordinate Theme #1: Experience learning about race in school*

The participants represented five different nations and seven different ethnic

backgrounds (ancestral heritage and/or tribal affiliations).   They attended a variety of

schools ranging from local public schools in their communities to international schools

with peers from all over the world.  As such, one would expect that what they learned

about race would be varied.   One thing that they did believe in common was that if a

person is born and raised in a country then they were of that nationality, regardless of

their ethnic ancestry. Here they were distinguishing between national identity and race.

Salina was the one participant who offered a lengthier insight into what she learned about race in school. Her mother is a Social Studies teacher in the Dominican Republic and she had first-hand accounts of learning about race. What she learned was in the context of Spanish colonization in the DR. She mentioned that they did not speak in regards to different ethnicities because "everyone is so mixed". There is a widely held belief in Caribbean nations of Spanish and African lineage that everyone is mixed and preference is for the European Heritage (Ròman and Flores, 2010). This is challenged by Afro-Latin@ scholars who argue in favor of embracing their African ancestry (p.2). The denial of African heritage will be discussed in more depth under Superordinate Theme #2.

Although Salina recalled learning about race in school prior to college, the vast majority of other participants said that what they learned about race in the context of colonialism and slavery was very minimal. Samira remarked that they left out the "gruesome parts" of slavery. The CRT tenet of interest convergence is applicable here because it states that ideas about race and the consequences of racism are designed to advance the interest of whites. In this case, it would not advance the institution of colonial rule (governed by White Europeans) to teach the 'colonized' about the cruelty and power structure associated with the systems of colonization (Memmi, 1965). Tatum (1997) states, "Slavery is a topic that makes many of us uncomfortable. Yet the nature of Black-White race relations in the United States have been forever shaped

by slavery and its social, psychological, and economic legacies.  It requires discussion" (p. 39).

James Loewen (1995), well known for his book, "Lies My Teacher Told Me", would say that students who are not exposed to the truth often are left with half-truths and worse, no historical knowledge of how to shape their current circumstances. Nigerian author Chimamanda Adichie refers to this as the 'danger of the single story'. One could argue that because of the perceived and/or biological African ancestry of each participant, they do share a historical past of the African Atlantic Diaspora.

A contributing factor into how the participants view the world and navigate through it is affected not only by what they learned (or did not learn) but also, what were the lasting effects of colonization was on their country.  One participant stated, "who colonizes you makes a difference".  An example of this is outlined by Davis (1991) in regards to miscegenation patterns in the West Indies.

> …Iberian whites have continuously married lighter mulattoes who have visible African traits, while the Northwest Europeans have married only those who appear white.  One suggestion for the explanation for the difference in the two West Indian patters is that the human physical image idealized by the Iberians is somewhat darker than that of the Northwest Europeans.  Both groups reject the image of the unmixed black (p. 105-106).

Ruth recalled learning about race from a scientific standpoint.  "We had like Negro…curlier hair, darker skin, bigger lips, nose; then we had Caucasian, and we had Mongolian, which is Asian".  She was likely referring to the racial classifications of Caucasoid, Mongoloid and Negroid, which were based mainly on hair form, the shape of the nose and head (Davis, 1991, p. 19).  Those three terms are connected to "the three great races" and also referred to as white, yellow, and black (in that order).  The historical legacy of this grouping of the races fostered a lasting division among the

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groups with 'White' being the most superior and 'Black' being the most inferior

(Fluehr-Lobban, 2006).

The system of racial classification created a hierarchy amongst the purported

races/species.  It was believed that caucasians were the superior race in terms of

genetics and intelligence.  During the history of legal slavery in the Americas, when

African people were referred to as slaves, "racial hierarchy was established by slavery

and other social and political processes" (Race Are We So Different, 2011).  That

notion was further reiterated in laws that stated Africans were property and only 3/5

human (Adams, 2011).

Although it was determined that race is not based in any scientific biological

reality, a remnant of that classification system still exist today. CRT contends that the

social construction of races are "products of social thought and relations…not inherent

or fixed, and they correspond to no biological or genetic reality".  Delgado and

Stefancic (2012) further state, "while people with common origins share certain

physical traits such as skin color, physique and hair texture, those have little to do with

distinctly human, higher order traits such as personality, intelligence, and moral

behavior" (p. 8-9). The belief that race is connected to these traits is reiterated through

stereotypes created and replayed in the media.

### Subordinate Theme #2: Media influence on perceptions of race

The participants all agreed that the media plays a tremendous role in how

individuals view race for themselves and how they perceive race in others.  Media in

this context refers to television, movies, music, advertisements such as billboards and

other forms of dominant social messages that create images designed to subordinate

people of color (Zamudio et al., 2011). For five of the seven participants who grew up outside of the U.S., they described still being inundated with images of what a 'Black' person, particularly in America, represents.

In the participants' home countries and communities in the U.S., ideas of ideal beauty was often marked by images of white or 'fair' skin women. Several years ago, I had the opportunity to travel to Ghana, one of the countries represented in this study. Numerous billboards displayed images of light-skinned women advertising skin-bleaching creams. In a country of predominately Black Africans, it was revelatory for me to see that the notion of lighter is better was a global phenomenon and not just situated in the U.S. The notion that "white beauty is the standard and the ideal" (Hunter, 2007, p. 238) is experienced worldwide. It is important to note, "in many former European colonies, there remains an overt legacy of Eurocentrism and white racism in the culture" (p. 239).

One of the participants in a focus group referred to the media as owning the 'story'. He believes, "the winner always writes the story, the loser will not". By winner, he was referring to the person or group of people who own and produce a positive story of themselves and in turn tell a negative story about all others. In a racial context, there are a multitude of stories about what it means to be 'white' and limited, often single stories of what it means to be 'black' (Adichie, 2009).

Although non-white individuals make up the majority of the population in the world, in many environments occupied by white Europeans, they were the creators of stories that are still maintained well past their colonial rule. CRT refers to this as the master narrative (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The master narrative is a discourse that

situates the white race above all others and is told over and over again. The result is that there are many stories for whites (i.e. lawyer, educated, doctor, janitor, banker, wealthy, trash collector, professor) and a single story for blacks (thugs, drug dealers, poor, gang bangers, lazy) (Adichie, 2009).

*Subordinate Theme #3: Views of Black/African Americans*

By and large, the participants had preconceived notions about Black/African-Americans prior to college. The views were mostly negative and instigated by stories from family members or images in the media. There was an immediate assumption that Black correlated to African-American (this will be further discussed under Subordinate Theme #9). This connection led to such descriptors as loud, ghetto, dangerous and poor. None of the participants said they fully believed the stereotypes, but they all acknowledged having heard them all before.

Several of the participants situated African-Americans as descendants of slaves. That connection alone was not problematic, however, the implication that African-Americans 'forgot their original culture' inferred blame. As David described it the whole shame of slavery left African-Americans as "nobodies". In other words, he believes that in order to maintain your 'true culture' and know who your family and ancestors are, you must be connected directly to Africa. In his assertion, "human fate still rides upon ancestry and appearance" (Haney Lòpez, 1994, p. 164).

It is believed that the ties to African ancestry were severed for African-Americans. He went on to say, "In Africa we have this notion of 'who you are is not you as an individual, it's who came before you". The lack of direct connection to the ancestors leaves African-American's 'devoid of any real connection to the continent of

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Africa'.  African scholar Kwame Gyekye (1996) discusses the "intense and unrelenting reverence of the African people for their forebears" in his book in African cultural values.  "Ancestors are believed to take a keen interest in the moral conduct of the human society and to serve as custodians of the traditional moral order" (p. 161).

The stereotypes of African-Americans as lazy and poor are directly connected to the thought that they do not have African ancestors monitoring their behavior. Samira said that in the eyes of Africans, African-Americans seem to have "less moral values" and that "morality is big in Ghana".  In discussing religious values, Gyekye (1996) states, "for the African people, to do the right thing is primarily a moral obligation".  To that end, the stereotypical activities (sagging pants, provocative music, laziness) of African-Americans exhibit poor behavior and therefore immoral.

There are a number of issues with this general view of African-Americans. First, it does not take into consideration the traumatic experience of slavery and the fact that Africans from different nations and tribes often had to creatively come together to communicate with one another and create some symbolism of home (language, music, religion).  Second, it assumes that all African-Americans are the same and there are no known ancestral connections as a result of the crime of enslavement.  Last but not least, the assumptions are based on negative stereotypes and not facts.

For instance, the Black church in the U.S. has a long history of preserving history and promoting morality amongst the African-American community but was not known (or spoken about) by any of the participants.  Tatum (1997) purports that stereotypes do impact how we see ourselves in relation to other groups.  "In a race-

conscious society, racial group membership has psychological implications. The messages we receive about assumed superiority or inferiority share our perceptions of reality and influence our interactions with others" (p. 94).

*Subordinate Theme #4: Family influence on race*

Family socialization, like education, is a major institution that has an impact on how we see and view the world (Conley, 2011). During the interviews, the participants were much more comfortable talking about race in the context of school and the media than in connection to their family. This was understandable because participants likely didn't want to paint their family in a negative light. Despite their hesitancy, what they shared was still valuable and insightful.

A major topic with the family discussions revolved around the color of the skin. Xabi shared that in her family and community, there is an idea called 'mejorar la raza' which means 'to better the race'. As she described it, it means that you should not marry a black man or anyone who is darker than your own skin color (especially if you are a dark Dominican). Marrying or dating 'white or light' in an effort to 'preserve the race' is a widely held belief across many Latin American and Caribbean cultures (Romàn & Flores, 2012). When a member of the community goes against this belief, they are often ostracized, ridiculed and sometimes disowned by their own family. Oscar shared that his grandfather initially kicked his mother (a white Latina) out of the house for getting pregnant by his father (a black Latino).

In a personal and historical narrative, Marta I. Cruz-Janzen (2012) a self-identified Latinegra of Puerto Rican descent, shares her story of navigating "mejoranda la raza" (improving the race) in the Afro-Latin@ Reader (p. 285). "My

mother had disgraced her family by marrying a Black man…".  These family beliefs have lasting effects on the children who are often in the middle of the color spectrum.

***Subordinate Theme #5: Color hierarchy***

As discussed previously, the participants stated that race was not a major part of their dialogue.  Some noted that the division within their community was more on a color spectrum.  The notion of color hierarchy is known as colorism.  Colorism is the process of discrimination that privileges light-skinned people of color over their dark-skinned counterparts (Hunter, 2007, p. 237).  Dating back hundreds of years to slavery in the U.S., white slave masters were known to grant special treatment to partially white 'mulattos'.  'Mulatto' was originally used to mean the offspring of a 'pure African Negro' and a 'pure white' – while the term is still used [even by those of mixed race] it is generally seen as having a negative connotation today (Davis, 1991, p. 5, 49).  "Light-skinned people received privileges and resources that were otherwise unattainable…" (Hunter, 2007, p. 239).

The belief that a light-skinned person is prettier or more handsome and thus affluent seems to transcend time, space and geography and relates to ideas prevalent in the days of slavery and colonialism.  In present day Africa, two participants stated that people in their home countries believe that the lighter you are the wealthier you are because it likely means you work indoors (and conversely the darker you are means you work in the sun).  This modern day belief is remarkably similar to the notion of the house slave and the field slave.  Colorism has roots in the plantation life of enslaved Africans where mixed race slaves were often allowed to work inside the home avoiding the sun (Hunter, 2007, p. 238).

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**Superordinate Theme #2: Identity (race, color, ethnic background)**

*How do the participants racially/ethnically self-identify and how does this differ from how others identify them based on observable physical characteristics, such as skin color and hair type?*

The way in which a person identifies their race is often taken for granted. There is an assumption that your outward appearance will be an indicator of how you identify racially. The fallacy in this approach is that it does not account for rules of identification outside of an American racial construct. "The salience of particular aspects of our identity varies at different moments in our lives" (Tatum, 1997, p. 20).

For the participants prior to college, the primary way of identifying revolved around nation of origin and/or ethnic affiliation. While many held on to this as their main way of identifying, they quickly had to get acclimated to the racial dynamics at play in the U.S. The participants from Africa talked about the core founding principles that enveloped their identity. Two of those principles were "respect and discipline".

The participants from the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico connected their identity more to their Spanish language. Xabi, even pointed out that Dominican identity is more aligned with their Spanish heritage. "You don't want to be identified as African". Cruz-Janzen (2012) recalled when moving to the U.S., "Latino friends advised me to emphasize my Latinness and to downplay my African traits to avoid being confused with African Americans" (p. 285).

In an effort to preserve their identity as 'affluent Africans' Samira noted that a lot of her peers wanted to simultaneously disprove negative stereotypes about Africans

(live in huts, ride camels, etc.) and prove they were 'better than African-Americans' by over-compensating through the purchase of designer materialistic items that they would never purchase in their home countries. However, as David stated, "to the world you guys are all black".

It makes logical sense that participants would not want to be identified as African-American because that is not their culture. A deeper analysis of this phenomenon, when taken into consideration both race and color, is a denial of 'Blackness' due to the historical, political and social stigma attached to this race. It creates a contradiction because on the one hand 'Blackness' is associated with being truly authentic African and on the other hand, 'Blackness' in the Americas is associated with being backward, ugly, and low status (Hunter, 2007, p. 245). The reality is that:

> …the European powers divided up the world in the heyday of colonialism, assigning power and privilege to the planet's North, and misery and exploitation to its South. With the rule of the Europeans…went a highly flexible and adaptive, but nevertheless inexorable "color code", a system of racial distinctions that was (usually) effective in reinforcing colonial domination (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 49).

### Subordinate Theme #6: Color and racial categorization

The history of racial classification in the U.S. has an impact on self and social identity processes (Tatum, 1997, p. 168). A clear demarcation between race and color becomes blurred for individuals who are not familiar with the rules surrounding racial categorization in the U.S. Although there are commonalities in physical traits among groups of people, biologist and physical anthropologist have proven there is no such thing as a 'pure' race (Tatum, 1997, p. 168). The reason why scholars today assert

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that race is a social construct is because there are societal systems in place that are designed to perpetuate an ongoing process by which a boundary is created between who can and cannot be 'White' (Haney Lòpez, 1994; Tatum, 1997).

Hunter (2007) makes a distinction between race and color. She asserts the following:

> …racial discrimination operates on at least two levels: race and color. The first system of discrimination is the level of racial category (black, Asian, etc.) [where] racism is systemic and has both ideological and material consequences. The second system of discrimination is at the level of skin tone: darker skin or lighter skin. Although all blacks experience discrimination as blacks, the intensity of that discrimination, the frequency, and the outcomes of that discrimination will differ dramatically by skin tone (p. 238).

The background of race and color by Hunter puts into perspective how levels of discrimination can operate on numerous planes. The participants made a clear distinction that 'race' and thus 'racism' did not exist as a form of division in their community prior to college. However, the hierarchy of color does exist and permeates virtually every aspect of the participants' lives (media, school, family influence, etc.). This can be likened to the evolution of hegemony within the theoretical frame of racial formation, which is the way society is organized and ruled. Oftentimes such race and color rules, albeit based in discriminatory practices, are taken as factual parts of everyday life – a basic tenet of CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Racial categorization dates back to the earliest days of colonization in America where, "an identifiable racial order has linked the system of political rule to the racial classification of individuals and groups…historically, a variety of previously racially undefined groups have required categorization to situate them within the prevailing racial order" (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 79, 81).

Specifically, what we refer to as the 'Black' race in the U.S. was categorized as 'Slaves' in the first Census of 1790. "Eventually in the United States, the terms

mulatto, colored, Negro, black and African American all came to mean people with any known black African ancestry" (p. 6). The determining factor in what decides who is 'Black' in the United States came to be known as the one-drop rule.

The one-drop rule states that if a person has a single drop of 'black blood' that makes a person black (Davis, 1991; Omi & Winant, 1994; Tatum, 1997). This unique racial positioning in the U.S. proved to be confusing for the participants in the study. A major part of immersing oneself in a new environment is quickly becoming accustomed to the rules that govern that society. This rule, albeit an American cultural definition, is still upheld today by individuals, society at large, even judges and courts as the primary way of determining who is 'Black' (Davis, 1991).

For Samira, the participant who identified as mixed race because her father is from Ghana and her mother is from the Ukraine, the one-drop rule was most difficult to comprehend. At home in Ghana, people jokingly referred to her as 'Obroni' – the term used to describe a white person. Here in the United States, her 'one-drop' of black blood makes her 'Black'. She stated that it was hard to get used to and as Davis (1991) stated, "is often hard to explain to students from other countries" (p.13). 'Passing' rests on the one-drop rule therefore if there is any record that a person has African ancestry, even if it is barely traceable, they are 'black' in the U.S. This positioning does not follow any line of logic, biological or historical fact (p. 14).

Countless cases have been brought to court, including the supreme court, where individuals challenge a ruling that they are 'colored' or 'black' based on records such as birth certificates even though they navigate through the world as white – a phenomenon in the U.S. known as passing. Samira, based on her skin tone, could not

'pass' for white in the U.S. but she did say that because of the texture of her hair people have asked her if she is Hispanic which proves that a major part of racial categorization is based on how a person looks.  While the one-drop rule still prevails in the U.S., "Nowhere in the Caribbean or Latin America is there a one-drop rule that defines mulattoes of all descriptions, including those who look white, as blacks" (Davis, 1991, p. 106).

In both CRT and racial formation theory, racial categories are created (invented), inhabited, transformed (manipulated), and destroyed (retired when convenient) (Omi & Winant, 1994; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).  While this can be seen by the racializing of various groups over time (Irish, Italian, Jewish and currently Hispanic/Latino), the one-drop rule has remained in place for 'blacks' and has denied many assumed 'blacks' the same fluidity. As it pertains to the one-drop rule, "Americans define no other minority group in a similar way" (Davis, 1991, p. 15). Hispanic/Latinos who primarily speak Spanish can often get exemption to this rule as long as they are not too dark (p. 15).  "In March 2000, the OMB announced that persons who check "white" and any minority race on the census form are to be counted as members of that minority…" (Davis, 1991, p. 5, 198).  However, this ruling would not apply to White Hispanics.

Critical race theorist would contend that the current shift in racial categorization of 'White' Hispanics would fall under differential racialization.  This tenet of CRT maintains that society racializes different minority groups at different times (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 9).   As of the 2000 Census, 'Hispanic/Latino' is no longer considered a racial category in the U.S. but rather an ethnic group.  One

could argue that within the other so-called races, there exist ethnic groups that are not 'racial' groups as well (Haitian, Jamaican, Chinese, Japanese, Irish, Italian, etc.).

Regardless of self-identification, for the participants, the rules surrounding how society believes they should identify is confusing. As previously stated, the participants from Africa identified with their nation of origin and ethnic group (often paternal) and the Caribbean participants self-identified as being 'mixed' (a combination of European Spanish and African – with more homage to their European ancestry). Xabi stated she always thought her race is Hispanic, her ethnicity is Dominican, and her nationality is American (and she is one of the few participants who actually grew up in the U.S.).

Darity et al., (2010), who studied Latino responses to the 1990 U.S. Census, found that, "the evidence is compelling that there is a strong Latino preference for racial self-identification as White, not Black or some intermediate category between the ostensibly dichotomous color poles" (p. 487). Salina, a participant in the study stated that she believes if given the choice, most Dominicans would choose 'White' including her biological sister who has fairer skin than her. "Everybody learns some combination, some version, of the rules of racial classification, and of her own racial identity, often without obvious teaching or conscious inculcation" (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 60).

There are widely held assumptions of racial superiority, where in race (White European) and color (white, light, fair) is idolized. The Latino National Political Survey (LNPS) revealed this phenomenon in a study of self-identification and identification based on phenotype.

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Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban ancestry respondents answered an open-ended question about race. Interviewers also "graded" respondents on their skin shade on a five-point Likert-type scale; an individual would be graded as "very light", "light", "medium", "dark", or "very dark"…More than 30 percent of the 454 dark and very dark respondents said their race was "White" as did more than half of the 957 medium-complexioned interviewees…among Cubans over 90 percent of the 140 persons graded as having a medium skin tone said they were "White". Overall, about 70 percent of all respondents said that their race was "White"; virtually none of the interviewees graded as light or very light claimed their race was "Black (Darity et al., 2010, p. 494).

"Race as a socially designed identity can be established by self-classification (own classification) or by social classification (classification). In both cases, an individual's phenotype may play a role in the process of categorization" (p. 494). What this study revealed is what Salina purported, that a large majority of Latino/a people deny their African heritage. The participants and scholars attribute this partly to a desire to achieve wealth and status that is linked to being of European descent. It is perceived and documented that those in the U.S. who identify as Black Hispanic have lower socioeconomic status than those Hispanics who identify as White Hispanic (Logan, 2012).

As long as society provides the categories for the identification of individuals and groups, there will always be a divide between who is 'White', who thinks they are 'White' and who can never be 'White'. The maintenance of this system is known as the black/white binary (Omi & Winant, 1994; Fluehr-Lobban, 2006). What this means for the participants is that in interacting with the vast majority of people who subscribe to the racial classification system maintained over time in the U.S., based on their phenotype (skin color and hair type), they will be considered 'Black'. "It may well be a long time, perhaps decades, before both blacks and whites generally can put aside

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the culturally ingrained rule that all persons with any black ancestry are black and

nothing else" (Davis, 1991, p. 199).

### *Subordinate Theme #7: Personal identity struggles with appearance*

As evidenced by the contradictions that are created by social constructs that

surround race, the images we are made to believe are beautiful and the discourse on

who gets to be 'White' in the U.S., it is understandable that some of the participants

would struggle with their racial identity. The global standard of beauty that has been

maintained is that of a phenotypic 'White' person. Additionally, positive attributes

such as wealth, education and success are also associated with that race. It would

make sense then that people would, consciously and unconsciously, deny their

'Blackness' in an effort to align themselves with the stature afforded one who

maintains 'Whiteness'.

> Ronald Hall (1994, 1995, 1997) suggests that 'the bleaching syndrome', the internalization of a white aesthetic ideal, is the result of the historic legacy of slavery and colonialism around the globe. He argues that many African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans have internalized the colonial and slavery value systems and learned to valorize light skin tones and Anglo facial features…this deeply rooted cultural value is understood as a cause of psychological distress and socioeconomic stratification (Hunter, 2007, p. 239).

It is hard to 'maintain' whiteness, certainly when you do not look white, and

when the rules of who can be white are not self-subscribed. Xabi had a hard time even

admitting that she once had a thought of wanting to be white. While an admission of

this would not strip her of her Dominican status or pride, it would reveal a personal

preference for the belief that 'white' is somehow better. Blackness can represent

everything Hispanics in the U.S. do not want to be (Cruz-Janzen, 2012, p. 286). This

statement is supported by Xabi's experience navigating various spaces in the U.S.

where people think they have an image of what a Hispanic looks like and she "does not fit that description".

Samira added an interesting dynamic to the dialogue around personal identity struggles. While light and white are considerably favorable attributes in her home country of Ghana, there is also a stigma attached to being mixed race. There is a belief that mixed race females are mischievous and/or rebellious. Hunter (2007) contends that although economic and social advantages of light skin are clear, "light skin may be viewed as a disadvantage with regard to ethnic legitimacy or authenticity" (p. 244).

One could also surmise from everything we have learned so far, that a form of jealousy could have developed over time between unmixed black Africans and those of mixed race due to the special treatment allotted to the offspring of White slave owners and the African slave women they often raped. During a trip to one of the slave castles in Ghana, I recall the historian giving the tour stating that on the immediate outskirts of where the castle was situated, there was a community of 'mixed race' individuals who had been given reign over the surrounding area by the European colonizers. This would certainly set-up a contentious relationship between those two groups as was intended in the design of colonial domination – divide and conquer.

Hunter (2007) argues that the U.S is complicit in maintaining this structure of domination and racial divide by "exporting of cultural images, including images of race that promote visions of the good life, of white beauty, white affluence, white heroes, and brown and black entertainers/criminals" (p.247). Oscar's comment that he

wanted to be "white so bad but didn't want to be white" is a direct reflection of his desire to attain what he believed to be "the good life" (white affluence and materialism) without giving up is cultural heritage. In another part of the study, Oscar also mentioned that being a dark-skinned Puerto Rican was associated with being 'ugly'.

Research studies looking at race and the attributes associated with race have long proven that even non-white people buy into the perception that white is better at an early age. One of the most notable tests was The Clark Doll Test in 1939 where children between the ages of six and nine were given a white doll and a black doll and then asked a series of questions. Not surprisingly, a number of children associated negative attributes with the black doll and positive attributes with the white doll. This experiment has been repeated many times over the past few decades and the results continue to show that for a subset of individuals, even children, the notion of being white carries with it beauty and superiority where black represents ugliness and inferiority (Hunter, 2007, p. 238).

### Subordinate Theme #8: Racial terms/jokes

Although the participants continued to maintain throughout the study that 'race' did not have much relevance in the home environment, they all gave examples of word(s) used to describe someone from another race. The fact that there are actual terms within their language to represent a person by race, (i.e. white, black) is evidence that race exist on some level, even if the translated meanings are different from that of American definitions.

In addition to racial terms, the participants noted that racial or color jokes are accepted in their culture. Salina stated she had to get used to the political correctness of general conversation and joking styles that exist in the U.S. The one thing that the participants did not articulate was the impact of such jokes in perpetuating stereotypes of Black inferiority discussed prior in this chapter.

Cruz-Janzen (2012) believes 'Latinegras', a term she uses to self-describe being a dark skin Latina, could represent the "darkest negras, morenas, and prietas, the brown and golden cholas and mulatas, and the wheat-colored trigueñas…the Spanish-looking criollas, and the pardas and zambas who carry indigenous blood" all represent "the mirrors that most Latinos would like to shatter because they reflect the Blackness that Latinos don't want to see in themselves" (p. 282). In fact, if a remnant of European colonization situated whites as superior and this dominant paradigm was spread across the African Atlantic Diaspora, then the continued use of degrading racial terms and racial jokes would only serve to maintain the master narrative.


**Superordinate Theme #3: Post-College experiences with race**

*What contradictions exist between their racial self-identification and the racial ascription of 'Black/African-American'?*
*How is their racial identity impacted when they are in predominately white campus settings?*

College is a time of exploration both in terms of academic pursuits and identity development. "Constructing our identities is a complex process for all of us, but for some it is more complicated than others" (Tatum, 1997, p.167). For the participants, their experience in college was not only about obtaining a degree, but also navigating an unfamiliar racial landscape. The identity formation they experience is marked by

social, cultural, and historical context (p. 19). In unfolding the complexity of identity formation, Tatum (1997) references psychoanalytic theorist Erik Erikson, who coined the phrase 'identity crisis'. In her book she states of Erikson:

> In psychological terms, identity formation employs a process of simultaneous reflection and observation, a process taking place on all levels of mental functioning, by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves and to a typology significant to them; while he judges their way of judging him in the light of how he perceives himself in comparison to them and to types that have become relevant to him (p. 19).

While I agree with Tatum and Erikson, what I would like to add to the scholarship of race, color, and national identity is the notion of 'cultural humility'. Cultural humility takes the psychological formula of identity formation and adds a key element: recognition of the impact of the European colonial narrative. Cheng (2007) defines cultural humility as "the learned and acquired experiences with multicultural encounters that embody the principles of life-long commitment to reflection, self-evaluation, and self-critique, while admitting limits to one's knowledge and being teachable".

For the participants, college was the first time they were constantly immersed in multicultural/multiracial situations. They rarely had to unpack what the notion of 'Blackness' meant across the African Atlantic Diaspora before coming to college. Once they were in a U.S. institution where the individuals and policies forced them to think about it, the limited knowledge of 'Black' outside of their own experiences was marked by a stereotypical view of all African-Americans.

College and universities desire to 'diversify' their campuses is resulting in a myriad of people from different racial, ethnic, social, national, socioeconomic, and

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religious backgrounds studying together. This noble effort does not in and of itself eradicate the belief systems around race. What can instead happen is a recreation of century old race rules (and stereotypes about race). Omi and Winant (1994) would offer racial formation theory as a tangible way to facilitate an understanding of "contemporary controversies and dilemmas involving race" (p. 55).

The participants noted that their post college experience with race was marked by a number of assumptions about who they were and what they represent. Some found themselves being embarrassed by their African-American peers yet constantly lumped into the same group as them. Others noted surprise that it was their African American peers who held on to stereotypical beliefs about them (Africans live in huts, Latinos were all light with straight black hair). This important finding shows that both groups lack factual knowledge of one another and their information is from sources that only provide one limited view which often equates to Black/Dark on a global scale equating to savage, poor, and lacking civility (Hunter, 2007).

All of the contradictory experiences the participants face once in college are compounded when they are in situations where they are the 'only one' (only perceived 'Black' person in a class or group). I could relate whole-heartedly with the participants having myself attended a college where I was often the only 'Black' female in courses, on committees, and in the residence hall. The difference for me is that I identify as Black and although I never wanted to represent the entire race, I could offer my personal experience of what it was like to be Black in Maine. It is more complicated for the participants when they are not culturally 'Black American' and expected to represent a group for which they have no cultural frame of reference.

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***Subordinate Theme #9: 'Black' as synonymous with African-American***

A major point of frustration for the participants was the fluidity in which the terms 'Black' and 'African-American' are interchanged in the U.S. While 'Black' was not a term that the Caribbean participants in the study embraced prior to college, the African participants were not shocked by the term. In a study of African American and African racial identity, Phinney and Onwughalu (1996) assert that African students have grown up in environments were notion of 'Blackness' are the norm. There is no need to discuss being 'Black' because it is a fixture in society. For the Caribbean students, "Black Latinos in the United States find themselves identified as African Americans by both Whites and Latinos" (Cruz-Janzen, 2012, p. 286).

The participants were all deeply troubled by the assumption that if you are Black in the U.S. you are automatically African-American. "Using the one-drop rule to define persons with any black ancestry as blacks clearly assigns them to the social status occupied by blacks" (Davis, 1991, p. 82). What Davis is explaining is that by virtue of maintaining the one-drop rule system in the U.S., we are also assigning a multitude of ethnicities under the umbrella of 'Black' the social status of African-American. In the United States, that status has a negative meaning attached to it (as discussed earlier in this chapter).

"Blacks" in ethnic terms are as diverse as "whites". A part of why Omi and Winant (1994) suggest ethnicity theory is not expansive enough to cover all of the nuances of race is because, "ethnicity theory isn't very interested in ethnicity among blacks" (p. 22). Davis (1991) further states, "the immediate effect of using the African American label is simply to substitute it for "black" as a designation of both racial

classification and ethnic group identity (p. 186). Scholars have noted that as long as 'black' is defined in terms of the one-drop rule and social hierarchy, it will be a long time before individuals within various ethnic groups embrace that term (Davis, 1991; Romàn & Flores, 2012; Cruz-Janzen, 2012).

### *Subordinate Theme #10: Assumptions of race*

Closely connected to the use of 'Black' and African-American interchangeably is the assumption of race. Participants voiced their frustration with the assumptions about their race based on their skin color and hair type. "In the United States, Blacks are usually identified as African-American" (Cruz-Janzen, 2012, p. 286). As this is done regularly, the word 'Black' becomes coded language for African-American. Salina eloquently summed it up that because of this racial assumption one is "robbed of your first impression".

The participants were all very proud of their ethnic backgrounds and felt 'cheated' that they were assumed 'Black American' – which for them took away from their ability to tell their own story. CRT contends that creating counter-narratives where the 'voice-of-color' presumably is the main storyteller is one way to combat the master narrative. In this case, the individual from the non-dominant group brings a competence to speak about race (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 10).

The only issue in this model is if the person providing the counter-narrative subscribes to internalized beliefs of black inferiority for their own ethnic group or that of any other 'black' ethnic group it could be problematic because they too could be helping to promote the single-story of what it means to be 'Black'. This does not mean that participants should not be the sole author of their own stories – it just means

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that a level of introspection and admittance to bias (cultural humility) would be applied against the backdrop of the dominant social messages we receive about ourselves and others. Cruz-Janzen (2012) was able to get to this place where she states, "Today, I affirm proudly that I am a Latinegra whose African ancestors were brutally extracted from a distant place and time and experienced historical realities no African who stayed behind could have ever fathomed" (p. 288).

### *Subordinate Theme #11: Disassociation from Black/African-American*

The last subordinate theme in the study revolves around disassociation. It is not surprisingly since leading up to this point, the participants described a number of negative beliefs of what it meant to be 'African-American'. As stated previously, it makes sense that the participants would not want to be falsely identified as African-American because that is not their cultural heritage. What this study uncovered was some of the reasons why this disassociation was so critical. It is marred by a belief that 'Black/African-Americans' are 'nobodies', exhibit behavior that is deemed immoral, devoid of any real cultural connection to their ancestral Africa, often dangerous, lazy, ghetto, poor, loud, and uneducated (as described by the participants throughout the study in regards to what they learned at home, in school, and in the media). "A racialized social structure shapes racial experience and conditions meaning…We utilize race to provide clues about *who* a person is" (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 59).

A way in which participants stated their peers would try and disassociate is to create an appearance that they were on a higher socioeconomic level than African-Americans (as discussed previously). They also wanted to make a distinction in the

way they talked and 'behaved' as different, perhaps more refined, than their African-American peers. "Our very ways of talking, walking, eating, and dreaming become racially coded simply because we live in a society where racial awareness is so pervasive" (p. 60). This very notion perpetuates the myth that all African-Americans are the same and one must act a certain way to even be perceived as 'black'.

In closing the discussion on the thematic analysis of the study, it goes without saying that race is a complex entity that has deep historical, political and societal connections to its meanings. As the researcher in a phenomenological study, my role was not to assert my opinions about race during the interviews, but rather elicit a deep, thorough response from each participant that would shed some light on the essence of their experiences of being categorized as 'Black' in the U.S. Of course the goal of Chapter 5 was not to judge those responses, but rather analyze them using critical race theory and racial formation theory as well as the leading text and articles written to provide a meaningful historical and present day context to the notion of who is 'Black' in the U.S.

**Researcher Reflection**

At the onset of this research, I had no idea the impact it would have on me personally and professionally. First and foremost, I was honored that the participants would share their stories of race with me mainly for two reasons: 1) While race is a visible construct, it is also very personal. The participants had to trust me with private stories of how they navigate race and 2) they all knew that I personally self-identify as Black/African-American but it did not stop them from being open and honest

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regarding the narratives they had previously heard, and perhaps believed about my group.

As I poured through the transcript data and begin to see their stories emerge and come together I was both elated and saddened. My delight was in knowing that they finally had a place to share their story. At the end of many of the interviews, the participants remarked how good it felt to talk freely about race and welcomed the opportunity to continue the conversations. Conversely, what troubled me was not their personal stories, for they were a beautiful tapestry of ethnic pride, language, and nationality. Rather, the collective ideology and messages they received that somehow the darker 'Black' you are the least desirable you become. Also, the widely held belief in communities of color across the African Atlantic Diaspora that African-Americans are the 'throw-aways' who lack culture and context because of the legacy of slavery and continued white Western supremacy in the United States.

For all of my post-secondary and professional life I have been in predominately white settings where stereotypical notions of what it means to be 'Black' and daily microaggressions became commonplace. Those experiences prepared me for the participants' commentary on the 'plight' of African-Americans. Although theoretically prepared, I still had to stop and take pause several times during the analysis phase to just mentally comprehend how insidious and divisive the construct of race truly is.

These natural feelings of both sadness and joy were not impediments to my fulfilling my obligations as a critical race phenomenologist. I think I became a phenomenologist back during my undergraduate years of college. If you would have

asked me then, I would not have been able to spell or define phenomenology.  I just quickly learned that I had a desire to make sense of others making sense of the world.

For instance, during a day trip to go blueberry picking in Northern Maine, a little girl asked me if I was a slave.  My first reaction was not to get angry but rather to engage in a dialogue with her about what past and present messages informed her belief around what it meant to be a slave and more importantly what was the essence of her experience interacting with black people prior to meeting me.  As the sun beat down on us and we bent down low to retrieve blueberries and empty our hand-held racks into what felt like a bottomless 5-gallon bucket, we laughed and talked and I learned a lot about what was going on in her 9-year-old life.  By the end of the day, she begged her mother to come home with me – a testament to what I believe was my ability to make her feel comfortable talking about a very uncomfortable subject.

Since that experience over 12 years ago and many more like it since then, I envision a space where we can unpack what we learned about one another in an effort to truly heal the hurts of the past.  I will be using the foundation of cultural humility to enact this change and combat the all too prevalent "images and discourses intended to subordinate people of color".  Helping individuals engage in multicultural and cross-national dialogue from a historical and self-reflective lens while admitting our learned biases will continue to be my life's work – both personally and professionally.

**Implications**

As one of the few (I would argue) Administrators positioned within the field of international affairs who is taking an in-depth look at the impact of racial constructs in the U.S. on the influx international students, particularly of African and Caribbean

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descents, I would say this topic will continue to have great implications for future work.

### *Higher Education*

As institutions continue to enroll students as record numbers from a multitude of different racial, ethnic and national backgrounds, the campuses are going to have to play a role in creating a space for students to share their stories. The university will have to contend with how they will help break the cycle of single story myths about the black race particularly as more and more students identify as biracial and multiracial but continue to be categorized by their minority status.

Through curricular and co-curricular initiatives, colleges must examine what they are doing to combat oppressive systems, evaluate their own policies and practices to see if they are implicit in maintaining these systems and to what degree. They must come up with creative solutions on how to dismantle these systems. If students are leaving institutions the same way they came (as it pertains to race relations and racial understanding), we must ask ourselves if we are doing them any justice.

Within the higher education arena, more synergy between international and multicultural affairs will become imperative. Schools across the nation are moving away from single and collective affinity group cultural centers (Black Cultural Center, Hispanic Cultural Center, Multicultural Center) to centers where underrepresented groups from both domestic and cross-national backgrounds are under one roof (Intercultural Center). This model can only work if the institutional priorities, resources and strategic planning goals do not make all things 'international' exotic at

the expense of domestic minorities.  There are commonalities these groups share and very distinct differences that should be celebrated and explored.

### *Students*

The implications for students are predicated on the institutions they attend.  If their institution is working to provide opportunities through the courses and co-curricular programs to engage in a dialogue about racial differences, then students need to take full advantage.  If, however, they are in a place where race is rarely if ever addressed, they should assert their rights as students to gain the skills necessary to live and work in an increasingly multiracial and multicultural society.  Often times students do not realize the benefit of healthy activism.  In this context, I am referring to a group of students collectively coming together in a peaceful manner using data and other means of tangible evidence to present to college administrators their desire to make a change that would positively benefit the campus community.

### *Cross-National Relations (African Atlantic Diaspora)*

The findings in this study have huge implications with how individuals from countries in Africa and the Americas engage in dialogue about race.  As evidenced by the literature on the lasting effect of slavery and colonial rule, many people in colonized countries have a distorted image of 'Black' and a stereotypical image of what it means to be African and African American.  One of the reasons why I wanted to do this study was because of a number of things I experienced while in Ghana.

In one meeting with Ghanaian college students, we were discussing the desire for some African-Americans to come to Ghana and other African nations and finally feel like they are 'home' where the majority of people look like them vs. the desire of

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some Africans to seek out the many opportunities in the U.S. which would lead to social mobility and success. I will never forget the words one young man stated in an attempt to describe the deep desire to have access to opportunities in America. "If there was a ship in the middle of campus (University of Ghana – Legon) that read, 'Slave Ship to America' it would be overflowing with people". This one statement captures the essence of this study in so many ways but most prominently in that 1) There is no collective understanding of the brutality of slavery and the impact on Africans across the diaspora; 2) There is no discourse on racial oppression to accompany the myth of meritocracy in the U.S.; and more subtly 3) African-Americans are the ones that got 'out' and are squandering there opportunities (this sentiment was raised in the same conversation).

In looking at the racial divide between Haiti and the Dominican Republic and the treatment of Brazilians of African descent, an approach to the conversation of what it means to be 'Black' similar to the one in this study could help heal racial divides that have plagued those of African descent for decades.

### Racial Categorization in the U.S.

Race as an institution has been legally operating since the first U.S. Census in 1790. There is little doubt that this study will serve to change how the U.S. government views race and categorizing individuals. However, the implication of this research is that it could serve to educate people about the fluidity of race and help them to stay abreast of the shifts in racial categories. Throughout my time during this research, most people I asked had little knowledge of racial categories and how they are designed, who maintains them and how they are used. My hope is that through

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further studies, a collective conversation can shift the negative connotation associated with being 'Black' and a recognition that within the black community there are a number of vibrant ethnic groups that deserve to be acknowledged.

**Limitations**

As in any qualitative research study with a small sample size, this cannot be generalized to a large group of Diaspora Africans. However, the personal account of each individual in the study sheds light on an assumption that has plagued our communities for centuries – white is better than black. For this study, it was appropriate to have a small sample size.

Another limitation was having participants from both African and the Caribbean. Although it helped create a collective story for the essence of their experience, there were some instances where their stories did not converge. Also, there was a dearth of literature on the experiences of African and Caribbean students studying in the U.S. While it was a limitation, it also supported the importance of this study.

The scope of the study was limited to one institution. This limited the comparison across other college campuses, both public and private, to see if campus climate is a factor in why the participants experience race the way they did. For the purposes of this study, it was helpful to have the participants from one small campus because they were comfortable speaking about race in the focus group discussions. This could have had different results if they were asked to speak personally about race in front of complete strangers.

Finally, the study relied solely on the participant recollection of and experience with race. Opponents of CRT would argue that this is a limitation because in their estimation, storytelling is not a scholarly research tool. Critical race theorist have worked hard to reverse this belief by continuing to position counter-narratives as the only way in which researchers can ascertain the lived experience of its participants.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

At the conclusion of this research, several areas of further study became evident. First, a study that involved the experiences of just African students or just Caribbean students would add to the scholarship. In international affairs and higher education in general, neither of these groups are adequately researched. The majority of research on international students is on those of European and Asian descent. Despite the lower percentage of African and Caribbean students that study in the U.S., it is important for us to understand their experience through their own personal lens and not through the generalized classification of 'international students and/or non-resident alien'.

Alternatively, a comparative research study can be done within and between groups of students from Africa and the Caribbean. For instance, Africa is often lumped together as if it is one country when in fact there are 54 individual nations and many facets to the continental African experience. Similarly, those of mixed heritage in the Caribbean also have distinct experiences based on the country they are from. Thus, a study can be done comparing the racial experiences of participants from various African countries, comparing the racial experiences of participants from

various Caribbean countries and/or a study comparing the racial experiences of participants from Africa to those of participants from the Caribbean/Americas.

Given the rich history and culture involved in a study on race, an ethnographic study would lend itself to really navigating the racial landscape with the participants. A study of this nature may include deep observation in the field (attending class with students, visiting the dining hall and dorm room) and even accompanying participants home during a winter or summer break. In the same way, a case study could be done with one person to gain a deep insight on their identity development around race.

Last but not least, a study focusing solely on the Census categories has a multitude of possibilities. One could look at the changes in the census categories and what impact it has on a certain demographic over time. Another study could entail an in-depth exploration of racial categorization and the impact on college admissions.

**Conclusion**

The results of this study will have implications for research in the field of education on racial identity within and among groups. It will explore how individuals from what is broadly known as the African Diaspora come to understand themselves in respect to others and how that affects our educational institutions. "Navigating between the long term-staying power of white privilege and the multifarious manifestations of the experience of whiteness remains the task of the next era of research on racial and ethnic identity" (McDermott and Samson, 2005, p. 256).

With tools such as critical race theory and racial formation theory, the foundation has been set for new ways to research and explore race in education. This includes a shift from the typical studies that focus on achievement, testing, and

acculturation to focusing on studies that will challenge the dominant social messages and master narratives around race (Zamudio et al., 2011). The participants in this study proved that well before their matriculation into college, they received messages about race. It will be ill advised to ignore those messages and continue to foster environments that scholar Trisha Rose called, "experiential segregation". The connection between constitutional, moral, political, historical, and emotional legacy of all forms of slavery and colonial rule are worthy of consideration in linking the people throughout the African Atlantic Diaspora (Rose, 2014).

APPENDICES

**Appendix A**

Letter of Recruitment

Doctoral Research Study

My name is Shontay Delalue King and I am a doctoral student in Education through a joint program of Rhode Island College and the University of Rhode Island. I am conducting a research study for my dissertation entitled: "Assumed to be "Black": A critical examination of being ascribed a racial status on a predominately white college campus".

The goal of my research is to explore and understand the experiences of students who study or have studied at predominately white college campuses and for whom their primary way of self-identifying racially/ethnically is in contradiction with their institutionally based ascribed racial categorizations (U.S. Census Racial Categories). The study is designed to explore the racial misidentifications that arise for students with family origins throughout Africa and the African Atlantic Diaspora – specifically those individuals who are perceived to be "Black" (in the U.S.) based on phenotype (skin color and hair type). Through an interview process, I will ask questions that will examine the conflicts that arise from self-identifying one way and the lived experience of being identified by others in another way.

The current official **racial** categories in the U.S. are White, Black, Asian, American Indian and Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander. (It is important to note that as of the last U.S. Census in 2010, 'Hispanic/Latino' is no longer referred to as a racial category but an ethnicity). This study will focus on being ascribed the racial categorization of "Black" based on skin color and hair type although the participant self-identifies in some other way, such as Hispanic/Latino (Dominican, Puerto Rican, etc.) or African (Ghanaian, Nigerian, etc.). The definition of race and ethnicity within a U.S. context are as follows:

The term race refers to groups of people who have differences and similarities in biological traits deemed by society to be socially significant, meaning that people treat other people differently because of them.

Ethnicity refers to shared cultural practices, perspectives, and distinctions that set apart one group of people from another. That is, ethnicity is a shared cultural heritage. The most common characteristics distinguishing various ethnic groups are ancestry, a sense of history, language, religion, and forms of dress.

*Race and Ethnicity Defined*. 9 Mar 2013

http://www.cliffsnotes.com/study_guide/topicArticleId-26957,articleId-26884.html


If you meet the criteria, I hope you will consider being a part of this study.  A consent form detailing the study will be reviewed with you should you accept the invitation to participate.  For more information, please contact Shontay Delalue King at 401-450-1060 or shakeea78@yahoo.com.

# CONSENT DOCUMENT
# Rhode Island College

**Assumed to be Black: A critical examination of being ascribed a racial status on a predominately white college campus**

You are being asked to participate in a research study about being ascribed the racial status of "Black". Ascribed racial status is a racial status that is given to you that you do not necessarily identify or agree with. You agreed to be a part of this study as a potential participant because you fit the description of looking (phenotype) "Black" but not self-identifying as Black. For the purposed of this study, phenotype is based primarily on skin color and hair type. Please review this form and ask any questions that you may have before deciding whether to be in the study.

Shontay Delalue King, a doctoral student in Education at Rhode Island College, is conducting this study.

## Background Information
The purpose of this research is to investigate the experience of students who have or are currently studying at a predominately white college or university and who are assumed to be Black (based on phenotype and U.S. racial categorizations) but do not self-identify as being Black. The participants will be from a country in Africa or have family roots throughout the Africa Atlantic Diaspora.

For this study, 'assumed to be Black' refers to any assumptions made about you (the participant) based on your physical features such as skin color and hair type. These assumptions could be either verbal or written as it pertains to your race (i.e. being asked to give your perspective as a 'Black' student in class when you do not personally identify as racially being Black).

Through an interview process and possible focus group including other participants, the researcher hopes to understand the contradictions that arise from racial misidentification. Based upon your lived experience, the researcher hopes to capture from each participant your own racial identity perceptions and how you cope with having an ascribed racial status.

## Procedures
If you choose to be a participant in this research, you will be asked to do the following things:
- Share your personal demographic information including racial and ethnic make-up
- Share your personal contact information including name, address, e-mail address and phone number – these will not be made public or published in the study
- Participate in three 90-minute interviews over no more than a 1-month period and later possibly participate in a focus group with other participants in the study
- During the interview process, a hand-held audio recording device will be used. It is the researcher's ultimate goal to accurately capture your lived experience in your own words

## Risks of Being in the Study
The risks of participating in this research should be minimal. You will be asked questions in the following three broad areas: Life history, contemporary experience and reflection on the meaning of

the experience of being ascribed a racial status you do not identify with.  The study has been designed to elicit your true, unaltered interpretations of your experiences and thus will not be any different from what you experience on a daily basis.


**Benefits to You**

There are no obvious direct benefits to you for participating in the study, but indirect benefits of reflecting and sharing your personal experience may have a beneficial result.

**Voluntary Participation**

Your participation is completely voluntary. It is not required by your current university, your alma mater or your current employer.  Naturally, you can choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time during the course of this research and it will have no effect on your grades or employment.  While participation is voluntary, there is an incentive for your time ($30 gift card for completion of the entire study).

If the participant decides to leave the study at any point, the incentive will be prorated as follows:

Leave during or after the first interview but before the second interview: $5 gift card

Leave during the second interview but before third interview: $10 gift card

Leave during the third interview: $15 gift card

Complete all interviews: $30 gift card


Gift card type is at the discretion of the researcher.  All gift cards will be provided to the participant within one week of the final interaction with the researcher regarding the study.

**At any point in the interview process, participants should feel free to stop responding to questions and/or withdraw from the study.**


**Confidentiality**

The records of this research will be kept private.  In any sort of report that might be published, the researcher will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you unless you choose to be identified.  Research records will be kept in a secured file, and access will be limited to the researcher. If there are problems with the study, the research records may be viewed by the Rhode Island College review board responsible for protecting human participants and other government agencies that protect human participants in research. All data will be kept for a minimum of three years, after which it will be destroyed.

## Contacts and Questions

The researcher conducting this study is Shontay Delalue King.  You may ask any questions you have now.  If you have any questions later, you may contact her at 401-450-1060 or shakeea78@yahoo.com.  You may also contact her doctoral major professor, Dr. Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban at cfluehr@ric.edu or 401-467-2857.

If you think you were treated unfairly or would like to talk to someone other than the researcher about your rights or safety as a research participant, please contact Dr. Christine Marco, Chair of the Rhode Island College Institutional Review Board at IRB@ric.edu, or by phone at 401-456-8598, or by writing to Dr. Christine Marco, Chair IRB; c/o Department of Psychology, Horace Mann Hall 311; Rhode Island College; 600 Mount Pleasant Avenue; Providence, RI 02908.

You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

**Individual Interviews Question Guide**

**History:**

Where are you from?

What languages do you speak other than English?

Describe your family

Describe your neighborhood?

How does your family identify?

How is race viewed in your family, neighborhood and country?

What did you learn about your race/ethnicity in school?

What did you learn specifically about the Black race in the US?

For the latter two questions, did you believe what you were taught if so why or why

not?

Why did you choose to come to the US to study?


**Current Experience:**
How did you answer the racial/ethnic identification question on the university

demographic form?

What do you know about the changes in the U.S. census racial categories?

What do you know about how a persons race is determined in the U.S.?

Before college, how did you identify and how is it different or the same to how you

currently identify racially/ethnically?

What events/transformative moments in college do you remember that helped either

affirm your racial identity in college or change it?

Based solely on phenotype (skin color, hair type), how does your college peers identify you?

What are the things you like about having brown skin?

What are the things you don't like about having brown skin?

What impact does race have across the globe?

## Appendix D

## Questions/Topics of Discussion for Focus Group

How do you racially/ethnically identify?

Why do universities want diverse campuses?

What makes a person diverse?

What do college campuses judge diversity off of?

Specifically, why would a campus want more visible minorities?

Define Black.

Define African American

What does it mean to be Black in your home country/community vs. what it means to be Black in the US?

Why are Blacks in the US viewed as not 'authentically' African?

Black as a catch all phrase; similar to Hispanic as a catch all phrase (issues with this)

How has your views on race changed or stayed the same since being on college?

Color vs. race

Why is lighter better in many African Diaspora communities?

**Appendix E**

**Debriefing Statement**

Thank you for participating in my study. The purpose of the study was to explore the

lived experiences of students with family origins from Africa and the African Atlantic

Diaspora who are perceived to be Black based on phenotype (skin color and hair type)

but who do not self-identify as Black.


 If you would like to learn more about this topic you can go to:

Race are we so different?®: A project of the American anthropological association.
(2011). http://www.understandingrace.org/home.html

Racial Categorization in the U.S. as of the 2010 Census
http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-02.pdf

*Black in Latin America* with Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (video)
http://www.pbs.org/wnet/black-in-latin-america/

*Who is Black? One Nation's Definition* by F. James Davis

*Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960's to the 1990's* by Michael Omi
& Howard Winant

*Race and Racism: An Introduction* by Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban

*"Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?" And Other
Conversations About Race* by Beverly Daniel Tatum, Ph.D.

*The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States* edited by Miriam
Jimènez Romàn and Juan Flores

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