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ABSTRACT

Racism is on the rise at colleges and universities around the country. This study was developed from a racial incident that culminated in physical violence at a medium-sized eastern university. This study used a naturalistic, qualitative approach to further understand the perceptions and feelings of white respondents in relation to racism. Respondents (N=39) included 13 faculty members, 13 staff members, and 13 undergraduate students. Interviewers collected personal data; observed and recorded the verbal and nonverbal behaviors of the interviewee; and followed a 10-item semi-structured interview guide. Most of the questions centered on issues evolved from the students' self-exploration of what it means to be white in a graduate course in multicultural counseling. The results of the interviews suggest: (1) racism exists with little ramification as far as the respondents' personal experiences; (2) stereotypes about blacks and an aversion to close inter-racial contacts are prevalent; (3) attitudes toward blacks are neither uniformly negative, nor totally favorable, but rather are complex, conflicted, and ambivalent; and (4) white is neither a race nor a color but something about which whites do not think. Respondents varied in the amount of racism that they see and in the level of commitment that they had towards fighting racism. (ABL)

Chilly Campus Climate: A Qualitative Study on White Racial Identity Development Attitudes

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Chilly Campus Climate: A Qualitative Study on White Racial Identity Development Attitudes

Racism is on the rise at colleges and universities around the country. Out of the closet and onto the campus verbal and physical attacks against minority members are being reported with increasing frequency (Ponterotto, 1991). In part, this racial intolerance is condoned by a national political climate that tacitly condones a backlash against the civil rights gains of the 1970's by pitting one group against another. These divisive tactics are successful in focusing anxiety generated by rapid social and economic change. During such periods of instability racial violence is often the result of individual attempts to define and control their immediate environment (Howard, 1987). While the national climate influences racial disharmony, understanding it and taking effective steps toward combatting it are best achieved in the local environment (Helms, 1984; 1990).

The stage theories of white racial identity development (e.g. Helms, 1984, 1990; Ponterotto, 1990) may be instrumental in fostering an understanding of how white people in the United States come to term with their whiteness and their connection with a racist society. Given the history of the enslavement of the black Americans, Helms (1990) suggested that "blacks and/or black culture have been the reference group around which white racial identity development issues revolve. "(p. 50). In her theory, white individuals may proceed from naivete (Contact stage) to become aware of cultural difference and injustice (Disintegration, Reintegration stages), then choose to abandon racism and adopt better personal adjustment and more positive relationships with people of other races (Pseudo-Independence and Autonomy stages). According to Helms (1990), individuals at different stages of racial consciousness enter different interpersonal/ intergroup relations. These interaction patterns depict how they react to and cope with racial issues/conflicts which in turn determines the racial climate in an environment.

Background and Purpose of the Study

The study was developed from a racial incident that culminated in physical violence at a medium-sized, eastern university, named South Central University. The incident ignited a protests on campus which led to the university's decision on encouraging racial and cultural diversity and prohibiting racism. It also made possible a telling piece of research on campus climate using the the White Racial Identity Attitude Scale (Helms & Carter,1990). Yang & Johnston (1991) found that white faculty respondents and administrators had higher level of racial identity attitudes (Pseudo-Independence and Autonomy) than staff and student respondents. Staff respondents, however, were similar to students in their world views (Disintegration and Reintegration). The findings of that study also suggested wide rage within-group variations and that factors defining whiteness are multifaceted. Education, age, gender, and social/familial upbringing, and other life experiences have direct impact on how one views self and others as racial beings.

The survey (Yang & Johnston, 1991) resulted in strong reactions from the campus community. A number of incomplete surveys were returned to the investigators with such written comments as "We are all God's people, I don't care what color I am." A group of faculty co-signed a statement with a detailed item-by-item analysis of the "wrongness" of the WRIAS and urged the primary investigator to stop the research activity as it was unethical to do so.

The striking correspondence between these comments and descriptions of Helms' stages and the wide range of within group difference aroused the researcher's curiosity that white racial identity development issues may be further explored by other alternative research approach (Capel 1991; M. J. Patton,1991). Ponterotto and Casas (1991) advocate that more efforts in cross-cultural counseling research should focus on, among others, the examination of the intracultural or within-group diversity, on the white majority, and on the multiple methodology to study a single research question. The present study using a naturalistic, qualitative approach seeks to further understand the perceptions and feelings of the respondents in relation to racism.

Procedures

Participants

Thirty nine respondents were interviewed at South Central University, a mid-sized north eastern university located in a rural community of about 6.000 predominantly white residents. Among the respondents there were 13 faculty members (5 Females and 8 males), 13 staff (9 females and 4 males), and 13 undergraduate students (6 females and 7 males). They respondents were selected by the interviewers on the basis of availability.

Faculty interviewees' age ranged from 30 to 61 with a mean of 47. Approximately fifty percent of them held a doctorate degree and fifty percent, master's. Staff interviewees' age ranged from 23 to 49 with a mean of 37. Approximately half of them were college graduates. Student interviewees' age ranged from 19 to 49 with a median age of 24. The median age was chosen for this group because of the uneven distribution. Most of the interviewees self reported as middle class and reared in rural areas.

Instrumentation

The Semi-Structured Interview Schedule (SSIS) is an interview guide consisted of 10 open-ended questions designed by the author. Most of the questions centered on issues evolved from the students' self-exploration of what it means to be white in a graduate course in multicultural counseling. In class, the task of defining whiteness raised controversial/divergent point of views such as perception of racism, lack of interaction with blacks, human right invite sharing of issues, and absence of an ethnic identity. As all of these twenty five students were white whose cultural background also resembled the general population of the university, it was anticipated that the SSIS could similarly facilitate conversations on perceptions of whiteness and related racial attitudes.

Data Collection

The interviewers were thirteen counseling trainees in a master's level research and statistics course. Prior to the interviews, the interviewers received three hours of instruction on Helm's racial identity stage theory (1984, 1990) along with three hours of training on basic qualitative data analysis. Interviewees were informed that the interview process was in partial fulfillment of a course requirement. They were encouraged to be open and honest in their responses and were given assurance of complete confidentiality. Permission to tape the interview was requested and participants were informed that the tape would be erased after a transcript and analysis of their responses had been made. The length of interviews ranged from 30 minutes to one and half hours averaging one hour.

The interviewers were instructed (1) to collect the following personal data: gender, level of education, age, social economic status, position, and birth place; (2) to observe and record the verbal and nonverbal behaviors of the interviewee; (3) to follow the 10-item semi-structured interview schedule. Thirteen reports were collected from the interviewers which all included three original transcripts of the interviews and an analysis identifying concurrent themes, similarities and differences in the responses among the three groups, non-verbal messages, and a placement of each interviewee into a white racial identity development stage.

Data Analysis

The content analysis procedures were designed based on the concept of inductive analysis (Patton, 1990). The responses from the transcripts were first coded and analyzed by the interviewer. A

total of 390 codes were generated: 13 (interviewees for each group) X 3 (groups: faculty, staff, and student) X 10 (questions). Each of these 390 codes was assigned to a racial identity developmental stage. The placement of an interviewee's stage was determined by the modal stage out of 10 responses to the interview questions.

Two additional reviews of the thirteen transcripts were performed separately by two graduate assistants (white females) who had prior training in both Helms' (1984, 1990) model and in multi-cultural research and counseling. The same procedures were later performed by the author (an Asian-American female). An overall observation was made regarding each individual interviewee's development stage based on the "modal stage" out of total four ratings by the interviewer, the two reviewers, and the author.

Results

Content Analysis of this study was a complex task in light of the variety of opinions among and within the three groups (i.e. faculty, staff, and students). In general, most of the interviewees were comfortable with the interview. The interviewers described many as cooperative, enthusiastic, sincere, honest and open. There were, however, a number of respondents who displayed nervousness, anger, and at times concern for the need to respond "correctly" to the questions. In general, the staff respondents and students appeared to be largely in the Contact and Disintegration stages. The faculty respondents tended to be primarily at the Pseudo-independent stage with some in the Reintegration stage.

The interviewers and the reviewers agreed that the task of stage placement was difficult and sometimes arbitrary. It was also recognized that certain questions evoked more emotional responses than others. Variation among the ratings of interviewee identity stage, however, was low enough to suggest patterns. The presentation of the results in this section is organized based on the patterns and themes uncovered from the responses across the groups for each question. Recognizing the difficulty of maintaining objectivity in a study of this nature, the researcher's reactions and interpretations were minimized so that the data can speak for themselves, so to speak.

1. How do you define racism?

The majority of faculty respondents gave an intellectual definition of racism such as: "Discrimination towards people of different race, creed, sexual orientation, or any minority group for that matter." Several faculty respondents seemed to recognize racism as issues at the institutional level which involves power and personal values in the struggle for scarce resources.

Although the language was less intellectual, staff respondents shared some common perceptions of racism with faculty respondents. Staff and students respondents too believed that racism can go "both ways", because "segregation can be based on social status, economics, etc." One staff member appeared confused in her response: "Minorities? Oh, that wouldn't be right because women are considered minorities. Racism is probably anything not white - blacks. Is that right?" Students tended to refer to racism as a lack of interaction, unfair treatment, and negative feelings because of differences.

2. Do you believe that black people and white people are different? If so, describe the differences.

The prevalent view was "yes". The respondents identified the differences as primarily stemming from cultural and biological/physical influences. One faculty respondent recognized ""I think they are different because the blacks grow up in a culture that doesn't value them so that they grow up with a negative self-concept. They grow up in a culture where people tell them they should be

white and that they are second class. I don't care where that is or how obvious or blatant it is, I think it comes across so that particular idea erodes them."

At least one staff respondent indicated explicitly: "I'd rather be born white than black." Some responses by staff respondent and student displayed stereotypes such as "More blacks are into drugs," and "more single black mothers." One student reported that blacks have a distinct smell, "The reason I say that is because a friend of mine freshmen year lived with a black guy and he had a distinct odor".

3. How comfortable are you in the company of black people?

Most of the respondents admitted to feelings of discomfort. This discomfort was described situationally such as when in a "one on one" or single white in a group of blacks situation. Many indicated, however, that it depends more on the person (e.g., male/female, lower/upper class) or where and when the encounter takes place (e.g. inner city or late evening), than a person's color. A staff respondent stated that "There are all kinds--black people and white people you don't like. There's black people then there's niggers." He said that "even though some people are black, they still act like average people, but some act....well there's whites that act like that too".

Students reported they had no problem in the company of blacks "If they are like me," "If my personality coincides," or "if they are middle-class and educated." One student confessed "At times I feel shut out because I'm white. In the dining hall, you see a table of whites with one black and it is acceptable but you never see a table of blacks with one white kid there--they seem to shut whites out, you don't feel wanted."

4. Describe your interactions with minority individuals, either social or academic.

Faculty and staff respondents reported their interactions with minorities to be primarily work-related. It appeared that shared interest such as in music or sports are the major reasons for their interaction. However, one faculty respondent replied, "South Central University? Not much, we don't travel in the same circles." Several staff respondents reported that their interactions with blacks are no different than their interaction with whites: "Just normal...I treat them like anyone else."

Students, on the other hand, reported very few interactions. This lack of contact with blacks is exemplified in remarks such as, "Socially, the only person I've had contact with is my sister's fiance. He is kind of annoying--really laid back and arrogant." or "They don't seem to want to hang around us."

5. In your opinion, are minority students and minority faculty members treated the same as their white counterparts? Are you aware of minorities being treated unfairly, in class or elsewhere on campus?

Respondents often raised the issue of reverse discrimination in response to these questions. A faculty respondent stated: "People bend over backwards to try to include more blacks, many minority students get more advantage in class work". Another indicated: " Black students may not be academically prepared. I try to form the attitude I have toward all students based upon what I consider the merits of their performance rather than anything else..." Typical responses of staff interviewees and students include: "There are some whites who are treated unfairly, too." and "In some cases more favorably...". All three groups also tended to regard discrimination as a problem in the local community rather than on campus.

6. Some people are talking nowadays of the need to protect white American's rights. How do you feel about this issue?

Opinions were expressed in relation to this question. In all three groups, specific examples were given about unfair treatment of white males in job selection/placement situations. Many shared a concern about using quota as oppose to qualification as criterion for hiring.

Faculty respondents, more than staff respondents or students tended to be more theoretical in their answers. "Mixed feelings. When things have been unfair, and distinctly so, then there is some deliberate effort to correct it. The I think what we end up with is those that have been down tend to, as they gain foothold, to push for all those things they haven't had. But no one has all rights and freedoms...". One staff respondent commented: "A white person doesn't have a chance." One student responded: "Strongly. I think people push it too far. I realize white have given blacks trouble in history, but there must be a limit to concessions given." Another, referring to college admission: "...To me, you get a scholarship because it is earned...and there is the Negro College fund."

A number of respondents talked about human rights of all people. For example, a staff respondent stated:" I would just assume not break it down into white rights and black rights...everyone has the same rights and everyone be treated the same way". Or "treat all equal; no special help." Some students disagreed with the need to protect white rights. One student indicated that "the system should take care of that for all people." Another: "It's baloney! White Americans have had their way all the time, that blacks have always been segregated, and that nowadays they're involved in what whites always had."

7. Racial violence/conflicts seem to be an emerging phenomenon on college campuses. How do you view such incidents?

When asked this question a number of respondents agreed that violence exists, but did not view the problem as a racial one but as "more a matter of personality conflicts between individuals that turn into something that can be construed as racial." Many looked to outside sources including factors such as alcohol or economic pressures. A faculty respondent stated: "I think that shows black frustrations. It shows that they are developing an identity of their own. When I was in school I think they wanted to be white but now they want to protect their own identity...."

The concept that racial violence is a result of the ills of the past was clearly reflected in all three groups. One student replied: " It ties in with us being blamed for where they are in society...." One faculty respondent stated: "I think there is a growing sensitivity, particularly young people, who are in that competitive game, who will lash out. I think a lot has to do with the economy. There's no doubt in my mind that these people have been downtrodden, we can't kid ourselves, but the ills of 20-100 years ago I'm not sure should be put on the people...I don't have anything to do with that...."

8. What interventions can be made on campus to expose and alter unequal opportunity?

In response to this question a number of faculty, staff, and student respondents responded that they were unaware that inequality even exists. A second view is to promote more interaction. Others were less optimistic in their response. One faculty respondent replied, "Just a very slow and quiet campaign. I don't think you can pass a lot of rules and just change people. They are going to have to stand their own ground, and their percentage will creep up (went into a lengthy description of inner-city and under-qualified blacks who receive scholarships and experience culture shock, as well as failure as a result of being pushed too fast, too soon....)" One staff respondent replied, "We need to recruit more faculty of all colors." Several, however, responded

quite frankly to this question with such comments as: "They should dig in their heels and work hard to make ends meet," and "Colleges must stress to colored people that there is no free ride. . ."

9. What do minority people need in today's society?

Equal opportunity and equal treatment (educational and occupational) were the general response to this question from all three groups. Some were more specific in suggesting food, water, clothing, shelter, desegregation, employment, greater acceptance from whites, and love." A faculty respondent gave a sincere, lengthy analysis : "First of all, an appreciation of who they are, a sense of identity. They should be free to accept that identity for what it is and not have someone else try define it. Find out who they are and to find ways of enhancing the strengths and overcoming the weaknesses through many things: their own resourcefulness, education, religious institutions, as well as family... "

A faculty respondent honestly pointed out that "hard work, drug education. There is no short cut to fortunes. I',m prejudiced for the best person for the job, and leave out all that other stuff. Several students suggested that "equal (educational) opportunities from ground zero up"; " No bonuses or perks need to be added to it." A staff respondent indicated: " They need to know if they work and keep at it, someday blacks and whites will be pretty darn close. They have to know what the meaning of equal is. There are some real obnoxious black people who I wouldn't give a second thought about calling them 'nigger'. Although you see more and more black professionals, some blacks bring about a bad name for themselves."

10. What it Means to be White to you?

A typical response to this question true for each group was "Good grief!" and "Never thought about this. It's a skin color. It doesn't mean anything." Other responses implied that being white means "being one of the gang, being part of the majority, and being the dominant race." In addition, it means more advantages. easier, comfortable, and "hassle free" life with lots of opportunity and freedom to pursue it.

Faculty respondents, comparing to other groups, elaborated more: " White Anglo-Saxon Protestant. My father was...My mother was...probably date back to the 1820's for immediate family." One asserted that "White is not a skin color...it is subscribing to cultural values. I consider myself a WASP. I have my own music, art, literature, dress, and religion." Another faculty respondent described: "We had a person here who talked about their art, but talked primarily about their race and that bothers me...because I want to talk about the art. It's almost a degrading thing to say, 'I am an woman, so I will show at women's art shows', instead of 'I am an artist'. So I guess being white is...you don't think about being white."

A staff respondent reflected: "It only makes me invisible in a group of whites. Anther stated, however, "I do not feel that I have been privileged...I personally resent that term privileged; no one has ever really given me anything. I really like to be honest; I've never seen or thought or conceived of life as a racial question." A student commented: "Pale skin. I don't think It means acceptance. I wouldn't be accepted at Howard. This is a strange question."

Discussion

In general, the results of the interviews are suggestive of several themes recurring across questions. They are: (1) racism exists with little ramification as far as the respondents' personal experience, (2) stereotypes about blacks and an aversion to close inter-racial contacts are prevalent, (3) attitudes toward blacks are neither uniformly negative nor totally favorable, but rather are complex, conflicted, and ambivalent; (4) White is neither a race nor a color but something whites

do not think about. In this section, a synthesis of the findings is presented in reconciliation with the characteristics of racial identity attitudes as described by Helms (1984, 1990).

Defining Racism and Aversion to Interaction (Pseudo-Independence)

Most of the the respondents shared an intellectual perception regarding racism as "discrimination based on race, creed, sexual orientation, etc". Their view of racism is more detached and less personal. Many respondents were not aware of that unequal treatment and racial violence exist at South Central University. Those who were more aware tended to discuss other factors (e.g. economic pressure, alcohol) that were part of racial incidents at the University.

In their responses, the respondents tended to use the terms stereotype, prejudice, bias, and discrimination interchangeably in the sense that whites can also be subjected to these negative experiences. Similar to individuals in the Pseudo-independence stage, these respondents had very limited interracial interaction (usually work related) with those blacks whom they shared interests. Many respondents in this study described (implicitly and/or explicitly) their interaction with blacks as discomfort, uneasiness, disgust and sometimes fear. According to Gaertner and Dovidio (1986), these are the negative affects which in turn encourage avoidance of interacting with blacks.

Stereotyping and Civil Right Controversy (Reintegration)

In this study, a substantial number of staff and student respondents frankly described blacks as "arrogant, aggressive, lazy, and even having a "distinct smell". The fact that these individuals had had in the past and continue to have limited exposure to people of other races substantiates Carter's reference to Dennis (1981) that many whites have little direct contact with blacks and have attitudes stemming from ideas rather than direct interaction or contact (Carter, 1990).

It appeared that the respondents' limited interactions with blacks have not only resulted in negative perceptions towards blacks, but also made credible a belief that blacks can "blame" themselves for their predicaments (e.g. poor motivation, inadequate education, and militancy). According to the white racial identity theory, individuals in the reintegration stage demonstrate a sense of white superiority and tend to believe that blacks dwell on being persecuted too much, and perceive as negative those characteristics on which they view blacks as differing.

The respondents' view of racism remained emotionally detached until they were asked about the issues of protecting the rights of White Americans and the blacks' needs in today's society. Reflected in the responses were some strong feelings of fear, resentment, anger, and bitterness implying that the standards of quality and the principle of equity have been violated by the use of fixed numerical quotas (an equation to preferential treatment) to remedy the "ills of the past". Examples were used by many respondents to prove that discrimination in access to employment and higher education does exist.

The respondents' views about civil right policies in this study appeared similar to the tenets of modern racism as defined by McConahay (1986). They are "(1) discrimination is a thing of the past because blacks now have the freedom to compete in the market place and to enjoy things they can afford, (2) blacks are pushing too hard, too fast and into places where they are not wanted, (3) these tactics and demands are unfair, and therefore, recent gains are undeserved and the prestige granting institutions of society are giving blacks more attention and the concomitant status than they deserve. In addition, these beliefs are empirical facts and are not attitudes that constitute racism" (p.92).

Ambivalence (Disintegration)

In this study, many respondents expressed guilt and a sense of apology when talked about black experiences but emphatically differentiated themselves from other whites as non-prejudiced and showed a detest of those who are prejudiced. Recognizing that whites and blacks differ in terms of skin pigmentation and culture, almost all respondents conversely embraced a philosophical belief that "we are all the same and should be treated as such". In contradiction to their unanimous support of "all are created equal", the impressions of "in-group" and "out-group" were expressed by a vocabulary of "we" and "they". Apparently, as an out-group, blacks tend to be seen as both the disadvantaged and deviant possessing the qualities that go counter to the respondents' values and norms.

Like individuals in the Disintegration stage, the respondents acknowledged that they are white and that prejudice and discrimination exist. Many respondents recognized and had sympathy with blacks "(who) should be helped because they have been down so long..." but insisted on "the other side of the coin" that issues should be based on human rights rather than on race, and that whites should not be held responsible for the plight of blacks in this society. They appeared to be experiencing conflict between personal standards of human decency and societal cultural expectations. According to Katz (1986), this duality of attitudes emerges in some degree from a a corresponding value duality in American society: the contradiction between humanitarianism which creates sympathy for disadvantaged groups and the Protestant ethic which gives rise to individualistic and critical perceptions.

A Color Blind Perspective (Contact)

Many respondents initially responded to the question: "What it means to be white?" with surprise accompanied by a perplexed and cautious searching for expressions. Their responses indicated a point of view which sees race as invisible characteristic, a social category of no relevance to the ways individuals are treated, a view Schofield (1986) referred to as color blind perspective.

The respondents' view of whiteness all hark of the "melting pot" ideology, a perspective perpetuated by a widely held American belief that people are individuals and should be rewarded on personal merit rather than group membership. Such a view is reflective of individuals in Contact Stage who are unaware of themselves as racial beings and tend to ignore differences or tends to regard differences as unimportant because "people are people."

According to Schofield (1986), the color blind perspective is appealing but not without a price. It functions to reduce the potential for covert conflict and minimize discomfort, but fails to respond to and capitalize diversity. Schofield indicated that individuals with the color blind perspective discourage intergroup interaction and promote interpersonal relations in intragroup interactions. In addition, the lack of insight of one's own racial identity fosters the concept that race is a taboo topic which then fundamentally perpetuate the refusal to recognize and deal with the existence of intergroup tensions.

Implications

The purpose of this study was to amplify the findings of a quantitative study on campus climate of South Central University. In the present study, results of thirty-nine interviews with faculty, staff, and student respondents, in general were supportive of findings of a quantitative study using the WRIAS (Yang & Johnston, 1991) in that the faculty interviewees were found to have higher level of racial identity attitudes than staff respondents and student interviewees. The results seemed to, however, reveal identity development stages for each group that were more conservative than the quantitative approach (i.e. a stage lower).

An examination of the literature suggests that there have been efforts to identify interventions to match and promote white racial identity development (Corvin & Wiggins, 1987; Helms, 1984 &

1990; Cheatham, 1991; Jones & Poole, 1991; Sabini & Ponterotto, 1991; Yang, Johnston, & Jefferson, 1991; Parker, Aecher, & Scott, 1992). The next steps after the initial assessment, seem to be the implementation and evaluation of such activities to further operationalize and refine the theories.

At South Central University, programmatic efforts can help create opportunities for dialogues with respects to topics and issues similar to the interview questions in this study. Focus could vary along with individuals' different racial identity stages. Those who are in the Contact stage can be encouraged to begin the process of recognizing and articulating their own values. A knowledge base of one's own cultural heritage and the cultural heritage of other minority groups can be provided. Individuals in the Disintegration stage can begin exploration of stereotypes and create awareness of prejudicial attitudes. Discussion opportunities on positive aspects of one's own culture and other culture of others can be provided.

Individuals in the Reintegration stage can be encouraged to accept feelings of hostility and become aware of their impact on minorities. They can be facilitated to deal with feelings of anger and fear and to appreciate characteristics of minority cultures. Individuals with Pseudo-Independent attitudes can be encouraged to move beyond the safety level and seek exposure to a variety of racial interactions in order to supplement intellectual understanding with affective experiencing other cultures.

The validation and verification of the findings of these interviews are accomplished by triangulation (M. Q. Patton, 1990; Ponterotto and Casas, 1991) through reconciling qualitative and quantitative data, attempting to compare multiple perspectives from multiple reviewers, and to minimize the researcher reactive effects . Although this interview schedule was by no means comprehensive in the dimensions included, it appeared capable of generating data that could be analyzed in light of the white racial identity development stages and support the hypothesis explicit in Helms' writing (1990) that the development of white identity is the United States is intertwined with the development of racism.

The generalizability of the results of this study is limited in that the interviewees were not randomly selected and may not represent South Central University, and that this university may not be reflective of American society. Racial climate as a social phenomenon, according to Cronbach (1975), is too variable and too context-bound to lend itself to generalization (in M. Q. Patton, 1990). The theories which served as contexts to these interviews can hypothesize but probably not explain why a certain racial climate exists at South Central University. Patton, M. J. (1991) suggested that the process of qualitative inquiry of a social phenomenon is never ending because "there are multiple interpretations based on different individuals and contexts." (p.391). In future studies of this kind, use and interpretation of the data can be most beneficial when other factors such as social economic status, political history, and demographic characteristics of members of campus and the surrounding communities are considered.

Conclusion

In this study, the respondents varied in the amount of racism that they see, in the level of commitment that they had towards fighting racism. Some seemed ill at ease with the whole issue of racism, while the others were relaxed and less defensive. It appeared that most respondents held two opposing and contradictory racial attitudes, one intellectual and empathic, and the other ethnocentric and hostile. This parallels to the historical coexistence of humanitarian values and slavery traditions in American society (Myers, 1989), a half-century old phenomena termed "American Dilemma" by Myrdal in 1944 (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986).

Many agree that although in the past 25 years, the racial climate in American has changed dramatically, subtle but insidious types of racism are still pervasive in the individual, institutional,

and cultural levels (Dovidio, J.F. & Gaertner, 1986; Helms, 1990; Ponterotto, 1991; Skillings & Dobbins, 1991). Gaertner & Dovidio (1986) observed that like a virus mutating into new forms, old fashioned prejudice seems to have evolved into a new type that is resistant to traditional attitude change remedies. At South Central University, and likely many other institutions of higher education, where a chilly climate of seemingly backwardness and homeostasis with respect to racial dynamics was uncovered, the task of organizational change is profound (Cheatham, 1991).

Results of this study are not conclusive. The present qualitative study, at most, provided an "window" (p.387, Capel, 1991) through which perspectives and emotions were revealed with respect to whiteness. These perspectives and emotions are in essence the elements of what constitute the racial climate at South Central University. Perhaps as suggested by Karp (1981), at South Central University and other similar universities, outlets for white individuals to address their feelings related to racism, and to recognize the price they pay for being the dominant group in a society that has demanded cultural homogeneity and denigrated differences are necessary to proceed the ideal of transcending white individuals beyond what whiteness currently is (in Helms, 1990).

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