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Kathleen Neville
Tara L. Parker

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Abstract: Due to the underrepresentation of African American teachers and college faculty, students have limited to no interaction with Blacks as authority figures in the classroom. When White students in particular face African American faculty in class, they often exhibit negative attitudes and inappropriate behavior. Using racial identity development and critical race theory, we seek to understand how White college students perceive African American professors and from where those perceptions stem. In considering the social and educational context in which students live, our study explores the ways White students perceive Black professors and how students' racial identity development influences their perceptions.

Tara L. Parker is Associate Professor of Higher Education and Chair of the Leadership in Education Department at the University of Massachusetts Boston. Her research agenda centers on race and racism in higher education, policy issues related to access and equity, and the experiences of faculty of color. Dr. Parker's current research is focused on the way regional networks support women faculty of color.

Kathleen M. Neville is an experienced higher education professional with student affairs and academic leadership experience. She currently serves as the associate dean of the school of graduate studies at Salem State University (SSU) in Salem, Massachusetts. Dr. Neville is also the graduate program coordinator for the higher education in student affairs masters' degree program and an adjunct associate professor at SSU. Her research interests include: student development, diversity in higher education, student-faculty interactions, and the influence of identity on student and faculty experiences in higher education.

Our nation suffers from the disturbing trend of increased segregation occurring within our nation's neighborhoods and schools (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2012; Orfield, 2001; Orfield, Bachmeier, James, & Eitle, 1997) as we grow up in communities defined by racial, ethnic, and economic disparities (Orfield & Lee, 2007). The majority of White Americans reside in White communities and are educated in overwhelmingly White schools with more financial resources and little or no contact with African American or Latino students or teachers (Orfield, 2001; Orfield & Lee, 2007). In fact, Whites remain the most educationally and geographically isolated of all groups (Orfield & Lee, 2007).

Due to the racial stratification of our residential and educational systems, the college environment is looked upon to provide a critical opportunity to challenge students' perceptions, values, and beliefs related to race. Unfortunately, many higher education institutions are ill-prepared to facilitate effective cross-racial interactions, due in part to White students' lack of preparedness for such interactions (Cabrera, Franklin & Watson, 2017). Opportunities for cross-racial interaction often occur in the classroom, primarily between students, rather than faculty, as the majority of faculty are White. Indeed, White full-time faculty make-up 84% of the professoriate while just 4% of full-time tenure and tenure track faculty self-identify as African American[1] (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Due to the underrepresentation of African American teachers and college faculty, students have limited to no interaction with these individuals of authority in the formal classroom environment. When these students face Black faculty in the college classroom, therefore, they often exhibit negative attitudes and inappropriate behavior. Little is known, however, about why students behave in this manner. In other words, what experiences and perceptions help to explain these behaviors? The purpose of our study is to examine the ways White college students, representing different personal positions of racial identity development, described and perceived African American professors. For the majority of students in our study, this particular classroom interaction was their first with an African American teacher or professor. In considering the social and educational context in which most students live, our study explores the following question:

- How do White students perceive African American professors and how does their racial identity influence their perceptions?

To respond to this question, we talked to college students about their experiences with having an African American faculty member in class.

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[1]For the purposes of this article, we use African American and Black interchangeably.

BACKGROUND LITERATURE

While literature concerning the ways students perceive faculty of color, and Black faculty in particular, is limited, we relied on three broader areas of inquiry to serve as the foundation for our study. First, research on the benefits of diverse interactions provides valuable insight regarding the ways students benefit from their engagement with people and experiences that are different from whom they are accustomed (Milem, 2003). This body of primarily quantitative research, largely focused on students' relationships with their peers, provides a critical examination as to how students might benefit from their interactions with African American faculty. This literature, however, does not illuminate the nuance that emerges from exploring the student experience through qualitative methods. Second, we explore the research on the unique contributions faculty of color, and African American faculty in particular make to the students' educational experience. This second body of research serves to frame the discussion on the unique contributions African American and other faculty of color make to the academy through the implementations of an inclusive curriculum, active learning techniques, and diversity related coursework. The impact of these teaching practices provides the opportunity for students to engage in diverse interactions with peers, ideas, and faculty. Finally, the third body of research paints a dramatic yet realistic picture of the challenges faculty of color experience with students in the classroom. Faculty of color are often confronted by White students who often seek to undermine the faculty's authority. This research frames the context of this study as we examine the students' perceptions of Black professors in the classroom environment.

Benefits of Diverse Interactions

Students' participation in diverse interactions allows them to engage with different people, ideas, information, and experiences (Milem, 2003). These interactions challenge the students' preconceived attitudes and beliefs and create an opportunity for personal growth in a relatively "safe" learning environment (Gurin, Dey, Gurin, Hurtado, 2003). Diverse interactions increase racial understanding, decrease prejudiced attitudes, and positively influence academic success and long-term attitudes and behaviors regarding racial understanding (Smith & Schonfeld, 2000). Students' interactions with their diverse peers are linked to the development of critical thinking and other academic skills (Astin, 1993; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Hurtado, 2001) and a greater sense of belonging on campus (Locks, Hurtado, Bowman & Oseguera, 2008). Furthermore, students who engage in cross-racial interactions during college are likely to gain a "lasting pluralistic orientation," even if they do not continue to socialize with people of other races after

college (Jayakumar, 2008). Thus cross-racial interaction may be a necessary first step in disrupting White privilege (Cabrera, Franklin & Watson, 2017).

Creating intentional spaces that encourage students to express their opinions and share ideas with members of diverse groups fosters an environment for learning and engagement to occur. African American faculty in the classroom create an intentional space for White students, in particular, to experience a diverse interaction with "people, ideas and information" (Milem, 2003, p. 132), reinforcing the long term effort to transform education to prepare students to live and work in our multicultural society (Hurtado, 2007).

Unique Contributions of Faculty of Color

Smith (2005) posits, "the diversification of faculty . . . is likely to contribute to what is taught, how it is taught, and what is important to learn" (p. 51). Specifically, faculty of color are more likely than their White colleagues to provide students the opportunity to interact with people different from themselves and explore new viewpoints, creating an environment that fosters a new sense of intellectual diversity (Chang, 2003; Gurin, Lehman, & Lewis, 2007; Saenz, Ngai, & Hurtado, 2007). Faculty of color significantly contribute to student learning and involvement (Umbach, 2006) and the diversification of faculty is an important aspect of preparing students to live in a diverse society (Cole & Barber, 2003; Hurtado, 2001). Faculty of color are also more likely than their White colleagues to utilize more active teaching methods (i.e., classroom discussion, cooperative learning activities, program projects and student presentations in class), conduct research on race and ethnicity, incorporate class readings on issues of race/ethnicity (Antonio, 2002; Milem, 1999) and promote teaching strategies that encourage students to interact with and challenge one another in class (Umbach, 2006).

Research (Antonio, 2002; Umbach, 2006) indicates that African American and other faculty of color "play a specialized and fundamental role in the teaching and learning process" (Milem, 2003, p.144). Further, students exposed to the classroom environment with a professor of color will more likely encounter an educational experience that differs from one of which they are most familiar (Collier & Powell, 1990). Although faculty of color make a significant contribution, which impacts teaching in higher education, there is a disconnect between what we know African American and other faculty of color do in- and outside of the classroom and how their contributions impact the student experience. In other words, few studies examine "how" students experience their interactions with faculty of color (Neville & Parker, 2017; Gurin & Nagda, 2006).

Faculty of Color Experiences in the Classroom

The narratives shared by faculty of color reveal that White students are more likely than their peers of color to criticize teaching styles of African

American faculty, to question their academic expertise, and to devalue course content, especially when race is discussed (Benjamin, 1997; Myers, 2002; Tuitt, Hanna, Martinez, del Carmen Sanchez, Griffin, 2009; Vargas, 2002). Indeed, students became uncomfortable, hypersensitive and/or resistant to discussing racial issues (Evans-Winter & Twyman Hoff, 2011) by "the mere physical presence of professors of color" (Sue et al., 2011, p. 337). Faculty of color also report that White students challenge their authority (Truong, Graves, & Keene, 2014), demonstrate a lack of respect (Croom, 2017), and report concerns and critiques directly to department chairs (McGowan, 2000; Patton & Catching, 2009). In a study examining the experiences of 17 women faculty of color, Pittman (2010) revealed that faculty members also experienced intimidating incidents in their interactions with White students in general and White male students in particular. These professors indicated they felt subtle or overt threats to their persons or careers. Aggressive behavior demonstrated by White male students' reportedly ranged from challenging a grade to throwing papers at a professor. Faculty also indicated that White students approached them inappropriately (i.e., called them by their first name), overtly questioned their knowledge, and gave them low course evaluation ratings that could negatively affect their departmental review (Pittman, 2010). Students have also been found to use course "evaluations as weapons" to stand against the perspectives professors of color present in class (Evans-Winter & Twyman Hoff, 2011, p. 462; Patton & Catching, 2009).

Experiences such as these shared by faculty of color, provide some insight regarding the way student perceptions reveal themselves in the classroom. There is little surprise, for example, that White students are the least likely to support hiring more faculty of color and the least likely to agree that course material should be diversified (Bush, 2011). Still, while the research related to faculty of color and their experiences is abundant, research on interactions with African American faculty from the student perspective is virtually non-existent. The lack of research, specifically designed to hear the voices of students regarding their perceptions of faculty of color leaves a significant gap in the literature. We have little understanding of White students' perceptions of their relationship with African American faculty and how White racial identity shapes these perceptions. With this study, we seek to address this gap by considering the context from which students enroll in college and how that context shapes their perceptions.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

We used the social construction of whiteness and tenets of critical race theory to provide a comprehensive framework from which to examine how the nuance of culture, power and oppression, and preconceived values and

beliefs influenced the students' perceptions and experiences as they interacted with African American faculty.

Critical race theory provided the contextual lens from which we explored how White students described and perceived African American faculty. While CRT scholars point to five or more tenets of CRT, two of these basic tenets are particularly relevant to our study. First, CRT asserts that racism is a routine part of American life (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012). Thus, because racism is so deeply entrenched in society in general and higher education in particular, we argue that racism affects relationships, behaviors, and perceptions. CRT thus allowed us to go beyond the surface and examine not only what was said but also the racial undertones that provide meaning to what was said. Second, CRT challenges dominant claims of race neutrality and colorblindness. The undeniable influence of racism and colorblind ideologies in the broader society is central to the context in which students' racial awareness develops or retreats. As students often come to campus from segregated communities, we know they arrive with "assumptions and expectations formed through earlier experiences" (Lewis, Chesler, & Forman, 2000, p. 87). These assumptions, expectations, beliefs and perceptions are often limited or distorted, creating what King (1991) calls "dysconscious racism." White students, particularly those from homogenous neighborhoods and schools, may therefore enter college with assumptions and stereotypes about African Americans and other people of color" (Lewis, Chesler, & Forman, 2000, p. 87) that reinforces White normativity (Cabrera, Franklin, & Watson, 2017). The dominant ideology of colorblindness and racial stereotypes that also permeates American higher education shapes the context in which students negotiate their interactions with faculty of color and develop their racial and ethnic identities.

By examining whiteness, as a racial identity, we explored how the ideology of colorblindness acts as a demonstration of embedded racism that shapes student perceptions and serves "to mask the underlying power dynamics that continually stratify society along the color line" (Cabrera, Watson, & Franklin, 2016, p. 121). While CRT helped us understand the structural context, whiteness helped us understand the individual by considering how racial identity (or what it means to be White), shaped these students' lives (Bush, 2011) and therefore their perceptions. During the early phases of racial identity, Whites are generally oblivious to racial and cultural issues, often employing a colorblind or "race neutral" perspective and exhibiting naiveté regarding the salience of race in their lives or in society (Helms, 1993). White students may engage in stereotypical thinking about people of color while also *believing* these stereotypes are truthful. Whites may also use coded language to refer to people of color (i.e., crime, urban) to avoid sounding racist, but they also use racialized narratives that portray Whites as superior and people of color

as inferior (i.e., the narrative that Whites are in positions of authority and that Blacks are subordinate) (Bush, 2011).

Throughout these early phases of racial identity, White students may experience feelings of discomfort as they begin to recognize the advantages of being White and the inequalities experienced by people of color (Helms, 1993). This discomfort is often reduced by trying to convince him or herself that they are not racist and that racism does not exist. Exploring how students described and perceived African American faculty through the lens of whiteness allowed us to explore White students' behavior in the classroom. White students who are not provided with opportunities to challenge this colorblind ideology will fail to recognize and confront racism (Cabrera et al., 2017). Thus, Whites may remain in a state of "racial arrested development" (Cabrera et al., 2016) that serves to reinforce racial inequality. This framework also allowed us to locate and examine places where there may be "cracks in the wall of whiteness." (Bush, 2011, p. 203).

As students develop their awareness of racism and/or develop racial consciousness, they begin to examine and question preexisting attitudes and assumptions. Students can then begin to test and confront or even alter the racial status quo. Individuals then maneuver toward more advanced phases of racial identity where they begin to define a non-racist identity (Helms, 1993). As individuals move toward a more advanced phase of White identity and into, a higher level of consciousness, they begin to acknowledge the role Whites play in maintaining and promoting racism in society.

Understanding that college students will be at different phases in their own racial identity development and that identity will influence their worldview and perceptions of people of color assisted us in data analysis. By using both CRT and the concept of whiteness, we sought to understand and interpret the way students described and perceived African American faculty. This is especially important since students' perceptions and experiences with African American faculty were reflective of their past experiences, personal sense of their racial identity, and their pre-conceived values and beliefs related to race.

METHODS

We selected interpretive phenomenology as the methodology for this study as it allowed us to examine the meanings embedded in students' experiences and their perceptions of African American faculty while also permitting us to reflect on our own roles as researchers. Prior to beginning our analysis, we began by each reflecting on the context from which we came to this study including where and how we grew up (both in majority White communities), our experiences as a Black woman associate professor (Parker) and a White university administrator (Neville) who is also an adjunct faculty

member, both at racially diverse institutions. We also reflected on the ways we made sense of our own direct and indirect experiences with racism and our perceptions of those who are different from us.

Interpretive phenomenology also allowed us to find meaning in the voices of students even when the meaning was not readily apparent to the students themselves (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). Our focus is therefore on the meaning engrained within students' perceptions of their African American professors.

Participant Selection

The success of this study relied on finding and ultimately interviewing students who had the "lived experience" of interacting with African American full-time faculty in the classroom. In order to locate these students, we asked African American faculty permission to recruit students from their classes. We chose one predominantly white institution in the Northeast region of the U.S. Three African American faculty agreed to allow us to recruit students from five courses.

Two of the faculty members, Professors Norton and Melton, were women teaching in the Department of Human Development. The third faculty member, Professor Thompson, was a man in the Department of Professional Studies. During interviews, one student described her interaction with a fourth professor, Charlotte Petry. While we did not recruit students from Professor Petry's class, the student's interaction with her was significant to them. Since our focus is on student, not faculty perceptions, we included experiences with Professor Petry in our findings. Pseudonyms are used for all faculty and students.

Data Collection

Student participants were selected based on the method of "intensity sampling" (Patton, 2002). To recruit students, the White researcher (Neville) attended each of the five classrooms that held a total of 100 students, to explain the purpose of the study and invite students to participate in a one-on-one interview. Students were told the interviewer was exploring student–faculty interactions, that interviews would occur after grades were submitted, and the faculty would not know who interviewed or what was said. Ultimately, 22 traditional college-aged (18 to 24 years) students, representing all academic years at the institution, interviewed with Neville. For this study, we selected the 16 students who racially identified as White.

As the institution served a regional area, all participants lived within a 25-mile radius of campus. Interviews with students occurred over a three-week period using a semi-structured interview protocol. We designed interview questions that helped us gain a description of how participants' perceived Black faculty (Creswell, 2007). Near the beginning of each interview, students

were asked to describe their first African American teacher or professor. For 11 of the 16 students, their first experience with a Black faculty member was during the semester in which we conducted interviews. These students therefore talked about the faculty member who they recently had in class. At the end of each interview, students were asked to reflect upon their identity as a White individual and discuss how their identity influenced their perceptions of their college professor. Interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder and transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

We imported all interview transcripts into the qualitative research software program NVivo for data management and analysis. Two phases of data analysis occurred in order to 1) assess the phase of racial identity of each participant and 2) understand how this identity influenced the students' perspective and attitudes toward African American faculty. In phase one, a professional transcriptionist transcribed the interviews. Next, we compared each original recording to the transcription for accuracy. We then read the transcripts from student participants at least three times, gaining new insights as we read and reread. We made notes on what we found to be significant in terms of the expressions and language students used to describe themselves and their faculty as well as anything that would give us a sense of the familial, educational, and residential context from which they came to college. As we reread the transcripts, we looked for moments when students repeated their affirmations or contradicted things they said. We followed this process for each student individually and then looked for similarities and differences across all participants. Using our conceptual framework as a guide, this process allowed us to group students according to both their phase of White identity development as well as their level of racial consciousness. In the second phase of analysis, we again looked for key words and phrases that students used to describe the African American professor they had in class. We then reviewed the categories developed in phase one and looked for connections to the ways students perceived Black faculty. Here, we used CRT to understand the influence of whiteness and the extent to which students' expressions were indicative of a colorblind ideology.

Trustworthiness

As we conducted this study, several steps were taken to establish trustworthiness. First, as the purpose of this study was to explore and understand how White students perceived African American faculty, a representative sample of students based on gender and year in college, completed in-depth interviews. Second, throughout the research process we reflected on our personal experiences and preconceived notions allowing us to remain open

to emergent themes. Third, during the interviews, Neville developed a level of trust with the student participants. Marshall and Rossman (2006) propose the conduct of a study significantly depends upon the researcher to build a relationship with participants. As an experienced White administrator, who has worked directly with undergraduate students for many years, Neville was able to talk with students, and relate to them, in a manner that made them feel comfortable.

Each of our participants was sent a composite description of our interpretations of what they experienced and how they perceived their African American professor(s). This process of "member checking" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) allowed participants to reflect upon their experience and our interpretations and to provide comments. More than half of the participants responded and all of them indicated we accurately reflected their experiences and feelings.

Racial and Ethnic Identity: Acknowledgement of Race

We placed all of the participants in this study in the early phase of White identity development, and within this phase they exhibited different levels of racial consciousness. From the voices of our 16 students, two themes emerged. The first theme, "To me everyone is human" is indicative of an embedded ideology of colorblindness and dysconscious racism where individuals are oblivious to or lack an understanding of race or racism (King, 1991; Phinney, 1996). The second theme, "Race has always been kind of an interesting thing for me" presents the attitudes and perceptions of the participants who were uncomfortable when asked about race or struggled to explain their feelings as they began to recognize the implicit differences between the experiences of being a White student and an African American Professor (Helms, 1993). Of note, there were no participants in the second more advanced phase of White identity development, "defining a non-racist identity." In other words, our participants were unable to reflect upon what it means to be White or share an understanding of how their interactions with and perceptions of African American faculty might have been influenced by race. The implications of this are discussed in our conclusions.

"To Me Everyone is Human" This first theme examines how students failed to acknowledge race as a personal and distinctive characteristic of the faculty in efforts to not appear racist. Thirteen of the sixteen White participants subscribed to a colorblind ideology as they were raised to "treat everyone the same." Jack, a senior, commented:

> I mean I don't see color . . . basically to me everyone's all the same . . . I'm not one of the people that will like, you know, be racist or anything like that . . . to me everyone's human . . . you know, [Professor. Thompson] is here to make a living and do the same thing . . . everyone has the same common goals . . .

> so like I said I don't view color . . . so skin color has no real effect . . . I'm not gonna be like "oh this teacher's African American I don't really care for what he has to say . . . like to me everyone is all the same it doesn't really matter one way or the other.

As Jack illustrates, this group of White students shared a naïve perspective regarding the influence and dynamics of race in their lives and they failed to recognize race as a distinguishing characteristic of faculty. During the interview, Jack also stated a concern, shared by many of the participants in similar phases of identity development, that he could be considered racist if he presented any thoughts that might suggest he was not colorblind. In other words, Jack suggested that he might be wrong to even recognize race. Similarly, Mark, also a senior, was clear regarding his belief that he treats everyone the same, regardless of race:

> I'm not like a racist, prejudice person. I'm not here to say, 'He can't teach me because he's a different race.' Or 'He can't teach me because he's a different color.' He's his own person. We're all in the same country here. We're not back in the slavery times. The world has really progressed since then. I was always brought up to treat everyone the same, don't discriminate against someone just because they're a different race. That's how I was raised, so it was never a problem of him being an African American teacher . . .

In addition to stating that he is not "a prejudiced person" Mark believed that racism is a part of our country's history but not of its present. Therefore, he argued racism no longer needs to be addressed in society. Mark was confident that his upbringing taught him to be open and accepting; so according to Mark, "it was never a problem" for him to take a course taught by an African American faculty member. Still, as he tried to be convincing in his declaration that he was not a "racist, prejudiced person," Mark's remarks clearly show that he was aware of the racial stereotypes and narratives placed on Black faculty (i.e., they "can't teach me . . . ").

The sentiment of being raised to be accepting of others and open to people of different races and ethnicities was widely shared by most students who participated in our study. Similar to Jack, several students clarified the categories of racial difference by referring to the colors of the rainbow. Andi, for example, a sophomore, was certain that racial differences do not influence his perception of his professor. He argued, "You can be black. You can be silver for all I care, or green. I don't care . . . It doesn't bother me." As Andi used random colors, none of which were skin tones, to describe individuals, he articulated that he believed he is comfortable with and open to racial difference. This metaphor is another example of how students used particular terminology to illustrate they were raised to be open to diversity and accepting of people from all racial and ethnic groups. One participant,

however, in an attempt to illustrate how open he was to diverse populations used a historically pejorative term to describe people of color in the U.S. Matthew, a sophomore who was from a diverse but segregated small urban community, stated, " . . . I've always grown up believing that everyone was equal, either man, woman, colored, not, whatever." Use of the antiquated and offensive term "colored" to describe a group of people illustrates how completely unaware Matthew was that as a White young man, his use of the word, colored, employed a racist connotation. Furthermore, Matthew appeared naïve as to how his use of the term contradicted the open and accepting values he talked about possessing.

As previously stated, 12 of the 13 White students within this state of racial arrested development declared they "treat everyone the same" as they espoused colorblindness. There was one participant, however, that openly used racist stereotypes of African Americans when describing and evaluating one faculty member. Beth, a sophomore, relied on negative stereotypes of African American men to negate Professor Thompson's credibility, professionalism, and intellect. When asked to talk about the first time she had a teacher of color, Beth described her reaction to finding Professor Thompson's name on her class schedule.

> Honestly, I looked at the name on my schedule and I was like, 'You've got to be kidding me.' [whispers], because I went to a Catholic high school. There wasn't even any [whispers] Black or [whispers] Spanish kids in my school, let alone teachers . . . I'm not racist or anything, but when I see a Black person it's like baggy jeans, not very educated and my first thoughts were like, "Oh my god. Great. The last thing I needed. I was even debating on switching [classes] . . .

As this quote suggests, Beth was educated in a segregated environment. Her perceptions of African Americans were based on racist stereotypes and these perceptions almost led her to drop the course. Indeed, at the same time she stated she is not a racist, she voiced the negativity that Mark and Jack tried so hard to avoid. Beth continued to talk about the feelings that arose when she saw Professor Thompson's name on her course schedule:

> Ah . . . it was going to be different for me. I had never had an African-American teacher. The first thing that came to my mind was how they are in other ways. I mean . . . you really – because I work at a bank, too, and all the high up management, none of them are [Black] – except I think our CEO is – I don't know. He's something. But all the high-end management, they're all White and everything and you just – I was thinking, "Oh, he's probably not professional. Let's hope he knows what he's talking about" . . . The first thing that came to my mind was not good. I was seriously debating on switching.

Beth's comments reflect that she did not believe in the possibility of African Americans serving in roles of power and influence within corporate America. She therefore perpetuates the racialized narrative of White superiority. Furthermore, she negated the prospect of her CEO being Black by stating, "he's something" but everyone else in authority is obviously White. At the end of the interview Beth was asked to reflect upon her identity as a White woman and share how her identity influenced her perceptions of Professor Thompson. Beth stated:

> At first, before I even walked into the classroom, it was not good. But as time went on I didn't even see him – I wasn't even sure if he was Black anymore [laughs]. I didn't even – when I was describing him the word African American would never come up because that's not how I saw him anymore. I saw him as a really good professor. At first, yeah, I was like, "Oh, I have this African American professor." But now, when topics came up about him, that wasn't even the discussion at all. That never even came up . . . Even the first day . . . he acted almost like a friend, too, and he was there and he wasn't just this [whispers] Black guy that didn't care. He's so different from any African Americans. I think he's half. Is he even full African American? . . . I don't think he is [laughing]

As Beth explained, her first perceptions of Professor Thompson were grounded in negative stereotypes, which reinforced her inability to believe that Professor Thompson could teach a college course in professional studies. These perceptions slightly changed however as the semester progressed. Ultimately, her assessment of Professor Thompson's abilities challenged her beliefs and preconceived notions to such a point that she denied his racial identity and tried to justify his abilities due to the possibility that he might not be a "full African American." As she described Professor Thompson as a faculty member, she continued to struggle with her preconceived beliefs about African Americans. Ultimately, Beth justified his qualities by insinuating that he indeed exhibited some positive characteristics that she apparently attributed to being White (like being a "good professor").

One male participant also struggled with the inherent authority held by an African American faculty member in the classroom. Lee, a junior, felt his professor was condescending to him and did not respect his opinions. Lee described one particular incident in which he expressed disagreement with Professor Melton in class. Lee indicated that he did not want to "pick a fight over" over the topic; however, he felt strongly about his opinion. When asked if he felt Professor Melton valued his opinion, Lee said, "no, not really" and explained, that his professor's position was firm and that he did not expect to change her mind. While Lee said he could express his opinion he did not feel Professor Melton valued it or showed him adequate respect. Lee went on to say that he did not think that Professor Melton wanted him to succeed. He acknowledged that although this was "probably . . . not true," it was how he felt.

As a White male clearly unaware of his whiteness and the role race plays in his life, Lee expressed that he felt his opinions had value and he believed Professor Melton would not recognize him as an equal in the classroom. When Lee reflected on needing to produce a paper that he was certain he submitted on time, he exclaimed, "I will despise her . . . and I will make that clear that I said despise her if I bring [in] this paper and she says, 'Oh, it's too late,' or something like that." Lee also stated that he felt Professor Melton's responses to him were personal rather than professional. More specifically, Lee felt Professor Melton did not like him. Thus, Lee felt that her personal dislike and disrespect for him negatively impacted her willingness to recognize his strengths as a student.

The perspectives of Beth and Lee demonstrate that students who were unaware of their racial identity, and the influence of whiteness on their perceptions of others, struggled with African American faculty's authority that is inherent within their role. While Beth showed her discomfort with having a Black man in such a position from the moment she saw his name, she resolved her internal conflict with the notion of Professor Thompson being "half White." Lee, on the other hand faulted his professor for his struggles in the course rather than admitting that as a White male student he does not hold the same power as a Black woman.

As illustrated in the next theme, "race has always been kind of an interesting thing for me," three of the sixteen students held a slightly different view of the African American faculty they had in class. This second theme presents how these three participants described the influence of race on their views as they began to recognize the inherent privilege of being White.

"Race has always been kind of an interesting thing for me" As previously discussed, participants struggled with realizing the advantages of being White and the injustices experienced by people of color. One student in particular, Kim, illustrated the conflict and struggle with the moral dilemmas associated with the inherent privileges of being White. She also struggled with the realization that although she thought of herself as living within a society that is open and inclusive, Whites and Blacks are not considered equal in society.

Kim, a Jewish woman, indicated that having two African American professors during the semester was "normal" for her because she was raised in a very diverse town where she and her family socialized with people of color on a regular basis. Kim acknowledged her White identity and stated she felt a connection to the two African American female faculty members in the department of human development because, due to her religion, she also identified as a minority. Kim however articulated that as a White woman, her physical features do not disclose her religious and cultural identity. Kim reflected upon her cultural identity as it related to whiteness:

> Race has always been kind of an interesting thing for me. I've always seen myself as a minority, so it's easier for me to accept other minorities. It's easy for me . . . . but my thing is when you look at me, you're not like, 'Oh, she's Jewish.' You can't really look at me – I have blonde hair and green eyes. I don't look like a Jewish person necessarily so I don't get stereotyped that often. So I hear a lot more than I normally would of the anti-Semitic stereotypes and all that stuff. I think because of that, I've become more aware of other stereotypes and other people and how they deal with that.

Kim further described what it was like taking two classes, in the same semester, both taught by African American women:

> So, having them as teachers, I felt like it was self-empowering, just because they um . . . they didn't let . . . society's judgments and everything didn't get in their way or anything . . . They're still, I would say, more empowered because of their color . . .

Kim was able to articulate inherent differences between religious and racial discrimination. She also appreciated the empowerment Professor Norton and Professor Melton role modeled as women of color teaching in higher education. As Kim illustrated, a student in this phase of identity development begins to challenge dominant ideologies and begins to understand the differences in power and privilege between White people and people of color. At this level of racial consciousness, White people may also begin to acknowledge their White identity and any residual feelings of guilt or anxiety may result in feeling anger toward people of color who are blamed for their discomfort (Phinney, 1996). Only one participant, Sheila, a senior, was able to describe the dissonance she was experiencing as she interacted with two different Black faculty members.

During the interview, Sheila discussed her perceptions of two African American women faculty, Professor Danielle Melton and Professor Charlotte Petry. Sheila's description of these two faculty members illustrates her perceptions of them varied greatly as she examined her identity as a White woman in relation to their self-expressed racial identity as African American women. When describing these professors Sheila stated:

> . . . so with Danielle, her teaching, her personality has nothing to do with race. I wouldn't . . . .if someone said, 'describe her', I wouldn't even say African American. But with Charlotte, I would say she's a very strong or she says, she says she's 'a very strong African American woman who just feels she's still enslaved by White women' . . .

As indicated by Sheila, how faculty members expressed their racial identity significantly influenced her perceptions of Professor Melton and Professor Petry. Sheila further stated:

> She [Professor Melton] was very . . . very fair and she didn't, she didn't put her opinions in, which I liked. Um . . . she didn't really judge . . . she didn't come off as um . . . like oppressed. My other teacher that I had for [course title] . . . she threw in *all* her opinions in and was very judgmental and . . . . She almost came off as racist towards anyone who wasn't African American or who wasn't a minority and um . . . I didn't connect with her [Professor Petry] at all. I actually shut myself off because she . . . I just felt like she was very ignorant.

According to Sheila, she felt comfortable with Professor Melton because she appeared to remain objective simply because she did not explicitly talk about race. In contrast, Sheila felt that Professor Charlotte Petry shared personal opinions in the classroom and she seemed to favor students of color. Sheila went on to state:

> [Professor Petry] almost made, it feel, um made at least me, feel uncomfortable for being White because that's what they used to do back then . . . .and she would emphasize that point so much, like it's the White peoples fault for the reason why there are African American gangs . . . and that's not my fault that happened so many years ago . . .

As previously described, as students develop racial identity and consciousness, Whites may regress and express anger toward Blacks for their feelings associated with guilt. Sheila's anger and dislike of Professor Charlotte Petry is evident; however her perceptions of Professor Danielle Melton were quite different. Sheila's differing perceptions of these faculty members most likely stem from her response to guilt when interacting with African Americans who differ in their own expressed racial awareness and/or Black identity. As a woman who is openly race conscious, Professor Petry represented, to Sheila, some of the negative stereotypes attributed to African American women (i.e., "the angry black woman"). The lack of discussion on race in Professor Melton's classroom, however, resulted in Sheila not even viewing her as an African American woman.

Discussion

Findings from this study illustrate the inherent complexity within the White student-African American faculty interaction, once the students' racial identity and consciousness are considered as we explored students' perceptions of their faculty members. Although the majority of students expressed positive perceptions of African American faculty, it is apparent that students' racial identity contributed toward overall feelings and dispositions toward those professors. Findings from this study not only support, but also advance previous research as the voices of students illuminate the influence of student racial identity and faculty race on the student-faculty interaction.

This is the first study to utilize the frameworks of Critical Race Theory (Lewis, Chesler, & Forman, 2000) and White identity development together to examine how students perceive African American faculty. The incorporation of both provided the opportunity to explore how students view the salient nature of race as they described Black professors. The use of CRT furthers that understanding as it provides a framework to explore how the concepts of race, power and privilege influence students' perspectives when interacting with a person of color who is also an authority figure in the classroom.

For many of the participants, their first experience of taking a course with an African American teacher or professor occurred when this study was being conducted. The students' experiences, shared in this study, shed light on the implications of racial and ethnic residential and educational segregation in the United States. Furthermore, findings reveal students at different levels of their identity development perceived African American faculty, and experienced their interactions with African American faculty, differently.

While CRT contends that racism is an ordinary part of everyday life in American society, students with very limited or distorted racial consciousness minimized or failed to recognize the salient nature of race in their lives. Several White students, in the less advanced phase of their identity development, displayed a naïve sense of "colorblindness" and insisted they "treat everyone the same" regardless of race. CRT, however, challenges these notions. Student participants were particularly concerned about being perceived as racist yet their reactions to and interactions with African American faculty showed why colorblind ideologies fail. The use of language by some White students, for example, indicated a general lack of awareness regarding how language re-enforces societal racism, even though they were obviously aware of the racial stereotypes facing Black faculty. Matthew, for example, used the term "colored" when referring to how open he was to people of different races and ethnicities. It is possible the use of such language is a residual effect of being raised within a highly segregated residential community. Mark and Sheila similarly commented that the diversity and perceived acceptance within society today is unlike days in the distant past. Mark's comments about "slavery times" and Sheila's comments that her professor felt like she was "enslaved" still brings forth the subtleness of how racism permeates American society. Language frames deep-rooted perspectives and until White individuals begin to critically examine their beliefs and values, the use of such words and phrases will continue to divide communities and individuals.

Colorblind ideologies also failed when the dynamic of power and oppression became prevalent, most notably portrayed by three White students, who struggled with the notion of a person of color serving as an authority figure in the classroom. Indeed, the very idea of having an African American in a position of authority or power conflicted with some students' narratives about

perceived White superiority and Black's inferiority. Lee, a junior, expected that as a White male his opinions should be highly valued and struggled when he believed he was not treated as an equal by an African American female faculty member. Rather than take personal responsibility, he blamed Professor Melton for his poor grade. Ultimately, Lee struggled with the notion of an African American individual, and a woman no less, having more power than he. Beth, a sophomore, admitted she almost withdrew from her course because she did not believe a Black man could teach her. When talking about her immediate reaction to seeing his name on her course list, Beth stated she was not "racist or anything" however her perceptions of African Americans were based in racism as her allegiance to negative stereotypes led her to believe Blacks wore "baggy jeans" and were uneducated and therefore were unprofessional and lacked authority (based on her past work experiences in her hometown).

Beth's reliance on racial stereotypes immediately framed her expectations of her Black male professor. After she learned more from him, she justified his knowledge and abilities in the assumption he was bi-racial because, in her mind, African American men are unprofessional. Beth's expressed beliefs and attitudes are clear examples of how a White student, in the initial phase of White identity development sought to reconcile the beliefs she brought to campus with the realities she faced when she had a professor who was African American. The perspectives, shared by Beth and Lee, illustrate that concepts of whiteness in terms of power and White superiority are woven within White students' perceptions of and experiences with people of color.

Only two students in our study could express an appreciation for racial diversity; however, they struggled when recognizing the inherent benefits of being White in society. Kim shared that as a Jewish woman, she understood the ramifications of living within a society that imposes negative stereotypes and slurs on people of color. As a self-identified "minority" woman, due to her religious and cultural background, Kim felt a connection to her African American faculty members, Professor Norton and Professor Melton. Kim was also able to express the inherent differences between racial and religious justifications of oppression and she indicated that as a White woman she did not experience the same level of oppression, as did her professors and other individuals of color. Kim was at the place in her White identity development in which she could articulate the advantages of being a white woman in society. A second student, however, shared the residual feelings of guilt due to her whiteness. This student, Sheila, indicated she felt isolated and alienated when a Black faculty member talked about issues of race in the classroom. Sheila took two courses with African American professors during her undergraduate career and she shared very different perceptions of these faculty members due to how they personally expressed their own racial conscious-

ness. According to Sheila, one faculty member did not "make herself out to be an African American woman" and the second faculty member was "a very strong African American woman" who just felt "enslaved by White women." In other words, the second faculty member, Professor Petry, represented to Sheila, the stereotypical "Angry Black woman."

Sheila's differing perceptions of these faculty members and the shared experience of other student participants raise two important conclusions regarding the influence of race on the perceptions and educational experiences of students. First, findings of this study reveal that although our society is becoming more diverse, White students raised in segregated communities may fail to recognize the salience of race in their lives. Students in our study, therefore, did not question their adherence to a colorblind ideology and instead believed they are "open" to diversity, and they "treat everyone the same," because to them, racism exists only in the distant past. Thus, they were unaware of how they treated African American faculty in their classrooms. It is apparent, however, that racism remains alive as racial stereotypes and negative images infected the way students perceived African American faculty. Second, the level of a student's racial identity development influenced their perceptions of African American faculty members. Students in our study, like Beth, with limited or distorted racial consciousness demonstrated concern about what an African American professor might contribute to their academic experience. Students in this state of racial awareness had somewhat favorable views of African American faculty but still struggled with the recognition of White privilege and racism; in other words, whiteness. While Sheila, for example, saw Professor Petry as the "angry Black woman," she overlooked Professor Melton's race—suggesting that Sheila, even at this phase of racial identity preferred to be "colorblind." Thus, racial identity significantly influenced the educational trajectory of all students in our study as they experienced diverse interactions with faculty who require students, at minimum, to question their preconceived beliefs about race and its accompanying stereotypes.

IMPLICATIONS

This research has direct implications for institutions of higher education. While we spoke to sixteen White students whose years in college ranged from one to four years, we found all of them to be at the entrance phase of racial identity development with little to no racial consciousness. Given that many students arrive on American college and university campuses with limited or no experience of interacting with people of color, it becomes imperative for institutions to take on the responsibility of challenging rather than perpetuating whiteness, racism, and colorblindness. Indeed, institutional

administrators and faculty can no longer ignore the need to boldly address race and racial issues and to do so in more meaningful ways. The 2016 Election of Donald Trump, who ran on a racially charged and divisive campaign, won 48% of White college-educated voters (CNN, 2017) and recent racial incidents on campuses and in society remind us that racism permeates our society. Further, through racial identity development, we can begin to understand the influence and implications of whiteness; that colorblindness is harmful as CRT contends and colorblindness *is* racism. Unless White students move toward a non-racist identity (with support from higher education institutional faculty, staff and administrators), their worldview will not expand and the consequences of whiteness will be reproduced on and off college campuses.

Racial consciousness can be increased when institutional leadership takes intentional actions to crack the "walls of whiteness." These actions will require human and fiscal resources as well as explicit intention to increase and improve cross-racial interaction at all levels of the university. Institutional leaders must take on the responsibility to provide training and education to current administrators, faculty and staff in order to directly address systematic racism. Leadership must also actively demonstrate a commitment to the hiring and retention of faculty of color so the entire community is aware of the value placed on a diverse professoriate. Indeed, as Bush (2011) argues: "The presence or absence of faculty of color conveys messages about who belongs where, who has knowledge and power." (p. 225). The chronic underrepresentation of African American faculty and other faculty of color illuminates the systemic racism that exists within higher education and affirms White students' stereotypical beliefs and racial narratives about who are authority figures and who are not. As student populations are increasingly diverse, there is a growing need for role models of color, particularly African American professors who are authority figures in the classroom.

Finally, institutions must be more aware of the negative impact espoused colorblindness and affirmed whiteness plays in the retention of African American faculty and other faculty of color. Challenges in the classroom or student attempts to discredit or disrespect African American faculty are a clear demonstration of this. Department chairs, in particular, must be prepared to support Black faculty and all faculty of color by taking their concerns seriously and recognizing these issues as faculty are evaluated for tenure and promotion. As comments by Sheila indicate, faculty who were considered to be "too Black," were viewed negatively, which will likely become apparent in course evaluations (Evans-Winter & Twyman, 2011). Moreover, some White students in this study had negative and stereotypical views of Black faculty even before they stepped into the classroom. Any faculty or administrators who review student evaluations of African American faculty or who review portfolios for career advancement must consider these factors,

particularly if the faculty member includes race in their curriculum or their pedagogy and/or exhibits any level of racial consciousness in the classroom. Administrators and faculty review committees must be trained and educated on issues of race and racism, to better support Black faculty by considering students' limited racial identity and the ways their identities influence their perceptions of faculty.

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