

FIRST YOU ARE WHITE, THEN YOU ARE DIFFERENT: FIRST GENERATION
IMMIGRANTS NEGOTIATING WHITENESS

By

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To my husband, without whose support my graduate career would never have taken flight.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	4
ABSTRACT.....	7
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION AND SIGNIFICANCE.....	9
Introduction.....	9
Research Questions	10
Significance	12
2 LITERATURE REVIEW	14
Theoretical Influences	14
Symbolic Interactionism.....	14
Intersectionality	16
Empirical Literature Review.....	18
Intersectionality and Immigration	18
White racial identity	20
Immigration and Whiteness.....	22
Whites and Racial Progressiveness	23
This Research’s Contribution	25
3 METHODS	26
Research Design	26
The Group Interview	26
Instrument.....	27
Sample	29
Determining eligibility	29
Sample characteristics	29
A note on participants of color	31
Analysis	31
Concerns	32
My Immigrant Experience.....	32
Participants’ Educational Level.....	34
Pilot Studies	35
4 FIRST YOU ARE WHITE, THEN YOU ARE DIFFERENT: NEGOTIATING WHITENESS.....	37
Immigrants and Whiteness	37
Race and the U.S. South: Situated Whiteness	37

The U.S. South as racist	38
The U.S. South as multicultural	40
“You Are White But Not American”: Whiteness as Relational and Conditional	41
Accent.....	42
Dress.....	44
Skin tone.....	45
Summary.....	45
5 THE POTENTIAL FOR RACIALLY PROGRESSIVE WHITES.....	47
White Immigrants and the Potential for Racially Progressive Consciousness	47
Parameters for Racial progressiveness	48
Recognizing racism.....	48
Marginalization, privilege, and racial progressiveness	49
Taking action.....	52
Cautions.....	53
Summary.....	53
6 DISCUSSION AND FUTURE WORK.....	55
Summary and Discussion of the Findings	55
Summary of Findings	55
Giving meaning to race as situated, relational, and conditional.....	55
Racial progressiveness	56
Discussion of Findings	57
White racial identity: whiteness and nationality	57
Old World regionalism and racial beliefs	57
Racial progressiveness and constructing the other.....	58
The language of solidarity.....	60
Sample size.....	61
Future Avenues for Research.....	61
Regional Differences	61
Comparing White Immigrants and Native-born Whites	62
Comparing White Immigrants with Immigrants of Color	62
Conclusion.....	62
LIST OF REFERENCES.....	65
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	71

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This study utilizes qualitative data collected from first generation immigrants living in the southeastern United States to examine the negotiation of a white racial identity. Data were collected in same-race and race-mixed group interviews of two to four participants. Drawing on the theoretical perspectives of symbolic interactionism and intersectionality, this study examines the ways in which a white racial identity is negotiated, and how it is tied to developing a racially progressive consciousness.

Results focused on the interaction between whiteness and immigration to examine whiteness as a situated, relational identity. Additionally, interview data suggest that one's white racial identity is conditional, where accessibility to white privilege was often mediated by factors such as language, accent and dress.

The study also explores whether the participants' unique social location, as racially privileged yet marginalized as immigrants, can lead to a progressive racial consciousness.

The implications of the study are twofold: first, by addressing how phenotypically white immigrants negotiate a racial identity, I complicate the static conceptualization of whiteness as privilege. Secondly, the development of a racially progressive consciousness by those in a

racially privileged position can lead to social change, both here and in the participants' home countries.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND SIGNIFICANCE

Introduction

The concepts of race and race relations continue to play an enormous role in shaping individual lives in American society. Numerous studies have shown that discrimination by race is still an important factor in the U.S. (Bonilla-Silva 1997, 2006, Feagin, Vera and Batur 2001, Massey and Lundy 2001) whether in the context of housing market, mortgage or car loans, education and occupations. Yet, the predominant social discourse is one of downplaying race as an important factor in everyday life (Bonilla-Silva 2006), and the privileges associated with a white racial identity remain largely unexamined., “invisible to those who benefit from it the most.” (Rothenberg 2002:3)

This exploratory study aims to present the personal experiences of immigrants in relation to race and racial discrimination in the U.S. South. Further, it will focus on phenotypically white immigrants and their experiences in developing a white racial identity, exposing whether their unique position as both white and immigrant allows for a more progressive racial consciousness. A large portion of my sample is phenotypically white, originating mostly from Eastern Europe, and thus has the option of engaging a privileged racial position in contrast to other participants in the sample, who could be categorized as people of color once in the United States (Feagin et al 2001, McIntosh 1988, Omi and Winant 1994.) Focusing on these participants allows me to examine the experiences of discrimination in a group of people who are in a position to access white privilege, as well as to examine whether this white privilege is made available to them. Data was collection in four group interviews, with two to four participants in each group,

yielding ten participants. Using line-by-line coding , I searched for emerging themes and concepts relating to my research questions.

I examine the particular meanings that people born and socialized outside the U.S. give to race once they arrive and live in their new country. Immigrants in U.S. society can serve as “outsiders within”(Collins 1986), as they must learn socially sanctioned rules, and adapt to the racial dynamics they encounter upon arrival at the same time that they need to adapt their previously acquired beliefs on racial matters. How they come to give meaning to a white racial identity can make discrimination more visible, and can highlight the privileges they come to enjoy over other participants of color in the sample.

Most research and public discourse on the interplay between immigration and race currently centers on migration from Mexico into the U.S. (Santa Ana, 2002.) The experiences of immigrants who would be classified as white are particularly missing from contemporary research. Most recent publications on immigration and race in the U.S. center on the wave at the turn of the 20th century, when Irish, Italian and Germans dominated the migration flows. (Guglielmo 2003, Guglielmo and Salerno 2003, Ignatiev 1995, Roediger 2006). Further, the analyses often ignore the importance of race as it affects whites; much theorizing on whites deals with ethnicity rather than race. This thesis will engage a more complicated conceptualization of whiteness and white privilege, offering instances where one’s privileged racial status does not always afford social privileges.

Research Questions

This research centers on two main questions: (1) How do participants give meaning to a white racial identity derived from their skin color and ethnicity? and (2) Does their unique social position as white-skinned but not American lead to racial tolerance?

The first question addresses how phenotypically white immigrants give meaning to race in the U.S. context. Whites in the U.S. generally deny belonging to a race (Bonilla-Silva 2006, Feagin et al 2001, Stoddart 2002), giving little if any racial meaning to whiteness, and obscuring their role in a racial hierarchy that privileges whites. I posit that phenotypically white immigrants must go through a racial “learning process” (Stoddart 2002) in which they recognize more readily the privileges afforded to people who are classified as white.

Further, I aim to see if and how immigrants who are phenotypically white access white privilege and on what terms. While the area of research on whiteness and white privilege has been growing in recent years (McDermott and Samson 2005), little has been done to validate how white racial identity and white privilege are experienced in people’s everyday lives. I expect to find that white privilege is not automatically granted to all those who look white, and aim to understand in what ways access to this privilege is made possible.

The second question addresses whether phenotypically white immigrants are uniquely positioned to develop a racially progressive, more tolerant consciousness. Defined as an awareness of privilege experienced due to one’s white race, a recognition of racial discrimination faced by people of color, and anti-racist action, a racially progressive consciousness in whites is intimately linked to the meaning given to race in one’s own life. I posit that immigrants have the potential to develop a racially progressive consciousness due to the learning process they encounter regarding race in the U.S., as well as the discrimination they personally face as immigrants. Participants voiced opposition to discrimination as experienced by themselves, as well as what they perceived others to have experienced. I ask whether one’s experience of racism and discrimination leads to the development of a racially progressive consciousness, and whether this has translated into solidarity with those who are perceived to suffer discrimination. I

also ask whether this can extend beyond the boundaries of the United States to include addressing racism and discrimination in the participants' home countries.

Significance

It must be noted that phenotypically white immigrants do not constitute a numerical majority in contemporary immigration flows (Portes and Rumbaut 1996), and that demographic projections cast that non-Hispanic whites will only constitute fifty percent of the population in the year 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau 2004), as opposed to the current 72%. Why is it important to study white immigrants and whiteness at all, if the white population is declining and immigrants to the U.S. are largely non-white?

One reason to continue to study whiteness is that, regardless of numerical majority or minority, whiteness remains embedded as a privileged position in the hierarchy of race. Structural racism is based on a racial hierarchy, whereby the “race placed in the superior position tends to receive greater economic remuneration and access to better occupations...occupies a primary position in the political system, is granted higher social estimation...” (Bonilla-Silva 1997:469). Those who are able to claim a white identity, then, can reap benefits unavailable to people of color. Another reason to investigate whiteness is that many immigrants who may be attributed a minority racial status by others self-identify as white, as in the case of 50% of the Mexican origin population, according to the 1990 Census (Murguía and Forman 2003). This emphasizes the fluidity of racial categories, whose meanings shift over time and accommodate to contemporary definitions. So, on the one hand, whiteness has a structural significance as conceptualized within a hierarchical framework of race, and on the other there is the significance of race on a personal level. Whiteness, then, is not an endangered racial category, and continues to have significance in race and ethnic studies.

The significance of this research is twofold: adding complexity to our understanding on white racial identity by including the experiences of immigrants, as well as assessing the potential for the development of a racially progressive consciousness. First, this research will contribute to the few empirical studies of immigrants' white racial identity in the contemporary United States. It will also attempt to expand the notion of whiteness, moving beyond a conceptualization of a static, invisible and ever-present asset to a more situational identity whose ability to access white privilege varies upon many conditions.

Secondly, the development of a racially progressive consciousness and, more importantly, turning that consciousness into action, can be a catalyst for change, at a personal and structural level. Eliminating discrimination is one of the declared aims of most Western societies today, yet there is little dialogue on discrimination or racism, and even less a discussion of the privileges afforded to whites. Perhaps experiencing discrimination and privilege contemporaneously in one's day to day life can foster a willingness to challenge discrimination and racism, both in one's immediate environment as well as in one's home country.

In order to contextualize this study, the second chapter will review the literature on immigration and race, white racial identity, as well as theories of race in the U.S.. The third chapter will detail the methods and sample used in the thesis research, and the remaining chapters will present the results.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Influences

Two main theoretical influences are guiding this research; symbolic interactionism (Blumer 1969) and intersectionality (Collins 2000). Rather than strictly follow particular methodologies associated with these theoretical perspectives, I cull useful elements from each and use them to inform my theoretical perspective.

Symbolic Interactionism

Because I am interested in the meanings participants give to their experiences with race, symbolic interactionism is a useful theoretical perspective to engage. Developed initially by George Herbert Mead (1972), the symbolic interactionist approach emphasizes the meanings that people assign to everyday interactions, and the ways in which this affects their understanding of the world. As further developed by Blumer (1969) and Goffman (1959), symbolic interactionism shifted the theoretical focus of much sociological inquiry from the objective to the subjective, from structure to interpersonal interaction, from macro to micro level analysis (Cuff, Sharrock, and Francis 2003). The emphasis on studying individuals and micro-level interaction is important to my research project, as I aim to understand how people give meaning to race in their everyday lives.

Symbolic interactionism further stresses the interpersonal relations as a key to one's development of a sense of self and, therefore, to one's understanding of the world. A person not only has a sense of one's own identity, but that sense is shaped by interaction with others and an interpretation of others' perception of one's self. This is aptly described by the term "the looking glass self" (Cooley [1902] 1956), wherein people develop a sense of self in concert with what they interpret others' views towards themselves to be. This becomes especially important in the

participants' development of a racial sense of self within a U.S. context, because, as we shall see, the way that people begin to give meaning to a racial self is through interaction with others.

Further, symbolic interactionism elevates people's perceptions of reality as an important part of the data to analyze. This is best known as the Thomas theorem, in which W.I. Thomas states: "If [people] define situations as real, they are real in their consequences." This statement allows me to analyze the respondent's narratives and privilege the meanings they give to certain situations, regardless of whether I would assign different meanings to them.

In my analysis, there are some instances in which the respondents' interpretation of a situation would differ from my own. For example, in one interview, a young female graduate student from Eastern Europe and phenotypically white, described a situation in which she felt discriminated against because of race. Taking place in a grocery store, the black cashier had let other black customers with fewer items in front of her, and she interpreted this situation as indicative of racial discrimination. While it may have been likely that the cashier let people in front of her because they had fewer items and she had an entire cartload, a matter of convenience rather than of discrimination, it is not important that I try to rationalize the racial meaning the participant has assigned to the situation. Rather, I must privilege her interpretation of the incident, and draw from it an analysis of the meanings she gives to race in that instance. Adopting elements of a symbolic interactionist approach, then, allows me to privilege people's understandings of race and give importance to the social interactions that activate and shape these understandings.

However, there are limitations to any body of theory. Symbolic interactionism is unsuited in all situations, and one such situation is analyzing the importance of structure and power as it applies to race. While privileging an analysis of race as socially constructed through everyday

experiences is important, symbolic interactionism's focus on the micro level must be tempered with an approach that allows for the analysis of power and structure. An intersectional approach allows for greater flexibility in researching relevant forces shaping racial experiences, linking the personal to the structural for a critical analysis of processes and power.

Intersectionality

The intersectional approach was popularized by Patricia Hill Collins (1986), and has remained an important contribution to sociological theory. Collins thus introduced the significance of looking not only at gender or race individually, but at gender, race and class simultaneously. Only by simultaneously analyzing these dimensions of oppression could research reach a better understanding and theorizing of black women's simultaneous oppression as black and as women..

The approach originated because black women, as Collins showed, had been doubly forgotten and ignored in scholarly research projects, as results were generalized to black women in terms of belonging either to the black race or the female sex. Research addressing either race or gender did not present accurate analyses of black women's experiences, and only a simultaneous analysis of race, gender and class could. By transcending a dualistic and oppositional paradigm, often pitting gender or race as the primary lens of discrimination, the intersectional approach recognizes the multiple facets of discrimination against black women.

While Collins addressed black women in particular, she acknowledged that other groups may benefit from an intersectional analysis, and that each group would have a specific set of salient interlocking factors (Collins 2000) in addition to race, class, and gender. Scholars have identified other factors to include in an intersectional approach, such as sexuality (Grewal and

Kaplan 2001, Thorne 1995), age, religion, nation, and citizenship, in order to better analyze particular groups' experiences.

Another important advantage of the intersectional approach is the conceptualization of the “outsider within” elaborated from Georg Simmel’s *The Stranger* (Simmel as quoted in Wolff 1950). Collins places black women sociologists as “outsiders within” the discipline of sociology due to their particular social location in U.S. society, and theorizes that their perspective can add to the field by challenging some of the norms, reevaluating key assumptions, and bringing another point of view to the discipline of sociology.

Adapting intersectionality to my research, my analysis engages race, class, and gender as well as immigration as important interlocking factors when analyzing immigrant experiences with race. By selecting phenotypically white immigrants to participate in a study on race, I engage participants who are privileged in some dimensions (race, educational level) and marginalized in others (as immigrants, as women for some of the participants).

Likewise, I place people who immigrate as “outsiders within” in the larger U.S. society, and theorize that an intersectional analysis of their experiences will add a dimension to the construction of a white racial identity, and generate a better understanding of how privilege and marginalization can serve to foster racial progressiveness among whites. Because they have gone through a “learning process” (Stoddart 2002) as “outsiders” to the racial hierarchy in the U.S., immigrants are more likely than white Americans to have considered whiteness as a racial identity and be able to talk about it.

Recent work addressing the difficulty in conducting intersectional research (McCall 2005) points to the value of interdisciplinary research and to the exploration of marginalization as a process rather than as a given condition of any society. While the complexity of conducting

intersectional research poses a challenge for any scholar, the benefits of this approach merit a concerted effort to add to the literature and to reach a more complex understanding of the intersectionality of immigration.

Empirical Literature Review

The following section explores the empirical areas relevant to my research, engaging themes of intersectionality, immigration, whiteness and work on white racial progressiveness.

Intersectionality and Immigration

While the empirical literature on immigration acknowledges that discrimination in the U.S. is based on economic, racial or gendered factors, qualitative works rarely engages all three simultaneously to provide a more complete analysis. My study endeavors to fill that gap and link the intersectional approach to immigration, adapting the approach to best capture the experiences of immigrants in the U.S..

Intersectional analyses of immigrants are rare, although race, gender, and class are addressed individually in several case studies. Gender and migration are examined together, as the field has begun to consider the ways in which migration can be a gendered process and hold differing outcomes for women and men (Chant and Radcliffe 1992, Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992, 1994, Kofman 2004, Pedraza 1991, Pessar 1999, Tienda and Booth 1991). Studies of race and migration are also abundant, (Denton and Massey 1989, Warikoo 2005, Woldemikael 1989), especially with regard to the racial formation of Latinos and Asians in the U.S. (Omi and Winant 1994).

Within gender scholarship, much research has been conducted on various facets of immigration. For example, the intersection of immigration and gender is evident in the literature on carework (Aranda 2003, Litt and Zimmerman 2003), violence (Menjivar and Salcido 2002),

mothering (Dreby 2005, Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997, Moon 2003) and social networks (Hagan 1998).

Intersectional analyses of immigrants engaging race, class and gender simultaneously are rare, although a few works approach migration using this method of analysis. (Brah 1993, Essed 1996, Raijman and Semyonov 1997). A most recent example is Shu-Ju Ada Cheng's (2003) analysis of foreign domestic workers in Taiwan. The intersectional approach she adopted allowed a much more complex analysis of how discrimination against the workers was racialized and gendered, implicating state policies (in terms of withholding of citizenship), the racialization of the foreign as essentially different from the native population, and the gendered nature of carework as simultaneously marginalizing foreign domestic workers. The intersectional analysis allowed Cheng to move beyond one-dimensional analyses of discrimination and provide a more complex understanding of the construction of marginalization in Taiwan.

Ethnographically inclined research (Torre 2001, Berger 2004), where immigrant women share their experiences which are then recounted in narrative form, is also a forum for intersections of race, class and gender emerge from personal narratives. Although the authors may not formally espouse an intersectional approach, the resulting immigrant narratives show the significance of interlocking factors in determining their experiences in their adopted countries. The women in Andrea Torre's (Torre 2001) recounting of immigrant experiences in Italy clearly mention their encounters with gendered and racialized discrimination, as well as an ascription of class that often does not match their own perceptions of themselves. In applying a more explicit intersectional analysis to my own work, I intend to emphasize the gendered and classed dimensions of the participants' experiences with race.

White racial identity

As evidenced by the introductory chapter, an important focus of this research project is the expansion of work on white racial identity as an important facet to better understanding the larger issues of race and ethnicity in the United States. The origins of whiteness studies lie at the turn of the 20th century, when scholars of color included examinations of whiteness as part of the larger study of race and ethnicity. (DuBois 2004). However, as McDermott and Samson (2005) suggest, the focus of much of recent scholarship in U.S.-based race and ethnic studies has been on minorities:

Sociologists of race and ethnicity have rightfully criticized the almost exclusive focus on nonwhites in studies of racial identity, implying that whites have no racial identity but are instead treated as the base group to which others are compared.(McDermott and Samson 2005:250).

In order to better understand race and racism, it is important to also research the supposed beneficiaries of racial discrimination (Doane and Bonilla-Silva 2003, Feagin, Vera, and Batur 2001, McKinney 2005). The current politics of colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva 2006, Omi and Winant 1997) are based on the white denial of a white race and, consequently, race-based privilege (of which they are recipients). By casting “whiteness” as a racial identity, researchers can implicate whites in a racial hierarchy of privilege and discrimination, and emphasize each person’s involvement in this system.

Therefore, an examination of white privilege is key to understanding a white racial identity. A particular characteristic intrinsic to white racial identity as it has been largely defined in sociological studies is the concept of white privilege. White privilege is defined as the unearned privileges people enjoy due to a privileged racial position, and can extend from occupational and educational advantages to everyday security and authority. McIntosh’s (1988) exploration of white privilege in her own life is a meditation on the “invisible” advantages that

being white affords people in the U.S.. She casts these privileges invisible to the people who possess them, unrecognized unless one has gone through a particularly intense period of self-criticism. Further, other researchers have noted that white privilege is not only something whites can access personally, but it is something that has been built into many institutions in U.S. society (Bonilla Silva 2006, Doane and Bonilla-Silva 2003, Feagin et al 2001, McKinney 2005).

In analyzing white privilege, it is important to explore to what degree this privilege is accessible by whites and in what manners this access may be modified. While there have been some studies that problematize universal access to white privilege by looking at poor, rural (Buck 2001) or working class (Hartigan 1999) whites' reduced access to it, white privilege is still largely under-researched. Further, there are other ways in which white racial identities are significant.

There has been a historical conceptualization of whiteness as simply invisible privilege; of whiteness as the "neutral" category against which everybody else is measured; an assumed, implicitly privileged status. Many researchers –Alba(1990), Frankenberg (2001), Roediger (1999),Waters (1990), among others- “urge a shift in thinking about white racial identity as more complex than [others] had previously considered...a focus on whiteness as a situated identity, not as an identity of uniform privilege but as a complex social identity whose meaning is imparted by the particular context in which white actors are located.” (McDermott and Samson 2005:250). Jaret and Reitzes (1999) for example, undertook a large scale study to determine the importance of racial identity, including whiteness, in different physical settings (the home, the workplace, in public). They found variability in the salience of one's racial identity both among races generally, and across different locations within and between races. Their findings speak to

the importance of recognizing the varied salience of racial identity in different physical and social settings.

Immigration and Whiteness

Just as there is a focus on non-whites in the study of race and ethnicity, there exists a similar focus on immigrants as minorities. This is especially so with the contentious discourse over the U.S.-Mexico border and illegal immigration dominating public discourse (Santa Ana 2002), resulting in little attention paid to immigrants whose race is white. Rather, the discourse seems to assume that white immigrants are not a problem and will assimilate more easily. This can be paralleled to the ethnicity theory of race, where white ethnics were perceived to assimilate easily into U.S. society (Omi and Winant 1997).

Ethnicity theory focuses on the experiences of immigrant groups at the turn of the century, whose assimilation into the U.S. society was predicated on a model that did not account for racial difference, and generalized their process of assimilation to all other ethnic groups in the U.S., including native born blacks. Ethnicity theory predicts that there are cultural reasons for why U.S. blacks have not assimilated as immigrants at the turn of the century, perhaps best exemplified in Gunnar Myrdal's (1944) report on "The Negro Problem." Myrdal holds that while there are racist barriers in place preventing African Americans from integrating (segregationist laws as the most obvious), when these barriers are removed, African Americans will face similar conditions to immigrants at the turn of the century, and the choice to assimilate will be theirs. This approach is problematic because it ignores the significance of race as a hierarchical ordering in U.S. society (Omi and Winant 1997). While the problems with ethnicity theory have been largely acknowledged and theorizing has moved on to different models (Portes and

Rumbaut 1996, Portes and Zhou 1993), the empirical studies of immigration and whiteness largely have not addressed contemporary immigration.

Studies focusing on immigration and whites are largely analyzing race within the context of turn of the century immigration to the U.S. and the “whitening” of various immigrant groups of European extraction (Guglielmo 2003, Guglielmo and Salerno 2003, Ignatiev 1995, Roediger 2006). While many studies problematize the assumption that even immigrant groups of European extraction assimilated “easily”, adopting more critical approaches than ethnicity theory allows for, there remains a lack of research on contemporary immigration and whiteness.

Whites and Racial Progressiveness

An important direction in the studies of whiteness and race is the mechanisms by which whites begin to recognize their positions of privilege and begin to develop a racially progressive consciousness.

There is no single definition of what makes a person racially progressive within the discipline of sociology or within the larger field of race and ethnic studies. There are, however, a number of texts that address both structural factors that predispose groups of people to be more racially progressive, as well as various personal characteristics associated with people considered to be racially progressive.

In addressing structural factors, group positions affect whether and how people experience oppression and come to recognize it as an important factor shaping the lives of other groups. Groups of people who experience discrimination have been thought to be better predisposed to recognize their group’s position of privilege along other dimensions. For example, white women as a group have been cited as inhabiting a “singular position in the patterns of oppression, being both racial oppressors and being oppressed by gender discrimination” (Feagin et al 2001:231). It could be argued, then, that white women’s experiences with gender discrimination would

translate into insights into racial discrimination experienced by people of color in the U.S.. However, Feagin found that experiencing gender discrimination alone is not necessarily enough to influence understandings of racial discrimination (Feagin et al 2001:231). Experiencing one dimension of oppression (gender, for white women) was not sufficient to translate to understanding other dimensions of oppression. Rather, groups of people who “experience multiple oppressions are more likely to share literally a ‘social space’ as well as a set of experiences that tend to develop a sense of ‘commonality’” (Bonilla Silva 2006:145). Groups that share experiences of the multiple oppressions are more likely to develop cross-racial understandings. So white women who are stigmatized in other ways are the most likely to experience solidarity and exhibit racial progressiveness (because of sexuality or class, for example).

There have also been studies that measured racial progressiveness by looking at personal characteristics that influence racial progressiveness (Berube 2001, Doane and Bonilla-Silva 2003, Rasmussen, Klineberg, Nexica and Wray 2001). Eduardo Bonilla Silva (2006) delineated a number of ways in which he measured racial progressiveness. He measured racial progressiveness by assessing his participants’ support for interracial marriage and affirmative action, having close relationships with people of color, and willingness to acknowledge discrimination as a central factor affecting the lives of minorities today. Peggy McIntosh (1990) encourages a critical analysis and awareness of one’s own white privilege as a stepping stone to racial progressiveness. Feagin et. al. (2001) cite acknowledging one’s own racism and developing empathy with African Americans as crucial to developing an anti-racist, racially progressive consciousness.

This Research's Contribution

In focusing on contemporary, white immigrants' understandings and experiences of whiteness, I aim to expand the empirical literature on whiteness as a situated, relational, and complex identity. I apply elements of symbolic interaction and intersectionality to analyze the particular contributions of immigrants' experiences with race, in order to examine the particular meanings people give to race as well as the ways in which their social location influences their experiences. Further, I hope to complicate the conceptualization of white privilege as accessible to anyone with white skin in the U.S., and explore that particular ways in which this access is modified in immigrants' experiences.

According to the measures described above, I also posit that immigrants, in general, and phenotypically white immigrants, specifically, have an increased potential for developing a racially progressive consciousness. Personal experiences with discrimination as well as structural dimensions of oppression combine to position the research participants at a nexus where the development of a racially progressive consciousness is possible and likely.

CHAPTER 3 METHODS

Research Design

I selected small, in-depth, semi-structured group interviews to explore the research questions and as the most appropriate method to gather answers to my research questions. Interview data were collected between May and June of 2006, in 4 group interviews, for a total of ten participants. Qualitative research methods were selected because they better render in-depth analyses of personal experiences and allow explorations of meanings.

The Group Interview

There are a number of distinctions that make a group interview setting the most desirable method for my research aims. The first is that, unlike one-on-one interviews, group interviews allow for multivocality, where participants build on each other's shared experiences and there is a genuine give and take of experiences, as well as questioning of responses (Denzin and Lincoln 1998, Holstein and Gubrium 1995). Conversations can flow with minimal direction from the researcher, who nonetheless prefaces the interview by explaining the topic of inquiry and guides the conversation during the interview. By having participants interact with one another, the flow of conversation and subjects can become part of the data to analyze, and allows for the participants to elicit new themes that the researcher may not have anticipated. Group interviews transcend the individual knower and allow for a community of knowers to share experiences, offering a more complex and varied analysis of the themes discussed (DeVault 1996).

The small number of participants per group ensured that potential negative effects of the group interview setting (one participant dominating the group, interfering with individual

expression) was controlled for. Individuals were more likely to create a running dialogue within the interview setting, fostering a back and forth between themselves and leaving me to listen. I was also able to guide the conversations and to circle back to answers I felt needed more explanations without upsetting the dynamics within the small group.

Practical considerations for adopting group interviews include the ability to reach more people in less time than individual interviews would allow, as well as freeing the researcher to observe unspoken reactions to topics of discussion (Denzin and Lincoln 1998). I was able to take jotted notes of non-verbal interactions during the interviews, writing my observations out more fully after the end of the interview. These non-vocal elements of the interview also become part of the data to be analyzed, and give a more layered account of the way in which participants talk about, give meaning to, and react to the topic of inquiry. Further, the non-vocal cues contribute to the analytical context in which I strive to give meaning the participants' answers that is faithful to their intended meaning as they spoke the answers.

Instrument

I modeled the semi-structured interviews after Holstein and Gubrium's *The Active Interview* (1995), which pushes the researcher into moving beyond regarding the interview as an extension of a survey, reconceptualizing the interaction a researcher has with participants. This influenced the way in which I designed the interview guide and the way in which I interacted with the participants.

The interview guide was based on questions I anticipated to be important, but was also geared to adapt from one interview to the next in order to incorporate developing issues. The participants were conceptualized as active knowers capable of informing me about the issues I deemed important, but also capable of building knowledge in conjunction with the other

participants and the researcher. The knowledge produced in an active interview is reflexive, emergent, and situated – knowledge that is built and given meaning within the particular context of the interview rather than as a static, unchanging opinion or fact that a person holds for his or her entire life. A flexible interview guide allows the interviews to have some internal consistency as to topics covered, but also to value the particular issues a group of respondents deems important to share. I was able to follow the interview guide I had developed, but I was also free to follow the participants' conversations into areas that I had not asked about or envisioned as important. Rather than discard this information as superfluous, within the active interview, all information shared with the researcher is potentially important and can become a part of subsequent interview guides.

Further, my conduct within the interview setting was also influenced by active interview tenets. The researcher is viewed as always a part of the interview, and while she should be careful not impose her meaning onto participants answers and avoid leading questions, her role in the interview setting need not be minimal or sterile. Rather, in opposition to positivist research which conceives of the interviewer as an absolute observer, I put forward that the researcher is an always and already “biased” individual, holding opinions and knowledge about the subject she is researching, bringing these opinions and knowledge into the interview setting. This stance allowed me to disclose my personal history as an immigrant to the US when it was asked of me, or when I deemed it important to the conversation. In all instances, participants asked why I was interested in studying the subject of race, and my ability to answer truthfully helped build rapport and establish trust between myself and the participants.

Sample

Determining eligibility

The first step in formulating a sample was determining eligibility to participate in the research project. This entailed a definition of the term “immigrant.” While it may seem simple at first, the definition of “immigrant” encompasses many dimensions; beyond moving from one country to another, there are many other factors to consider. For instance: How long does one have to live in a new country to be considered an immigrant, as opposed to a visitor? What role does intent play in the definition? If one intends to return to their native country at the end of their studies is s/he an immigrant, as opposed to one who intends to remain in the U.S.? If someone immigrates as a young child, should he/she be considered an immigrant? These are only some of the questions I encountered in determining whom I could recruit to participate in my study.

In considering all of the above, I determined that two criteria should be fulfilled for participation in the study. As my study aims to address first generation immigrants, the first criterion is that the participants have been born abroad. Secondly, I sought participants who self-identified as an immigrant. This is important because I seek to understand how immigrants experience the racial dynamics in the U.S. Because being an immigrant is hardly a strictly delineated status, I chose to allow as wide a definition as possible, in order to include as much variability and to allow as many participants as possible.

Sample characteristics

The research was conducted in Collegeville, USA. The immigrant population in Collegeville, USA is quite large, due both to the State University’s ability to attract foreign students and staff as well as the state’s immigration history. I recruited the participants through

personal contacts, and asked that they bring any willing acquaintances who met the requirements to the group interviews. This resulted in a convenience sample of ten participants, interviewed in groups of between two and four participants per group interview.

The group interviews lasted from one to two hours, and were conducted on-campus. They were organized according to the schedules of the participants, in order to accommodate their availabilities and comfort. The group interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed. Participants were given pseudonyms during transcription in order to avoid identifying them in subsequent reports.

The sample consisted of 10 people, 7 females and 3 males, their ages ranging from 29 to 39. Their countries of origin are: Bulgaria (1), India (1), Ireland (1), Nicaragua (1), Romania (1), Slovakia (1), Uganda(1), and Ukraine (3). In response to the question “How do you identify your race/ethnicity?” the participants listed white (5), Ukrainian-white (1), white-Romanian(1), Hispanic (1),Asian (1), and African-Ugandan(1). All participants had attained the equivalent of a Bachelor’s degree, and eight out of the ten were either pursuing or had attained graduate degrees. Among the participants, some were work acquaintances or friends, and others had no previous relationships to the other participants.

The resulting convenience sample, because of its geographical location and time constraints, does not claim to be nationally representative of immigrants as a group. Instead, I strived to include as much variation in immigrant history (i.e. time of migration to the US, reason for migration, whether alone or with family, etc.), as well as nationality and ethnicity, so as to engage as many perspectives and experiences as possible.

A note on participants of color

When I initially designed the research questions, I was also interested in looking at how immigrants of color gave meaning to race. As the data analysis progressed and clearer analytic themes emerged, I focused on the phenotypically white participants. However, I did not discard the participants of color from the sample for two reasons. First, I had anticipated that discussions of whiteness and white privilege might vary according to the racial makeup of the group to be interviewed. Therefore, I held group interviews in which participants were white-only, white and non-white, as well as non-white only. The conversations about whiteness generated in the race-mixed group interview are, then, just as valid as those generated in white-only groups. Second, although their responses figure less prominently in this research, the perspective of participants of color on whiteness can be instructive, and their experiences can serve to contrast those of the white participants.

Analysis

The analysis of the interviews was continuous throughout the data collection process. Rather than separating the phases of data collection (the interviews) from analysis (poring over the transcripts), I continually engaged in analysis throughout the project. Practically speaking, this meant that rather than abiding firmly by my interview guide, I was able to adapt topics and questions from one interview to the next, enriching the data collected and allowing others to respond to themes and issues that I had not included in my initial questions. This allowed me to continually alter the study to best follow the leads in the data collection, resulting in increased comparability between interviews and more complex data analysis in the end.

In coding the transcripts for emerging themes, I focused on the participants' experiences regarding race. As themes emerged in one interview, I searched across the other interviews for

comparable or contrasting themes, attempting to construct a coherent narrative of the themes found in the analysis (Denzin and Lincoln 1998).

Concerns

As with any research, there are areas of concern that need to be acknowledged and examined. First, my position as a researcher was foremost in my mind (as with most researchers) as a possible source of bias. In an effort to be reflexive, I outline some of the ways in which my position as an immigrant has influenced the research. Further, there is also a concern regarding the limitations of the sample itself.

My Immigrant Experience

Engaging Marjorie DeVault's (1996) analysis of feminist methods, as well as Holstein and Gubrium's (1995) conceptualization of the active interview, I disclosed my personal immigrant history, having come to the US as a child and remembering instances where I learned and internalized racial norms. Being an immigrant fuels my interest in this topic of research, but it can also be a source of bias. My experience guided assumptions about important themes and questions to be asked as much as the literature concerning race did. I entered the interview setting with expectations and hypotheses about what the answers to my questions might be. In order to address this concern, I designed the interviews to be semi-structured so that while the questions I asked guided the conversations, at least initially, the participants were encouraged to share their own experiences. An active, semi-structured interview, then, encourages the communal building of knowledge and transcends the limitations I may have unwittingly placed through the interview guide.

My position as an immigrant can also become the basis for shared knowledge between the participants and myself. For example, many times during the interviews, I could sympathize with my participants' explanations of longing for home or disorienting racial experiences in this country. Rather than ask for explanations of these feelings or further clarifications, I too often assumed shared knowledge between us and instinctively agreed with their statements (Schwalbe and Wolkomir 2002). In these situations, my position as an immigrant to the U.S. allowed me to assume shared knowledge, when as a researcher I should have asked for clarification.

As always, there is a negotiation between the advantages and disadvantages of position. While in one context it may hinder the researcher's instinct to ask for clarification, thus resulting in loss of data (Schwalbe and Wolkomir 2002), in another it will create an atmosphere of shared experiences, in which participants will be willing to communicate their opinions and meanings more openly. As Manohar (2006) states, insider or shared knowledge with the participants can be beneficial. Asking for too much clarification can negatively affect the dialogue taking place, halting conversation and creating an atmosphere where respondents feel what they say may not be correctly interpreted.

In all of the interviews, my position as an immigrant legitimated the questions I was asking of the participants. All four groups asked about my motivation for the research, and responded positively upon hearing that the questions were partly based on my experience as an immigrant. For example, Ajit, a young Asian graduate student, was recruited through a friend and was initially diffident about answering questions. Halfway into the interview, he insisted that I share my motivations for researching race and immigration. After I did so, his demeanor became more responsive and his answers more in depth.

This commonality with my participants cannot be judged as either entirely positive or negative, but its effects should be noted. In some cases, then, the shared experiences may have resulted in less clarification on my part and less elaborate answers drawn from the participants. This can also be due to my limited experience as an interviewer. On the other hand, being an immigrant was viewed positively by the participants and often legitimated my interest in racial experiences, allowing them to be more expansive in their discussions.

Participants' Educational Level

Additionally, a concern regards the sample and the biases that are inherent within it. While no sample is ever truly unbiased, there are characteristics that ensure a sample to be more or less biased. Because this research was conducted in University Town, the sample is comprised of individuals between 29 and 39, with a minimum of a Bachelors degree (or their national equivalent) and eight out of ten were pursuing or had attained higher educational degrees. It is clear that the sample represents highly educated students and professionals, and this must be remembered as an important factor. The dialogue taking place is firmly situated within the people's social location, and with regards to education and profession, there is little variation within my sample.

These factors, then, cast my sample as representative of a homogeneity in education status, and can be cast as a proxy for class. Although occupying differing levels of privilege in regards to visa status (some have US citizenship, others have student or work visas, a much more precarious situation) or occupations (regularly employed versus students), the participants resemble each other in both educational levels and age, lending some internal consistency to the sample and specifying the parameters of the social location of my sample. So, while my sample may not be as varied along the lines of education and age, this helps to delineate the population that I am researching and makes my results more tailored to a particular group.

Rather than frame this as a limitation of the sample, I have chosen to use the similarity in educational and class backgrounds of my sample to further prove the importance of intersectionality. The similarity in class background will serve to highlight the importance of race, gender, and nation in both the analysis of the participants' experiences, but also in the differential ways that they are treated in the US context. Because US rhetoric concerning immigrant success stories relies heavily on Horatio Alger-like notions of self-sufficiency and individual potential for class mobility (Steinberg 2001), an analysis of differential treatment based on race and gender can highlight the dimensions of social location that might interfere with integration.

This similarity in educational status will undoubtedly affect the kind of experiences and knowledge shared by the participants, but needs not be a hindrance to this research. While many works highlight the experiences of immigrants in more precarious positions with regards to documented vs. undocumented legal status, class, social capital and more (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992, 1994, Kosic and Triandafyllidou 2004, Menjívar and Salcido 2002, Woldemikael 1989), this work will explore the contributions of immigrants who are in a position of privilege with regard to these dimensions.

Pilot Studies

This research was undertaken as a pilot or exploratory study. Much of the literature concerning white immigrants focuses on the early 20th century, and this research instead targets contemporary white immigrants. While there will likely be overlap in themes and analyses, I wanted to approach this research without making assumptions of commonalities between white immigrants now and those immigrating at the turn of the century. I intended to approach contemporary white immigration as a “new” field, because of the relative dearth in research

addressing the research questions put forth in this research. In this sense, a pilot study's " 'loose', inductively oriented design ... works well when the terrain is unfamiliar ... and the intent is exploratory"(Huberman and Miles 1998:185).

Exploratory studies, then, seek not only to draw informed analyses from the interviews, but also to explore themes and inform future research. By designing the study to include fewer but more in-depth interviews, I hoped to generate unique themes and analyses pertinent to the researching of contemporary white immigrants.

CHAPTER 4
FIRST YOU ARE WHITE, THEN YOU ARE DIFFERENT: NEGOTIATING WHITENESS

Immigrants and Whiteness

How do participants give meaning to a white racial identity derived from their skin color and ethnicity? This chapter focuses on the meanings imparted to race by phenotypically white participants. How do the participants give meaning to race once they have reached the U.S.? How do they talk about and make sense of entering and living in a racially hierarchical society in which they have not presumably been socialized? This chapter seeks to understand how the participants negotiate a racial, and specifically, a white identity in the U.S. racial system. To that end, I will focus on the participants who are phenotypically white (five females and two males) and who self-identified as white during the group interviews.

As has been previously stated, the literature calls for a “focus on whiteness as a situated identity, not as an identity of uniform privilege but as a complex social identity whose meaning is imparted by the particular context in which white actors are located.” (McDermott and Samson 2005:250). Some studies have problematized whiteness as privilege by examining whiteness and poverty (Buck 2001), sexuality (Berube 2001), class and urban-rural location (Hartigan 1999). I aim to focus on the interaction of whiteness and immigration to examine whiteness as a situated, relational identity, where access to white privilege is modified by factors such as accent, dress, and class.

Race and the U.S. South: Situated Whiteness

Much recent research has emphasized the importance of space and place in many areas, such as doing gender (Marsiglio, Roy, and Litton Fox 2005, Connell 2000), feminism (Guerrero 1996, Heng 1996), and a few have addressed the importance of place and ethnicity/race (Nagel

1994, Jaret and Reitzes 1999). Looking at place, or grounding an analysis of race within a situated context, can offer important insights into how a white racial identity can be influenced by outside factors.

To cast whiteness as a situated identity is to recognize that whiteness becomes salient in certain contexts, and takes on different meanings in different contexts. For example, whiteness may have a different salience and meaning in a mathematics classroom versus a class on minorities in U.S. society. Jaret and Reitzes (1999) explored the differences in salience of race in settings such as the home, at work, and in public. From the coded interview data, there are two main themes that emerged in which whiteness as an identity was importantly situated within nested contexts: the U.S. South and rural towns in the South,

The U.S. South as racist

When discussing race and racial identity, the majority of the participants took pains to preface their remarks as originating from their experience living in the rural U.S. South. For the majority of the sample, the U.S. South (particularly the states of Florida, South Carolina, and Mississippi), is the only place in which they have lived within the United States. Almost all participants mentioned that they drew on their experiences as immigrants in the U.S. South, and that perhaps their experiences would be different had they resided in other locations. As Milan explains, “living in the deep South, doesn’t give you the lesson [about race] that you probably would get if you lived in up north...” (Milan , professional).

Within the context of the South, the participants also qualified the spaces in which they lived and experienced race as rural spaces, often in rural college towns. Interview data convey that participants thought whites in small, rural towns to be more racist:

You see it in the grocery store...My husband, you know, he'll open the door for whoever and ... I've witnessed people sort of looking at him, other white people looking at him because he's opened the door for a black lady. You know, out in the country. (Eileen, professional)

Interviewer- Do you feel that ... racism is still prevalent?

Milan- Oh very much so, in the deep south, yes. And in South Carolina. I just came back from there 2 weeks ago, and I feel like people still, and for a long time they will, continue to look down on the blacks and see themselves as superior. (Milan, professional)

Jenica- There were slaves 40 years ago, probably they expect them to be slaves in their minds.

Interviewer- In whose minds?

Jenica- In the Americans mind, especially all the whites. (Jenica, graduate student)

There is a parallel construction of race as particularly significant in the rural U.S. South and of whites in the South as racist. Participants perceived the South as a place steeped in racism, where slavery (as mentioned by Jenica) was only recently dismantled. Further, they perceived that the legacy of slavery still influences people in the South, and specifically whites. This perception of the South has been paralleled in other studies (McKinney 2005).

It is within the perception of a racist U.S. South that the participants base their racial identities and experiences. Milan, again, highlights this fact as he recounts his first experiences in the U.S..

... when I came to South Carolina, and that town was totally you know, small and rural and full of .. uhh.... people who are not very welcoming to immigrants. But I was from Europe. And I think I had a completely different experience than other people. And it definitely helped that I took my studies seriously, and I was the best student, and blah blah, all that jazz. But I think just because I was white people could, you know, look at me different. Because I attended some international students panels and I could immediately tell by the questions that were asked of me and of students who were black or Hispanic that they had a different feeling towards where I came from (Milan, professional)

Here, as in many interviews, the physical setting (rural South) was an important dimension to the participants' experience of race in general, and of their understanding of how race affected

them personally. In Milan's quote, we can draw a connection between his perception of the setting and the people who populate it, as he associates small, rural towns with people who do not welcome immigrants.

He then goes on to detail how his racial status qualified his experience, because, as he states, being from Europe and white gave him some advantages. He perceived that his experience was "different" from other people's, and not as discriminatory, because of his privileged white racial status in this rural, small college town. Whiteness in and of itself is a privilege, in this case, accessed whether it is linked to an American identity or not. As we shall see later in the chapter, this is not always the case.

The U.S. South as multicultural

Thus, place can influence how a white racial identity can provide privileges within a certain context. Above, Milan discussed the privileges he benefited from as a white student in the South, referencing a southern town populated by intolerant people, where his whiteness afforded him advantages over other international students of color.

On the other hand, articulating a different perception of a physical setting can complicate how racial privilege is accessed. While previous participants perceived the rural U.S. South as particularly racist, Sofia articulates the South as a multicultural setting in which her whiteness can be problematic. Sofia talks about the difficulties she faces as a white professional in a southern, multicultural setting. Below, in response to Angela's concerns, Sofia confirms the particular salience of race in the U.S. South for her experience, and in this case in a state that is heavily influenced by a significant Latino presence:

Angela- I've never felt discriminated against. I've gotta tell you that I'm afraid of moving to a different city, I think that I was sheltered as a Hispanic in Miami, in terms of the racial issues going on. ...You become a little self conscious when everything starts becoming whiter and less multicultural, then you start sticking out...

Sofia- You see, for me its different because I don't speak Spanish, and I'm not part of Hispanic population in Florida, when I go in a state that doesn't have such high Hispanic population... um,.. I don't feel as foreign, to an extent, I feel more... because I guess more among whites, I feel more, um,... more assimilated than other parts of the U.S.. Maybe it's because it's the South, maybe it doesn't have anything to do with Hispanic population. (Angela and Sofia, professionals)

Angela, a young Hispanic professional who works at the university and contemporaneously goes to school, relates her reluctance to travel to places which she considers less diverse and more “white” than Florida. Sofia, on the other hand, a young Eastern European professional at the university, initially articulates the difficulties she faces in a multiracial South. She attributes some of the troubles she faces as due to her phenotypical attributes, “because I have darker hair, and I don't have very white skin...” (Sofia, professional) In a setting such as Miami, where physical attributes such as darker hair and skin tone can easily be associated with a race other than white, Sofia expresses discomfort and highlights that her whiteness is called into question. Later in the quote she revises her response, locating her difficulties with asserting her white identity as perhaps not only related to the Hispanic influence in Florida, rather as a particular aspect of race in the U.S. South more generally.

“You Are White But Not American”: Whiteness as Relational and Conditional

As we can see above, physical settings can influence how race is experienced and given meaning to. Interview data also suggests that whiteness is conditional; there are a number of situations in which their racial identity is cast into question, and their access to privileges afforded by skin tone modified. A racial identity, then, can be simultaneously relational (because it has significance in interactions with others) and conditional (because through this interaction, their access to privileges afforded by whiteness is denied).

Accent

Below, Jenica and Olivia, two young Eastern European graduate students, discuss their identification as white in relation to social interactions in everyday life. Jenica describes an interaction where her racial identity was highlighted through social interaction, and how her accent affected the exchange:

Jenica- The black population definitely consider me white. When I go to buy something I can see that, it happen to me if there is a black person at the counter, and if there is some other blacks after me, it happens to ask them if you are in a hurry just because we buy a lot, and then asking the person after me to go before me, ... because I am white and they are black.....First you are white, then you are different.

Olivia- ...after you start talking....

Jenica- After, they realize you are not American.

Andriy- You are white, but not American. (Jenica and Olivia, graduate students and Andriy, professional)

There are a number of important themes in this exchange, the first of which is Jenica's qualification that the "black population definitely" considers her white. Jenica posits her white racial status as relational - she recognizes that her it is dependent upon others recognizing her as such.

Jenica then goes on to describe how whiteness can be perceived as linked to discrimination rather than privilege. As she perceives it in the exchange she described, Jenica's white racial status did not afford her any privilege or protection from discrimination. In fact, she interprets race as a divisive force ("because I am white and they are black") that justified the supposedly discriminatory acts by the store cashiers (letting others jump in front of Jenica at check out).

Further, her white racial status is conditional on how she speaks English.. As Olivia concurs, once you interact with others by speaking English with an accent your status as white is modified, and you suddenly become "different." Speaking obviously accented English instantly

marks one as different, and therefore relinquishes some of the privileges that whiteness would have bestowed. The perception of the speaker changes to from white as the main identifier to “foreigner,” and additional controls are placed on people. The exchange below exemplifies the process:

Jenica-I don't like talking because they realize all of a sudden that I'm foreigner, and what I've noticed, when my husband goes to buy something they are always asking about his ID when he's using his credit card; but it's not happening to Americans. Now I'm beginning to pay attention, why are you asking if the credit card is signed, I don't know if you have to, but it happens..

Olivia-... Yeah it happens.

Jenica- It happensand then in the hospital when I deliver, when my baby was born, they were always asking 'do you speak English' even before speaking to me. You could try first [to see] if I speak !I wish my English were better and not to see the difference

Interviewer- You mean, no accent?

Jenica- I would like to get rid of my accent. (Jenica and Olivia, graduate students)

Jenica again articulates the perceived discrimination she faces because of her accented English, the erasing of privilege through accented language. Still unsure of whether she's facing excessive control in stores, Jenica questions whether the practice of checking identification when using a credit card is mandatory for everyone or a specific incident of controlling suspicious people, in this case herself and her husband. Even as she notices that “it's not happening to Americans,” Jenica seems tentative in locating discrimination in this experience. In this instance, Jenica experiences no privilege due to her racial status as white, rather the more important factor is her accented English giving away her “foreigner” status.

These quotes highlight an important assumption made by the participants: that whiteness in the U.S. is linked to an American identity. The participants social location of racially white but culturally and legally foreign complicates the homogeneity of a white racial identity. The

participants negotiate being “white, but not American” as a liminal space, where their skin tone affords them a white identity until it is modified by speech.

Dress

While accented speech is one way in which white racial status is conditional, clothing is yet another. Many participants related that one’s style of dress, which is perhaps still inspired by a “foreign” sense of style, can single them out..

So, as a foreigner, especially from Europe, we felt welcome. Now when, like I said, when I don’t wear the clothes that I do for everyday work, when I’m just in shorts or .., you know, its funny- but clothes are very significant for everyday encounters. And if you’re in just working clothes or jogging clothes and you’re talking to someone, they cannot judge...whether you are educated; then you see that feeling that ‘You don’t belong. You’re immigrant.’ (Milan, professional)

I’m very fortunate because, like Milan, I’m white, I’m blonde... I pretty much look like I fit, I think, most of the time; in terms of my facial structure and my...physical appearance. My clothes, on the other hand, people say make me sometimes stand out... my accent sometimes... particularly in the local grocery store in [a local small town], I’m definitely exotic in [small town]. (Eileen, professional)

Both participants draw on their physical characteristics- white skin, light hair, European extraction, to denote privilege: they “felt welcome” and “fortunate” and “fit in” within white America based on their “white” look. However, both Eileen and Milan noted that dress was important in constructing an identity which allowed them to access the privilege of fitting in. Eileen notes that her style of dress can make her “exotic” and stand out. Milan notes that when he does not wear professional clothing, his ability to access white privilege is diminished.

The importance of the intersection of race and class is exemplified by Milan’s passage: while he may benefit from white privilege in some encounters, the clothes as physical markers of class play a role in how this privilege is accessed. When not wearing clothes that identify him as educated (Milan usually wears button-down shirts and slacks to work), he senses a difference in the way people interact with him that denotes a discriminatory attitude. Without his markers of

class, the benefits of white privilege are further mitigated by language as a marker of difference, and Milan is subject to discrimination as a foreigner.

Skin tone

Further still, constructing and maintaining a white racial identity can be conditional upon one's skin tone. Sofia relates an event in which the particular situational context conditioned her white racial status.

Sofia- The few times I felt I had been discriminated was at [the] Miami airport. Because I don't speak Spanish, and because I have a darker hair, and I don't have very white skin, ... people would talk to me in Spanish, approach me in Spanish, and I would say 'I don't speak Spanish', and they would continue to speak Spanish, and make jokes. And I don't understand, and it's not like I'm making it up! I really don't [speak Spanish]...

Interviewer- Was there an assumption that you could but you wouldn't?

Sofia- Yeah. I felt really bad, really, because I have darker skin, and because I'm not blonde and blue eyed doesn't mean I speak Spanish! (Sofia, professional)

This quote exemplifies the importance of racial identity as situated and relational, which determines the conditional nature of access to whiteness. The situational context, a multicultural and multilingual Miami airport, defined the parameters of race. Sofia's skin tone, which she describes as "not very white" places her identification by others as white at risk, given the situational context where she may also be classified as Hispanic. The relational dimension of race is highlighted when people ascribe a Hispanic rather than white identity to Sofia, and address her in Spanish. This runs contrary to the racial identity she holds for herself, constructed in a different setting.

Summary

This chapter has explored the ways in which participants talked about the contexts in which they gave meaning to a racial identity. The major themes emerging from the interviews highlighted that racial identities are situated and relational. One's white racial identity was also

conditional, often mediated by factors such as accent and dress. This conditionality is a distinguishing factor of white racial identity for phenotypically white immigrants, which will be discussed further in the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER 5
THE POTENTIAL FOR RACIALLY PROGRESSIVE WHITES

White Immigrants and the Potential for Racially Progressive Consciousness

I lived in a house with a lady who was very ... Southern, to say the least, very mildly. And she remarked that every time she saw an interracial couple, "Oh I don't understand how they could be together," and that to me was striking... This country is what helped me a lot .. to become more respectful of different color and different race, because back home we have a huge racist problem with the Gypsies, and coming here taught me a lot about that. People are not different, even though they are physically different, but they are still human beings.

That's actually the main point of contention when I [go back to my home country] and I tell people to their face that they are racist and the way they behave towards Gypsies is like the way Americans behaved towards blacks before, during, and after the civil war. And I ... I'm proponent of maybe positive discrimination [at home] and people look at me like I'm crazy... but I say all those arguments that you're using against the Gypsies are similar arguments that were used here against the blacks... I feel like the problem is not just the Gypsies, it's a structural problem, and that the majority population of [my home country] has to look critically on themselves as well. I mean if you have a Gypsy and a white person asking for a job, 99% the white person will get it, even if they're equally qualified. So I think [people] have a lot to learn.

One of the best things that happened to me was to come here and learn that. ... [My wife and I] resent people who judge blacks and don't like blacks and don't like black culture and uh just.. are negative towards them, so what we do now is to go out of our way to show that were different, even on the bus you would let a black person to sit next to you, or you sit next to a black person just to show everybody else that I don't agree with your racial politics. (Milan, professional)

Milan's quote is exemplary of what I term a racially progressive consciousness. He relates how his experiences with race in the US have shaped his understanding of discrimination and of privilege, both in the US context and as it applies to his home country. This consciousness has translated to his daily behavior, where he attempts to challenge "racial politics" which support inequality.

This chapter will explore the prevalence of a racially progressive consciousness among the study participants. I will examine instances in which the participants claimed that their experiences with race and discrimination in the US led them to form anti-racist beliefs and, in a

few cases, led to their taking anti-racist action. I will first attempt to define a racially progressive consciousness, and then examine whether and how the participants in the sample have developed one due to their experiences as immigrants in the US.

Parameters for Racial Progressiveness

As elaborated in the second chapter, there can be many dimensions to defining a racially progressive consciousness. For the purposes of this research, I define it as an awareness of privilege experienced due to one's white racial status, having personal relationships with people of color, a recognition of daily racial discrimination faced largely by people of color, and a translation of these recognitions into anti-racist action. I posit that the development of this consciousness is intimately tied to the experiences of discrimination faced by my participants, as well as the recognition that their ability to access a white racial identity (if not an American one), affords them certain privileges over other immigrants of color.

The previous chapter examined the ways in which participants came to understand and give meaning to a white racial identity. Below, I will examine the ways in which participants came to understand discrimination and react against it.

Recognizing racism

The first aspect of developing a racially progressive consciousness is the ability to recognize that racism and discrimination exist as an important factor in everyday life. Most participants recognized that racism is a problem, and that it plays a large role in American life.

Interviewer- Do you feel that racism is still prevalent [in the US]?

Milan- Oh very much so." (Milan, professional)

"I didn't know there is so much debate here about black and white, for me [in my home country] there were just people. I couldn't see the difference between black and white. But once I arrived here, it was a completely different story. There are blacks, they are left outside, they don't mix so much with white people, and you hear all the time talking about

them, “they are not so educated, they don’t have good jobs.” And so yeah there is a huge difference. (Jenica, graduate student)

Andriy- Only here in the US...I got this idea [that there was a] problem between...

Olena- ...white[s] and black[s].

Andriy - Before that [coming to the US], I didn’t know.

Olivia- That is true....

Andriy -HERE is the problem! (Andriy, Olena, professionals and Olivia, Jenica graduate students).

The participants all recognized that race is a salient issue in everyday life, with many citing their entry into the US as the beginning of their awareness of racial tensions. Many also identified the Civil Rights period as a legal turning point in race relations, but that social tensions were slow to retreat. Some perceived the racial history of the United States to have been extremely discriminatory. In this quote, partially repeated from page 39, we see the degree to which some participants understood racial history to influence the present day:

Jenica- There were slaves 40 years ago, probably they expect them to be slaves in their mind...

Interviewer- In whose minds?

Jenica- In the Americans’ mind, especially all the whites. (Jenica, graduate student).

While segregationist laws had extensive and far-reaching negative consequences for people of color, to equate that time period with slavery would be inaccurate. However, the fact that Jenica believes that conditions 40 years ago equate to slavery for people of color speaks to the importance she gives to racism today.

Marginalization, privilege, and racial progressiveness

The literature refers to groups of people who share experiences of discrimination and who are marginalized as being more likely to recognize cross-racial discrimination and become more racially progressive (Bonilla-Silva 2006, Feagin Vera and Batur 2001, Stoddart 2002).

Throughout the interviews, participants recounted instances in which they perceive themselves to be discriminated against and marginalized, both by individuals and by institutions. The previous chapter also showed that the participants felt they had been discriminated against by various people in different settings. Jenica recounted how she felt discriminated in stores when asked for additional identification when other customers were not, Milan felt the effects of discrimination in his first college town Sofia, below, shares that her status as female and immigrant has made her more susceptible to being harassed by the government in regards to her marriage to her American husband.

Certainly the government thinks I married [an American] for reasons other than love, and that has been implied very strongly in letters I've received from the government. That's why we had to hire lawyers, because I didn't change my name and I didn't have children. (Sofia, professional)

Other participants also felt they occupied precarious positions due to arbitrary rules regarding other social institutions. For example, two graduate students who are also mothers explain the fear they face vis-à-vis social welfare institutions:

Jenica- ... I don't know the laws, I don't know my rights... And the fact that we have a baby, and I've seen too many movies where social agents come and they don't like.. [General laughter] Because my husband, just the other day, he fall asleep and my baby ate some ointment. And we had to call, they took my name and address. What if they file complaint and come here and take the baby.... they can do that!

Olivia- They can?

M- Yes. At least in the movies.

Olivia- People can steal in hospital. I had problem with mine, she have burn. And people come first to you, and ask question, and ...My god it was accident, I didn't do anything! Scary. (Jenica and Olivia, graduate students)

These two mothers clearly stated a marginalized and precarious position with respect to government institutions. This precarious position is also articulated among other participants in

the group interview in regards to visas and the seemingly arbitrary nature by which they can be renewed or revoked.

With the student visa I don't even feel immigrant here. You're nobody, student, temporary; as soon as you finish your study, its not even immigrant status for me. I don't consider myself immigrant because I don't have right to anything here. I don't feel like I have rights here..... I mean, if my education is not so good, they cannot keep me in the program; I am out of here in [so] many hours, I cannot stay unless I stay illegal[ly]... (Olivia, graduate student)

From the above quotations, we can gather than most participants feel that by virtue of their status as immigrants, they feel a part of a marginalized group as opposed to the dominant part of American society.

However, woven along with conversations about marginalization is a recognition that their white skin tone and racial status privileged them in certain situations, especially vis-à-vis immigrants of color. Milan gives an example of how he feels he can respond to instances of personal discrimination based on his immigrant status.

It really doesn't bother me, because I know even [a friend] says "Oh, you have typical Eastern European face, ... if you even wanted to say that you are American I wouldn't believe it" ... I don't have problem with that, I feel like I can handle any remarks on my background. Maybe it's easier because [I'm] white. I think ... if I were Latino or if I were a person from Africa I would have a different perspective on how this country treats immigrants and foreigners. (Milan professional)

It is interesting to note that in his last phrase "how this country treats immigrants and foreigners", Milan's comment is not only referencing his personal ease with dealing with discriminatory remarks, but also a recognition that as a white man, he is experiencing less discriminatory treatment than if he were "Latino or a person from Africa." Milan makes an important link between his skin color and the discriminatory experiences he has had, recognizing that were he an immigrant of color, his experiences would be different.

Taking action

In the opening quote, we learn that Milan has translated his experiences with discrimination and his recognition of racism in the US into anti-racist action, both locally and in his home country. Milan's experiences with racism in the US allowed him to recognize racism towards a minority group in his own country, and led him to challenge racist talk amongst his peers at home. He also translated his experiences into anti-racist actions in his everyday life.

There are other examples in which racist behavior was recognized as unacceptable, and the participants took actions to mitigate that behavior. Jenica relates an instance taking place in a freely provided English class.

Jenica- I made a mistake when I came here. I went to an English class with an old lady, conservative lady, white. And she started talking very badly about black people. Although I don't think it's legal. You are not allowed to do that. They might put you in prison if you are talking bad about other people. And I didn't understand why is she doing that in English class, because in the class there were yellow people, me, there were also Latino - so why are you doing this class for free if you are talking so bad about black people, who are different from you, but we are also different from you...

...Interviewer- Do you think she saw you as [white]?

Jenica- In a way yeah, because then she started talking about Latinos who come to the country pregnant and give birth to American babies....

Olivia- Oh my gosh!

Jenica- ...and I was pregnant at that time! [General laughter] So I left that class, and everywhere I go, I talked about that teacher and "look at what she is doing! Why is she doing that?"

Interviewer- So, did you talk to the administrator?

Jenica- No, because the English class was for free, although it was organized somehow; but it was on campus, for free. (Jenica and Olivia, graduate students)

Jenica describes an English language teacher, likely a volunteer, infusing her English lessons with racist talk demeaning people of color. At first Jenica expresses surprise that the teacher would engage in such racist behavior to an audience of immigrants, and holds the belief that such

speech is actually legally prohibited. While this may not be the case, Jenica recognized that the behavior was wrong and left the class. In addition, she shared her experiences “everywhere” she went, questioning the legitimacy of such talk in a classroom and warning acquaintances to avoid that teacher.

While these actions can be seen as minor, they are nonetheless significant for Jenica. As a new immigrant to the US she spoke little English, and thus leaving the free English class represented a loss of potential language skills. While she did not report the teacher to an administrator, she did engage her personal network of friends and acquaintances to warn people about the teacher and lessen the impact she may have had by lessening class attendance. Thus, although there are more sweeping actions she could have taken (confronting the teacher, reporting her to the administrators of the English classes), leaving the class and encouraging people to avoid attending it are still anti-racist in their nature.

Cautions

In analyzing the ways in which the participants have developed some aspects of a racially progressive consciousness, their construction of African Americans as the racial other must be addressed. Although this will be discussed more fully in the concluding chapter, participants did not address personal relationships with people of color, and often essentialized African Americans in their discussions of racism. This is a cause for concern, then, in developing a racially progressive consciousness.

Summary

In this chapter, I attempted to define the parameters of a racially progressive consciousness, proposing that phenotypically white immigrants are uniquely poised to recognize the privileges associated with being white in the US.

I defined the parameters for a racially progressive consciousness, drawing from sources (Doane and Bonilla-Silva 2003, Bonilla-Silva 2006, Feagin et al 2001, O'Brien 2003, Rassmussen 2001, Stoddart 2002) to determine important measures. These are: an awareness of privilege experienced due to one's white racial status, developing personal relationships with people of color, a recognition of daily racial discrimination faced largely by people of color, and a translation of these recognitions into anti-racist action.

In analyzing the participants' responses, many clearly recognized that racism was an important factor in everyday life in the US. Many also recognized that their skin color afforded them differential treatment, reducing their exposure to discriminatory or racist experiences. Although the participants were quick to recognize the impact of racial discrimination in the lives of people of color in the US, they were also not likely to have close personal relationships with people of color, complicating their articulations racism and discrimination. And finally, some of the respondents took anti-racist action, whether in the local context or in challenging racism in one's home country. While not all participants exhibited a racially progressive consciousness, the fact that some did lends importance to studying this phenomenon.

CHAPTER 6 DISCUSSION AND FUTURE WORK

Summary and Discussion of the Findings

This study looked at the experiences with race of phenotypically white, first-generation immigrants. Through semi-structured group interviews, I examined the meanings participants gave to a white racial identity, and whether and how the privilege that is associated with whiteness is accessible to the participants.

Summary of Findings

Giving meaning to race as situated, relational, and conditional

There are three ways in which participants gave meaning to a white racial identity: as a situated, relational and conditional racial identity. In giving meaning to race as a situated identity, physical places affected how the participants experienced a racial identity. The participants never talked about their understanding of a racial identity abstractly; rather, they consistently contextualized their experiences within a specific geographic place.

More importantly, the participants emphasized the regional dimension of their experiences with race in the U.S. South. They ascribed particular meaning to the South as a place with historical significance with regards to race, hinting at the salience of the South as a relatively recently desegregated place, one where racial tensions still linger. Milan's hesitation in describing the residents of his South Carolina university town as unwelcoming of foreigners has a subtext which hints at racism among the townspeople. This was confirmed in his description of receiving preferential treatment due to white skin, linking his racial privilege to the larger perceived context of black-white inequality and racism in many southern towns. It is important to note that scholars have criticized the notion of the South as more racist a place than the U.S.

North (Breines 2006; McKinney 2005). However, within the theoretical orientation of symbolic interactionism, it is also important to consider that the participants assigned a specific meaning to the South as a place where racism, and thus racial identity, is more visible and salient.

Racial identity was also simultaneously relational and conditional: participants found racial identity to carry importance in social interactions with other people, mostly Americans, and related that their status as “white” is often mediated by factors such as language and dress. For example, participants may appear white and may engage a white racial identity walking down the aisles of a store, but their ability to access this racial identity is modified once they speak to a cashier in accented English. As Jenica states, “First you are white, then you are different.” A white racial identity is simultaneously constructed in relation to other people, and is conditional upon factors that may mark one as foreign.

Racial progressiveness

This study also attempted to determine whether the participants’ experiences of discrimination as immigrants and their conditional access to the white privilege translated into racial progressiveness. I defined a racially progressive consciousness as an awareness of privilege experienced due to one’s white racial status, a recognition of daily racial discrimination faced largely by people of color, and a translation of these recognitions into anti-racist action. I aimed to explore whether the participants were uniquely positioned to develop such a consciousness, and found that most participants fulfilled the first two parameters.

While not all participants translated their heightened awareness of racial injustice into anti-racist action, a number exhibited solidarity with people of color. Two participants specifically took anti-racist actions as well. In a society that downplays the importance of racism both at the institutional and personal level (Bonilla-Silva 2006), developing and maintaining a racially

progressive consciousness is an ongoing process that must continue to guard against the dominant frames surrounding race.

Discussion of Findings

White racial identity: whiteness and nationality

Throughout the conversations in the interviews and the analysis of the interview data, participants constructed a personal white racial identity distinct from an American identity. They talked both of their own sense of self as white, and recognized that whiteness in America is conceptually tied to American citizenship. The participants negotiate being “white, but not American” as a marginal identity, where their phenotypical attributes afford them a white racial identity, from which they can benefit (see Milan’s analyses of how his skin tone protected him from discrimination) but that can also be limited. Accented speech, clothes, facial features that may mark the participants as not American can influence the way in which they access white privilege, and subject them to scrutiny as foreigners.

Old World regionalism and racial beliefs

The participants’ categorization of the U.S. South as a particularly racist place weighed heavily on their perceptions of race. All participants, either explicitly or implicitly, referenced the South’s racial history as heavily influencing interpersonal dynamics.

There must, however, be a recognition that people bring their beliefs with them as they migrate, and that the participants may be transferring European notions of regionalism to the U.S. context. The southern regions of most European countries are generally constructed as inferior, and on a national level, Southern European countries are often viewed as less civilized, more chaotic, and generally inferior (see Franco Brusati’s 1973 film *Bread and Chocolate* as an example). These regional beliefs, while not explicitly racialized, carry overtones of group

positions and perceptions. Accounting for the influence of regionalism in the participants' socialization in their home countries can partly explain the heavy emphasis they give to the U.S. South in their experiences with race.

Racial progressiveness and constructing the other

In researching race, and especially whiteness, research must also consider the ways in which even anti-racist action that can have racist undertones (McKinney 2005, O'Brien 2003). For instance, the well-meaning reactions of those who can access privileged positions could be regarded as further essentializing marginalized groups, or encouraging a compassion that may be paternalistic in nature (Essed 1996). Comments such as Milan's, repeated from the initial quote in chapter 5, must be analyzed both as well meaning and potentially exploitative.

We [my wife and I] resent people who judge blacks and don't like blacks and don't like black culture and uh just.. are negative towards them. So what we do now is to go out of our way to show that we're different; even on the bus you would let a black person to sit next to you, or you sit next to a black person just to show everybody else that 'I don't agree with your racial politics.' (Milan, professional)

As O'Brien (2003) documented, whites involved in anti-racist action fall subject to the pervasiveness of white supremacy in everyday interactions, leading even those who recognize racism on a grand scale to reproduce it in everyday interactions. This research confirms some of the same findings, in that participants who articulated anti-racist stances were also likely to objectify and essentialize blacks. Milan's comment shows the recognition of his white privilege of not being at the receiving end of discrimination against African Americans, as well as his efforts to disassociate from racist behavior by showing a lack of prejudice in choosing who to sit next to on the bus. However, this particular enactment of anti-racist politics requires African Americans as objects - people to sit next to, but not necessarily as people to engage in conversation with or develop personal relationships with. While it is important that he directs his anti-racist politics to those whose "racial politics" he does not agree with, he did not discuss

active and purposeful interaction with communities of color as another avenue in which to combat racism.

Placing this comment within the larger context of the group interviews, Milan is clearly among the participants with the clearest sense of his white privilege and who is most critical of racist practices. That one can take such a clear stand against racism and yet still engage in anti-racist behavior that can be problematic speaks to the complexity of racism in the U.S..

Additionally, participants also articulated opinions consistent with Bonilla-Silva's (2006) conceptualization of colorblind racism. During the interviews, participants highlighted the dualisms that can be engaged in talking about racism and people of color. For example, Jenica talks about how black people "don't mix so much with white people," but does not address the fact that whites also self-segregate; she focuses her attention on the presumed self-segregation of people of color.

Yeah I got the same impression. Here it's a huge problem, they even live in a different part of city, they have different stores... (Jenica, graduate student)

While Jenica has previously acknowledged that racism plays a large role in everyday life, she also ignores the structural dimensions of racism that may have led to residential segregation. This speaks to the power of dominant frames of racial discourse today (Bonilla-Silva 2006), where the emphasis is on people of color's responsibility for not assimilating rather than structural racism.

Many studies addressing whites' development of racially progressive identities stress the importance of close, personal relationships with people of color as a crucial element (Doane and Bonilla-Silva 2003, Feagin, Vera and Batur 2001, McKinney 2005). The participants in this study did not mention any such relationships, and this can be considered an important factor

limiting their development of a racially progressive consciousness. However, this may also be due to the small sample, and should be researched with larger numbers of participants.

Finally, the participants' discussions of race and racial identity were largely centered on their experiences in relation to black Americans. Other communities of color, such as Latinos/Hispanics, Asians, or Native Americans were rarely mentioned and only in passing references. The one exception to this was the mixed-race group interview, where the presence of a Hispanic participant led to a more prominent discussion of Hispanics and race. The focus on black-white relations, then, speaks to the dominating influence of the black-white paradigm in U.S. race relations (Omi and Winant 1994, Perea 1997). That is to say, the focus of much discussion on race – both in the academic field and within these interviews- centered on black and white Americans, omitting non-black people of color from the discourse.

The language of solidarity

Studies on race relations has placed a heavy emphasis on the language used in the conversations, specifically on the link between language and expressing solidarity (Feagin and Sikes 1995). Feagin and Sikes explored the issue in their work on Black middle class Americans. As participants talked of experiences of discrimination, there were shifts from using the “I” pronoun to describe personal experiences to the “we” pronoun. This shift to the use of “we” signaled racial solidarity, a sense of togetherness and commonality of experiences, the “collective character of the African American experience” (Feagin and Sikes 1995:16).

In the group interviews I conducted, phenotypically white participants used the pronoun “We” in two ways: to denote the participant and his or her spouse, or to evoke a nation of people (“back home we have a huge racist problem with the gypsies”). There does not seem to be a “collective character” of the immigrant experience in the US for my participants, neither along racial lines nor immigrant status. Students of color, on the other hand, used “we” much more

often, both in reference to a nation of people (“we Indians”) and to their status as immigrants in the U.S. This suggests a disparity in the experiences of race dependent upon a person’s racial classification in the U.S. that should be investigated further.

Sample size

Although this has been addressed in the methods chapter, I would like to emphasize the importance and validity of small sample pilot studies. As a means to generate important themes and discover grounds for future research, pilot studies are efficient and practical means to elicit information. As they do not strive for generalizability, small sample sizes do not affect the validity of the findings. Borrowing from the medical literature, a syndrome needs only one patient to be identified, its characteristics and properties delineated. Any further incidence of the syndrome only speaks to its distribution within a population.

In this sense, this research aims to identify some of the key concepts, themes, and factors in phenotypically white immigrants’ experiences with race and racial progressiveness. Even the relatively small sample can generate important results. As Durkheim stated, you only need one well done experiment to come up with a theory.

Future Avenues for Research

Regional Differences

While this study does not claim to generalize to the entire population, it would be a logical avenue of research to examine the same questions in different geographical spaces. The participants in the study made constant reference to the U.S. South as providing a specific context for race and racial identities, and it can be reasonably assumed that perceptions may differ according to different regional settings. I expect that greater differences could be articulated by comparing urban and rural settings, especially ones with different levels of immigrant populations.

Comparing White Immigrants and Native-born Whites

An important avenue for research would be to research first-generation white immigrants and native-born white Americans, comparing the ways in which they articulate racial identities and whether they articulate racially progressive stances. Following important works that challenge the existence of a monolithic white experience, comparing the two groups can address both the differences in whiteness due to the differing social locations of the participants, as well as the similarities in experiences based on their ability to assume a white racial identity. While this research has attempted to address some of these questions, a study that included participants from both groups in the interviews would be better able to address issues of comparability in experiencing white racial identities.

Comparing White Immigrants with Immigrants of Color

As noted above in the section on the language of solidarity, there seem to be disparities in the ways that immigrants of color and immigrants who are classified as white experience racial discrimination and develop a sense of solidarity. Studying the differentiation of immigrant experiences with race based on their racial classification and the extent to which this promotes a sense of solidarity, or in other words, racial progressiveness would be an important development.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the field of race and ethnic studies by addressing an area that is under-researched: contemporary first-generation immigrants' experiences with a white racial identity. While there may be many ways in which their experiences parallel white American's negotiations of a white racial identity, these participants also offer distinct contributions to whiteness studies. In examining how participants come to give meaning to and experience a racial identity, whiteness is conceptualized as more than just privilege. Participants' experiences

of race as situated, relational, and conditional helped to problematize the conceptualization of whiteness as a static identity (McDermott and Samson 2005).

Further, this study attempts to examine whether experiences with discrimination can lead to a racially progressive consciousness for immigrant whites. Recognizing one's privileged position is an essential step towards understanding one's role in perpetuating racism, and a necessary step in order to take anti-racist action.

The development of a racially progressive consciousness is important in combating racism both in the local and in the global context, for these participants can translate anti-racist action to their home countries as well as their local communities. In an increasingly multi-racial Europe, racial discrimination and racism will become an important paradigm through which to analyze inequalities in these changing societies. The participants' experiences with discrimination in the U.S. can translate into recognizing and challenging racism, as in Milan's example at the beginning of chapter 5.

Although few participants may intend to return to their home countries, the links they retain to their home countries (through families and friends, political structures and such,) can influence discussions of ethnic exclusion and marginalization to include discussions of structural and everyday racism. While it is not my intention to transpose the U.S. racial paradigm to other countries, participants have recognized that some elements of racism as they experienced it in the U.S. can apply to their home countries. O'Brien (2003) stresses that anti-racist action must challenge structural racism as well as the "everyday rituals" that perpetuate white supremacy. Just as Milan countered the racist discourse surrounding Gypsies in his home country by challenging his peers to recognize structural and personal racism, many of the participants have the opportunity to challenge everyday racism not only in the U.S., but also internationally. As the

world becomes increasingly globalized, and as racist images are perpetuated by the U.S. dominated media on a global scale (Feagin, et al 2001, Vera and Gordon 2003), anti-racist whites who have experienced racism in the U.S. context can become powerful allies for change.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Born in Italy and raised in the US since the age of 10, Georgia Bianchi has always been interested in migration, and this thesis was based on her questioning her own experiences as an immigrant to the US.

Her specializations in the field of sociology are race and ethnic studies and gender, specializing in the sociology of migration. She received a B.A. in international studies, from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, in 2001. She also received an M.A. in political science, from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, in 2003.