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Why Blame Me? Interpreting Counselor Student Resistance to Racially Themed Course Content as Complicity with White Racial Hegemony

Evonne Denise Olson

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‘WHY BLAME ME?’ INTERPRETING COUNSELOR STUDENT RESISTANCE TO RACIALLY THEMED COURSE CONTENT AS COMPLICITY WITH WHITE RACIAL HEGEMONY

by

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DEDICATION

To TWO: With appreciation and love
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ABSTRACT

Counselor educators commonly experience resistance from students when the classroom focus turns to issues, literature, projects, or discussions involving race. Recognizing this resistance as an obstacle to learning, scholars developed strategies to address it. These strategies, however, have been based largely on individualistic conceptions of student resistance that obscure its possible sociopolitical influences and overlook the potential for formulating strategies to address its sociopolitical underpinnings. To expand the view of student resistance as more than simply individual behavior and thereby assist in developing and improving tools to overcome it, this project interprets student resistance as a sociopolitical phenomenon by connecting it to a complex of general behaviors that reinforce the sociopolitical context of White racial hegemony.

For this purpose, I define student resistance as an issue of emotion which I explicate with a cognitive appraisal emotional process model.

To begin the project, I went into five regularly scheduled counselor education classrooms to screen a video presentation addressing two topics that frequently evoke resistance from students: White racial group advantage and oppression of racial minority groups. Thirty-seven masters level counseling students participated in the project by
providing certain demographic information and describing their experiences of the video presentation on questionnaires and in classroom discussions. Applying my definition, I identified the following manifestations of resistance in the students’ descriptions of their experiences: harm-related appraisals, beliefs rationalizing the appraisals, negative emotions, and defensive coping actions. Analyzing these manifestations of student resistance in light of critical whiteness studies and social dominance theory, I found that beliefs underlying students’ harm-related appraisals and resulting coping actions connected most readily to behavior that reinforces White racial hegemony. The particular reinforcing beliefs students expressed gave credence to White superiority, nonwhite inferiority, and traditional American myths used to justify White racial dominance. Defensive coping actions consisted of: (1) avoiding race-related discussions; (2) attacking the person talking about racism and White privilege; (3) becoming resigned to racial injustice and doing nothing about it; and (4) escaping responsibility for racial injustice.

A main conclusion of this project is that student resistance is problematic because it presents an obstacle to important learning, may function as a form of violence against students in the classroom who are members of subjugated groups, and represents behavior that precludes the development of therapeutic relationships with future clients. Strategies faculty can use to address student resistance that stem from findings in this project are discussed. They include: (1) provide theoretical frames of understanding; (2) identify sociopolitical influences on beliefs; (3) facilitate communication; (4) increase the desire for social justice; and (5) introduce the Hero’s Journey. Ideas for future research that further describe and explain student resistance are suggested.
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CHAPTER ONE

STUDENT RESISTANCE AS A SOCIOPOLITICAL PHENOMENON

Introduction

Counselor students cannot begin to achieve the understanding and learn the professional skills necessary to counsel racial minority clients until they successfully overcome their well documented resistance to racially themed course content (American Psychological Association [APA], 2003; Arredondo, Tovar-Blank, & Parham, 2008; Ridley & Thompson, 1999). Although a significant body of scholarly literature addresses strategies to moderate student resistance, it is generally premised on perceptions of student resistance and its underlying mechanisms as individual psychological phenomena. As a result, student resistance is portrayed as a psychological shortcoming of individual students and is addressed accordingly (i.e., strategies faculty can employ to deal with prejudiced, close-minded, or wrong-thinking students).

This study presents a different interpretation of student resistance, viewing it as a reflection of sociopolitical phenomena in addition to purely individual psychology. In the study, I define student resistance as an emotional process that is largely triggered by students’ beliefs and use two sociopolitical perspectives or lenses to connect student resistance and its underlying beliefs to larger sociopolitical forces. First, I use critical whiteness studies to connect student resistance in counselor education classrooms to sociopolitical behavior that reinforces White racial hegemony in larger society. Second, I use social dominance theory to link beliefs that drive student resistance to ideology that rationalizes and supports a White-dominated hierarchy of social relations between racial
groups in the United States of America (United States). By linking student resistance to sociopolitical behaviors that reinforce White dominance and control, this study may increase understanding of student resistance and encourage development of pedagogical strategies that constructively expose and address possible sociopolitical determinants. Such strategies could provide potentially valuable complements to existing strategies that target the psychology of individual students.

This chapter provides an orientation to the study by first explaining the problem of student resistance followed by a formalized conceptualization of student resistance in counseling and psychology explicated with a cognitive appraisal model of emotion. Next, concepts from social dominance theory and critical whiteness studies are examined for application as analytical tools for the study. A discussion of the research problem, purpose of the study, research questions, study significance, researcher assumptions, and definitions of key terms conclude the chapter.

**The Problem of Student Resistance**

Awareness of culture as an essential component of human behavior has led to increasing emphasis on multiculturalism in the mental health professions (Pedersen, 2005). Graduate programs for counselors, traditionally derived from White cultural values and norms, have begun to recognize and incorporate diverse racial perspectives into their philosophies and curricula (Abreu, Chung, & Atkinson, 2000).

The impetus for this infusion is twofold. First, educating counselors-in-training about race and race-related issues is presumed to help foster their development as *culturally competent* practitioners. That is, it promotes counseling professionals who have
developed race-related awareness, knowledge and skills to work competently and ethically with racially diverse clientele (Arredondo et al., 1996; Sue & Torino, 2005).

An example of a race-related issue to which students must become sensitive is the deleterious effects on people of color that come from living in racist conditions and experiencing racism. Norman (2008) described the greater stress people of color experience compared to their White counterparts due to the daily microaggressions that racist environments breed. Some of the offensive acts that African Americans routinely experience include “being ignored for service, assumed to be guilty of anything negative, treated inferior, stared at because of color, ridiculed because of hair texture, or singled out for being different” (p. 16). Carter and Reynolds (2011) discussed some of the physical and psychological effects of racism related stress.

The heightened stress from the chronic, comprehensive, and cumulative effects of racism and perceived discrimination has been associated with decreased quality of life, negative self-esteem, intrusive thoughts, hypertension, and increased risk for mental and physical illness such as depression, anxiety, or headaches in Black Americans. (p. 156)

The second impetus for incorporating racially diverse perspectives into traditional counselor education concerns licensing requirements. Agencies that accredit graduate programs for counselors have issued revised guidelines requiring programs to reform Eurocentric curricula and philosophies to make them more racially inclusive (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, 2009). These reforms represent best practice in counselor education to redress the failure of conventional academic training to develop culturally competent practitioners who can respond
appropriately and effectively to the unique mental health needs of racial minority clientele 
(Abreu et al., 2000; Pieterse, Evans, Risner-Butner, Collins & Mason, 2009).

With the forward strides in practitioner training, however, came the backlash of resistance. Counselor educators commonly encounter resistance from students when the classroom focus turns to issues, literature, projects, or discussions involving race (APA, 2003; Fouad & Arredondo, 2007; Ridley & Thomson, 1999). Tatum (1992) explained, “the inclusion of race-related content in college courses often generates emotional responses that range from guilt and shame to anger and despair. The discomfort associated with these emotions can lead students to resist the learning process” (p. 1). MacMullan (2009) contended that anyone who teaches about race-related issues “is familiar with the balking, denial, and recalcitrance this subject elicits” (p. 7). Students are most likely to resist course materials and classroom learning activities that expose a social structure of White racial group advantage (Ridley & Thompson) and oppression of racial minority groups (Tatum).

Student resistance is a problem because it disrupts engagement with racially themed course materials and activities and thereby thwarts the intended benefits of including them in the curriculum (Jackson, 1999; Vasquez & Garcia-Vazquez, 2003). Students, in other words, are not engaging and thus not learning the very content that has been added to traditional, White-informed curricula to prepare them to interact competently and ethically with racial minority clients.

**Student Resistance as Conceptualized in Counseling and Psychology**

Jeffrey Scott Mio, an experienced university professor, has encountered many incidents of student resistance in his multicultural classes (Mio, 2005; Mio & Awakuni,
Several are documented in written responses to racially themed course materials and activities, which are reviewed in Chapter 2. The racially themed course content in Mio’s examples includes an article exposing White racial advantage, a course textbook that presents racial minority group perspectives, and a discussion on affirmative action. Mio explained student resistance as an individual student’s strong negative reaction to these racially themed course materials and activities. He implied that the resistance of students is related to their thinking and negative personal qualities. These ideas directly correspond to formalized conceptions in the literature that are based on a purely individual psychological understanding of student resistance.

Student resistance is formally conceptualized in counseling and psychology as an issue of emotion triggered by a classroom focus on race, and is explained in terms of the psychological functioning of individual students (APA, 2003). This conceptualization of student resistance is explicated in the next section using a process model of emotion based on cognitive appraisal theory.

**Student Resistance Explained**

Student resistance is commonly discussed in the counselor education literature as a negative emotional process that is evoked when racially themed materials and learning activities are introduced in the classroom (APA, 2003). Using the cognitive appraisal emotional process model discussed by Lazarus (1991), student resistance involves a process that begins with a student appraising an event such as a racially themed classroom lesson as personally harmful or harmful to a group with which the student affiliates. This harm-related appraisal evokes negative emotion (i.e., anger, guilt, fear, or sadness) which, in turn, motivates action to defend against the unpleasant feelings. During this process,
the student diverts attention from the lesson to the perceived harm and what can be done to address it.

Research in cognitive appraisal theory has linked particular appraisals of antecedent events to each emotion. Calling these links core appraisal-emotion themes, Lazarus (1991) found that appraising an event as a threat leads to feelings of fear, appraisals of loss lead to sadness, self-blame leads to guilt, and blaming others leads to anger. Lazarus also identified different biologically based coping actions evoked by each emotion. For example, fear motivates avoidance or escape, anger motivates attack, sadness motivates inactivity, and guilt motivates reparation. Lazarus, however, pointed out that biologically based coping actions are often undercut by conditioned ones. For example, when a person appraises an event as something she or he is to blame for, it is not unusual for that person to act to exonerate herself or himself rather than to make amends.

In the above examples of student resistance discussed by Mio (2005) and Mio and Awakuni (2000), students considered the article about White privilege, the course textbook, and the classroom discussion on affirmative action to be offensive and accusatory. As a result, these students experienced negative emotions (i.e., anger, frustration, guilt) and disengaged from the learning intended with the materials and discussion to focus on how to deal with the appraised offenses and resultant uncomfortable feelings. Students responded with defensive actions such as dismissive rejection of course literature and the course in general, denial of the existence of White privilege, denigration of the textbook authors, and effort to portray White people as the real victims of affirmative action. Within the purview of cognitive appraisal theory, these students’ behaviors (making harm-related appraisals, experiencing negative emotions,
focusing on the appraised harm, and taking defensive action) define the emotional process of student resistance.

The core principle in cognitive theories of emotion is that a person is not disturbed by an event such as a classroom lesson on race, but by her or his view of the event (Lazarus, 1991; Ellis, 2002). This means that two students who are exposed to the same racially themed classroom activity can have different emotional responses depending on how each one appraises the activity. One student, for example, might consider a classroom lesson on race to be beneficial and feel happy about it while another student may appraise the same lesson as harmful and feel angry or threatened as a result.

A main assumption in cognitive theory is that a person’s appraisal of an event is mediated by her or his individual thoughts and beliefs (Ellis, 2002). In the next section I discuss the thoughts and beliefs that mediate students’ appraisals of racially themed classroom content.

Mediating Thoughts and Beliefs

According to cognitive theorist Albert Ellis (2002), everyone has a personal philosophy or unique set of beliefs that was learned in the past. An individual’s continual indoctrination of herself or himself with these beliefs determines a person’s present interpretation of life’s events and the emotional reactions and behaviors that flow from them. Tatum (1992) described two beliefs commonly held by students in her classes that motivate negative appraisals of classroom discussions about race and racism, negative emotion, and disengagement from learning. The first belief is that race is “a taboo topic for discussion, especially in racially mixed settings” (p. 5); and the second is “the United States is a just society, a meritocracy where individual efforts are fairly rewarded” (p. 6).
According to Ellis and Abrams (2009), beliefs that mediate appraisals of objects and events (i.e., classroom discussions on race) can be either rational or irrational. Rational beliefs are logical, in accordance with some acknowledged goal or purpose, flexible, and or empirically supported. They lead to healthy emotion and functional behavior. On the other hand, irrational beliefs are illogical, are extremely rigid, create barriers to achieving desired goals, and or lack empirical support. Irrational beliefs lead to disturbed emotional responses and self-defeating behavior. As indicated in these descriptions, the criteria of rationality cannot be objectively determined because they are relative to a social context and the goals and purposes deemed to be important by each individual (Ellis & Abrams; Ellis, David, & Lynn, 2010).

In the next section, I discuss the social context of a counselor education classroom and its determining effects on the rationality of students’ beliefs.

Rationality of Beliefs in a Counselor Education Classroom

Best practices in counselor training and program accreditation standards (i.e., Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, 2009) require that multiculturalism and social justice be fundamental elements in the curricula (Pieterse et al., 2009). Consequently, counselor educators routinely incorporate racially themed course materials and activities into their classes to educate students about diverse racial perspectives and racial inequity in society.

Assuming the goals of students genuinely correspond with professional training objectives, beliefs students hold that preclude the learning that racially themed coursework is intended to impart are irrational. For example, a student’s rigidly held belief that race is a taboo subject or that equal opportunity exists for everyone is
irrational. These beliefs are irrational, according to Ellis and Abrams (2009), because they are inflexible, create barriers to training goals, and present distorted views of reality. They are also irrational because, as Tatum (1992) pointed out, they lead to emotional upset and disengagement from learning that counselors-in-training need in order to facilitate positive therapeutic outcomes with future clients.

Remedial strategies based on cognitive understandings of student resistance focus on challenging and transforming students’ irrational beliefs through education (Ellis, 2002). Murphy (2007) described the “Rational Persuasion Approach” and the “Fatalistic Future Approach” as two ways of challenging the irrational beliefs of resistant students. With the Rational Persuasion Approach, educators provide factual information that challenges students’ beliefs. To dispute the belief that the United States is a racially just society, for example, counselor educators might present students with statistical evidence showing social and economic disparities along racial lines. The Fatalistic Future Approach consists of informing students how their futures may be jeopardized if they cling to their irrational beliefs. For example, explaining to counselors-in-training that passing their licensing exam depends on their knowledge of certain race-related issues may motivate them to reexamine and transform the irrational belief that race is a taboo subject.

**Rational Foundation of Student Resistance**

Not all scholars agree with notions in counselor education that students’ irrational beliefs motivate student resistance and that disputing these beliefs with factual information is the best remedial strategy. Bonilla-Silva, Lewis, and Embrick (2004), for example, argued that although problematic behavior around race (i.e., student resistance)
often involves irrationality, it has a rational foundation. They suggested that the hierarchy of social relations between racial groups in the United States provides an alternate framework in which to understand race-related behaviors such as student resistance evoked by racially themed course content.

In the next section I use social dominance theory to explain student resistance as a logical consequence of a hierarchy of social relations between racial groups in the United States. Through the lens of social dominance theory, student resistance can be connected to a conscious or unconscious interest in maintaining a group’s position over others. In other words, students who resist course content that threatens to expose and dismantle the system of White racial dominance and control may not be motivated by irrational beliefs. Instead, these students may be acting as agents of their racial status groups who are rationally invested in their position of dominance over others and the social, economic, and political advantages this racial location affords them.

**Student Resistance through the Lens of Social Dominance Theory**

The need to understand the influence of social, political, and historical contexts on individual behavior is increasingly stressed in counselor education and psychology (APA, 2003). Sidanius and Pratto (1999), for example, stressed that, “though psychological predispositions are important, they are always enacted within specific sociopolitical contexts” (p. 302). Envisioning the classroom as a microcosm of larger society, Fouad and Arredondo (2007) encouraged the use of a sociopolitical perspective or “lens” as a way to analyze the impact of larger sociopolitical forces on student classroom behavior. Social dominance theory offers a valuable framework to describe the larger sociopolitical
context of White racial domination and its connection to students’ beliefs, appraisals, emotions, and actions.

Two social psychologists, Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto, introduced social dominance theory in the 1990s to identify mechanisms that are responsible for the production and reproduction of group-based social inequality. The theory begins with the observation that human societies over history have tended to be structured as group-based social hierarchies with one group at the top of the social system and one or a number of other groups in relatively subordinate positions. In such hierarchical arrangements, dominant groups secure a disproportionate share of power, social status and other material and symbolic things of positive social value. At the same time, members of subordinate groups receive a disproportionate share of society’s miseries (e.g., relative powerlessness, low status, poor healthcare, poverty) (Sidanius & Pratto, 2012).

One of the ways that dominant groups retain the hierarchical arrangement is through the use of systematic terror directed against subordinate groups. According to Sidanius and Pratto (1999), the use of terror is found in all societies with economic surplus including those societies with democratic and egalitarian pretension. “However, in general, the level of brutality and discrimination against subordinates within so-called democratic societies will tend to be somewhat constrained, indirect, or covert due to the cultural ideals espousing equality before the law” (p. 43).

Violence and terror against subordinate groups in “democratic” societies can manifest not only as brutal physical acts, but as normal components of intergroup discourse designed to maintain group-based inequality and dominance. Vera, Feagin, and Gordon (1995) described “the imposition of systems of meaning on subordinated groups
in an attempt to make the dominant group’s actions appear legitimate” (p. 297) as symbolic violence. In social dominance theory, symbolic violence in the form of discourse that serves the political purpose of maintaining group-based inequality (i.e., keeping low-status groups in their place) is discussed in terms of “legitimizing myths” (Sidanius & Pratto, 2012).

Central to social dominance theory is the proposition that behaviors of individuals are shaped by legitimizing myths or consensually held social ideologies that are used to justify the establishment and maintenance of group-based social inequality or equality. When the legitimizing myth rationalizes group-based oppression and inequality, it is called a hierarchy-enhancing legitimizing myth (Pratto, Sidanius, & Levin, 2006).

Assertions of White superiority, inferiority of people of color, and traditional American values continue as hierarchy-enhancing legitimizing myths that rationalize and serve to maintain the present-day racial order of White dominance and control in the United States. Sue (2004a) expounded on these myths in his explanation of ethnocentric monoculturalism, a pervasive system of cultural racism in the United States. Like other forms of oppression, ethnocentric monoculturalism can be regarded as a manifestation of a more “basic human predisposition toward the formation of group-based social hierarchy” (Sidanius, Levin, Rabinowitz, & Frederico, 1999, p. 91).

Ethnocentric Monoculturalism

According to Sue (2004a), individuals in the United States are born into a system of cultural racism called ethnocentric monoculturalism, which acts as a powerful influence on the perspectives and beliefs from which they see and interpret the world. Two of the defining attributes of ethnocentric monoculturalism are: (1) a strong belief in
the superiority of White American culture; and (2) a belief in the inferiority of nonwhite cultures.

**Belief in White Superiority**

Katz (1985) defined White culture as “the synthesis of ideas, values, and beliefs coalesced from descendants of White European ethnic groups in the United States” (p. 617). Hallmarks of White culture include individualism, competition, action orientation, the Protestant work ethic, capitalism, certain physical features (blond hair, blue eyes, and fair skin) and monotheism (Christianity). Valuing the scientific method, progress and future orientation, communication in Standard English with controlled emotion, written tradition, and historical accounts elevating European immigrants’ experience in the United States are also components of White culture (Katz).

Sue (2004a) contended that people who possess or adhere to characteristics of White culture are privileged in society and therefore have an easier path to the rewards society has to offer. “This validation in society makes them feel special, chosen, and entitled” (p. 765) and these feelings of superiority often lead to the belief that their way of seeing and doing things is not just one of many possible ways, it is the right way. This thinking often blocks their ability and or willingness to understand and empathize with other people’s differing perspectives or life experiences. In his discussion of feelings based on positional arrangement of racial groups, Blumer (1958) explained that members of the dominant group also feel a sense of proprietary claim in many important areas of life (i.e., the right to certain jobs, ownership of choice lands).
Belief in the Inferiority of Nonwhite Racial Groups

A second attribute of ethnocentric monoculturalism is the belief in the inferiority of nonwhite cultures, which extends to customs, values, traditions and language. Individuals who possess or adhere to characteristics different from the White culture are judged as less intelligent, less qualified, and even pathological at times. Their lifestyles, behaviors, customs, and practices are also considered inferior (Sue & Sue, 2003).

Belief in Traditional American Values

Sue (2004a) explained that in the process of White cultural conditioning “individuals are taught not only the prejudices and biases of society but also the many myths that serve to guide the interpretation of events” (p. 766). Three of these are: (1) the myth of meritocracy; (2) the myth of equal opportunity; and (3) the myth of fair treatment.

The myth of meritocracy suggests that the people (i.e., Whites) who rise and prosper in United States society are the people who deserve it. They are the ones who are intelligent and hard-working. Those who fail are less capable, intelligent and motivated. By concealing the role White privilege plays in the material, social, and psychological benefits White people in society enjoy, the myth of meritocracy works as a hierarchy-enhancing legitimizing myth by positioning Whites as superior (i.e., hardworking, intelligent) and nonwhites as inferior (Sue, 2004a).

The myth of equal opportunity assumes that we all face the same obstacles in life, the playing field is level, and everyone has equal opportunity. Failing to acknowledge the racist conditions that thwart the life chances of people of color, the rhetoric of equal
opportunity not only provides an excuse for not addressing racial injustice but also suggests that the victims of racism have only themselves to blame (Sue, 2004a).

The myth that fair treatment is equal treatment equates differential treatment to discriminatory or preferential practices. This myth perpetuates White dominance and control by suggesting that policies and programs (i.e., affirmative action) designed to counter White privilege and widespread discrimination against racial minority groups are inappropriate because they are unfair to White people (Sue, 2004a). Sue explained that all of these myths combine to obscure inequities and discrepancies in society that oppress racial minorities. When considered from the perspective of social dominance theory, assertions of White superiority, inferiority of people of color, and traditional American myths used to justify White racial dominance serve as ideological mechanisms to maintain the interests of the dominant White group. The field of critical whiteness studies described other behavioral practices that serve to maintain the racial status quo. In the following section I present an overview of whiteness studies and describe some of these behaviors.

**Introduction to Whiteness Studies**

In this section I introduce whiteness studies and describe the conceptual tools it provides for the analysis of data in this study.

**History, Scope, and Intent of Whiteness Studies**

Pamela Perry (2007) described Whiteness studies as an emergent, interdisciplinary field of inquiry that focuses on the nature and function of the White group. Critical versions of whiteness studies emerged with the mission of “particularizing, making visible, and assessing ‘whiteness’ ”(p. 243). Whiteness is defined as “the constellation of
identities, processes, and practices that systematically privilege white people and reproduce white domination” (p. 243). According to MacMullan (2009), the conceptual basis of whiteness is White supremacy. White supremacy is a socially fabricated “idea that there exists a certain group of people who are by virtue of their heredity, entitled to greater rights and privileges than other groups” (p. 168).

A major focus in whiteness studies, according to Perry (2007), is exposing cultural assumptions of the White group and the nature and mechanisms of whiteness. For example, whiteness scholars have chronicled the continuous reinforcement of White supremacy in the United States through laws, customs, and culture. The following passage, for example, describes how powerful White-decision makers promoted and maintained White supremacy and dominance through legislation:

Until passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, U. S. Law conferred upon whites (propertied males, especially, but also white women and workers) singular access to full human and civil rights and protected white identity, privilege, and property. Today, “colorblind” law and the disproportional wealth that whites have accrued from a long-term “possessive investment in whiteness” provide ongoing benefits to whites (better schools, toxic-free neighborhoods, excellent credit). Historically, these privileges were solidified even in progressive public policies like those of the New Deal, which specifically advantaged White workers and home buyers. (p. 245)

Scholars also described ways that White systems of representation shaped the pedagogy and practice of psychology and counseling (Robinson & Morris, 2000). In a classic work called Even the Rat was White, Robert Guthrie (1976) provided a historical
view that clearly illustrated the White hegemonistic and racist underpinnings of both the scientific work and the institutions of psychology. Guthrie, for example, clearly documented psychology’s use of pseudo-science to justify racist beliefs and acts starting in the late 1800s.

Counseling, like psychology, was revealed as a historically White hegemonic system founded in part on racist theories, research methods, and application. In the past, counseling has employed three deficit models to guide methodology and conceptualize findings in research on racial minorities. The first of these, the inferiority or pathological model, is based on the assumption that racial minorities are inherently more pathological than Whites because they are more primitive (i.e., lower on the evolutionary scale). Blacks and other minorities are presumed to lack desirable genes in the second model which is called the genetically deficient model. The third model, the culturally deprived model, judges the cultures of people of color to be deficient. Implicit in these models is the assumption of the superiority of Whites and White culture (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992).

Benefits afforded to Whites throughout the history of the United States have accumulated across generations to the present day. As was true in the past, White racial advantage continues to be perpetuated through actions, decisions and policies that reinforce White dominance and supremacy (Leonardo, 2009).

Jensen (2005) contended that White advantage in the United States and elsewhere persists because White people, the ones with disproportionate wealth and power, have not taken responsibility for changing it. Most White and White-minded people stay on paths of thinking, feeling, and acting that reinforce White dominance and supremacy and
sustain the patterns of advantage and oppression rooted in the system of White privilege (Johnson, 2006). When White and White-minded people are confronted with the reality of the system of racial injustice that they participate in and make happen, they resort to complex sets of behaviors not only to protect their privilege but also to mask any sense of complicity or responsibility for the system (Dei, 2007; Jensen; Johnson; Kivel, 1996; Tatum, 1997). Whiteness scholars have identified many of these tactics.

Behavior to Maintain White Privilege

Whiteness scholars have identified many of the tactics that beneficiaries of the system of White privilege use individually and collectively in various social venues to reinforce the system and thereby retain their advantage. One such tactic is treating race as a taboo topic for discussion (Tatum, 1992). Johnson (2006) found that people avoid conversations about race by substituting words like culture or ethnicity for race and calling race-related matters something else (i.e., issues of economics or gender). According to Johnson, if we dispense with race-related words and consider gender or class issues paramount to race issues “we make it impossible to talk about what’s really going on and what it has to do with us” (p. 2). Without critical discussions that demystify the system of racial inequity and processes that sustain it, strategies to dismantle the system remain elusive and the system continues unabated (Johnson).

Another tactic is discrediting the person (i.e., educator or trainer) who talks about White domination and privilege. Sue (2003) contended, “by discrediting the communicator, the information and assertions made by the trainer are invalidated” (p. 29). According to Sue, people often discredit the professionalism of educators and trainers who address issues of White power and privilege with comments such as, “she’s
a bleeding heart liberal. . . or she’s an opinionated person who’s lost her sense of objectivity” (p. 29).

Viewing racism and White privilege as hopeless or insoluble, and efforts to overcome them as futile also sustains systemic racial injustice. According to Tatum (1997), despair and resignation toward racism become excuses to do nothing about it.

Scholars have identified several tactics people use to escape responsibility for addressing White domination and privilege. Johnson (2006), for example, described denial as the simplest way for people who benefit to “get off the hook” for systems of privilege. The rationale for denial is that you cannot be responsible for or benefit from a system that doesn’t exist. Johnson explained that people simply deny that White privilege and racism exist by saying things like White people are the ones victimized by racism these days or the American Dream is alive and well and available to everyone.

Equating intentions with outcomes is another form of denying racism and White privilege. According to Johnson (2006), people using this tactic to deny that policies and practices that benefit Whites are racist by saying that was not the intention of the policies and practices. Kivel (1996) observed, “Today we continue to claim racism is unintentional by saying, ‘Discrimination may happen, but most people are well intentioned.’ ‘She probably didn’t mean it like that.’ Or, ‘it was only a joke’ ” (p. 44). Another way to deny oppression and privilege is to say that they happened in the past and are not issues today. According to Kivel (1996), “Today we claim racism is all over by saying, ‘Slavery was over a long time ago.’ ‘The days of land grabbing are long gone.’ ‘That was before the Civil Rights Era’ ” (p. 45). If they are faced with indisputable evidence of current day racism and violence toward racial minorities, people diffuse
responsibility by making it seem like the racism and violence are isolated incidents perpetuated by a few bad eggs. According to Kivel, people using this tactic say, “‘Housing and job discrimination are the result of a few bigoted people.’ ‘The Far Right is behind the scapegoating of immigrants.’ ‘It’s only neo-Nazis and Skinheads who do that sort of thing’” (p. 45).

Other times when racism and White advantage are too obvious to deny, people may acknowledge them but minimize their effects. People employing the tactic of minimization may characterize the racism people of color have to deal with as “not all that bad” or “not bad enough to interfere with the life chances of people of color” (Johnson, 2006).

Another strategy people employ to evade responsibility for privilege and oppression is to blame the victims. Kivel (1996) explained, “Today we blame people of color for racism by saying, ‘Look at the way they act.’ ‘If they weren’t so angry…’ Or, ‘they are immoral, lazy, dumb or unambitious’” (p. 43).

Whiteness scholars stress the importance of exposing tactics that reinforce White racial hegemony in all levels of society and displace responsibility away from those who use their positions of power to reinforce it (Jensen, 2005; Johnson, 2006; Kivel, 1996; Sue, 2003; Tatum, 1992, 1997). Awareness of the true nature of the tactics, according to Kivel, is important to the process of undermining their effects. These effects may include undermining intended learning from racially themed materials and activities offered in counseling classes to challenge White centered perspectives and values.
Statement of the Research Problem

Recognizing that student resistance obstructs learning and development of cultural competence, scholars developed various strategies to address it. These remedial efforts have been constrained, however, by perceptions of student resistance and its solutions mainly in terms of the psychology of individual students. This unduly limited view is problematic in two ways. First, it obscures how student resistance may be perpetuated and reinforced by the dynamics of sociopolitical systems in which it occurs. Second, it overlooks the potential for formulating pedagogical strategies to constructively expose and address these sociopolitical underpinnings.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to expand the view of student resistance as more than simply individual behavior by considering how it may be influenced by the sociopolitical context in which it occurs. In the study, I interpret student resistance as a sociopolitical phenomenon by connecting it to a complex of general behaviors that reinforce White racial hegemony and control.

Research Questions

The fundamental question that guided this study is: In what ways does student resistance evoked by a racially themed classroom video presentation qualify as a sociopolitical phenomenon? Six auxiliary questions are: 1) How do students describe what it was like watching the video? (2) How do students describe the feelings they experienced during the video presentation? (3) How do students describe the thoughts they had during the video presentation? (4) How do students describe the beliefs underlying those thoughts? (5) How do students describe their opinions of the video as a
tool to teach counseling students about ethnicity and race? (6) How does student resistance define behavior that reinforces White hegemony and control in counselor education classrooms?

**Significance of the Study**

The need to understand the influence of larger sociopolitical forces on student classroom behavior is increasingly stressed in counselor education (APA, 2003). This study acknowledges the larger sociopolitical context of White racial hegemony and analyzes its connection to student resistance evoked by a racially themed classroom video presentation. By linking student resistance to its larger sociopolitical context, this study provides a more expansive view of student resistance and lays the groundwork for establishing pedagogical strategies that constructively expose and address its possible sociopolitical determinants. Such strategies could provide potentially valuable complements to existing strategies that target the psychology of individual students.

**Researcher Assumptions**

The proposed research is grounded in the following researcher’s assumptions: (1) Participants’ descriptions of their experiences are important sources of data. (2) As counselor education graduate students, participants will provide rich descriptions of their experiences in terms of their opinions of the video, emotions, and underlying thoughts and beliefs. Ellis (2002) contends that the beliefs a person holds that mediate her or his appraisals of events and resultant emotions are largely just below the conscious level and can be brought rather quickly to conscious level. (3) Sociopolitical dynamics in the larger society are reflected in participants’ described experiences of the racially themed video presentation.
Key Terms

**Cognitive Appraisal Theory** is a theory of emotion that regards emotions as subjective states that are the product of an initially evoking event and a cognitive appraisal of the event as beneficial or harmful for the individual (Reber & Reber, 2001).

**Culturally Competent** describes a practitioner who is developing competence to work with racial minority clientele. She or he is increasingly aware of personal beliefs and attitudes, knowledgeable about diverse racial groups, and skillful in the use of culturally appropriate therapeutic interventions (Sue et al., 1982).

**Cultural Racism** is characterized by individual and institutional expression reflecting a belief that one racial group’s cultural accomplishments, achievements and creativity are superior to those of another’s (Mio, Trimble, Arredondo, Cheatham, & Sue, 1999).

**Ethnocentric Monoculturalism** is a form of cultural racism in the United States. Two of its attributes are: (a) belief in the superiority of White culture; and (b) belief in the inferiority of nonwhite cultures (Sue & Sue, 2003).

**Irrational Thinking/Beliefs** are evaluative cognitions that are dysfunctional and emotionally disturbing. They violate the rules of formal logic, create barriers to achieving goals, are extremely inflexible, or lead to distorted views of reality (Ellis & Abrams, 2009).

**Minorities** include people in the United States of African descent, Asian descent, Latin American descent and indigenous people who are sometimes referred to as Native American or American Indians (Tatum, 1997). The term is used to signify the groups’ limited political power and is not meant to connote inferiority or to
indicate small demographic size (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001).

**Multiculturalism** is “the view that the various cultures in a society merit equal respect and scholarly interest” (multiculturalism, n.d.).

**Race** is a politically constructed system of categorization in which individuals are assigned to certain groups based on physical characteristics (i.e., skin color, eye shape, hair type). The concept of race is used to determine which groups in society receive inferior or superior treatment, access to power, and other valued resources (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001).

**Racialized Social Order** refers to a hierarchy of racialized groups in society. The higher the racial group’s position on the hierarchy, the more social status and life opportunities its members have (Bonilla-Silva, 2005).

**Racially Themed Course Content** refers to classroom materials and activities dealing with issues of race.

**Rational Thinking/Beliefs** are evaluative cognitions that lead to healthy emotion and functional behavior. They are flexible, appropriate to some acknowledged goal or purpose, logical, or empirically consistent with reality (Ellis & Abrams, 2009).

**Social Dominance Theory** is “a general theory of societal group-based inequality” (Pratto et al., 2006, p. 271).

**Student Resistance** is an issue of emotion provoked by racially themed course materials and activities (APA, 2003; Fouad & Arredondo, 2007; Utsey & Gernat, 2002; Jackson, 1999).
**Training** refers specifically to the practical application of general psychological theories for the purpose of developing applied skills (APA, 2003).

**White** is a variable socio-political category made up largely of Americans of European descent (Tatum, 1997).

**Whiteness** is defined as “the constellation of identities, processes, and practices that systematically privilege white people and reproduce white domination” (Perry, 2007, p. 243).

**Whiteness Studies** is, according to Perry (2007), an emergent, interdisciplinary field of inquiry that focuses on the nature and function of the White group. Critical versions of whiteness studies emerged with the mission of “particularizing, making visible, and assessing ‘whiteness’ ” (p. 243).
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Developing cultural competence is a core objective of counseling education. Yet students often resist and disengage when presented with racially themed course materials and activities intended to increase their competence to address particular issues encountered when counseling racial minority clients. Once scholars recognized student resistance as an obstacle to learning, they developed strategies to remedy it. These strategies, however, are mostly based on individualistic perceptions of student resistance and therefore overlook how student resistance may be impacted by the sociopolitical context in which it occurs.

In the three sections of this chapter I review literature that contributes to a rationale for broadening understandings of student resistance as more than simply individual behavior by interpreting it as a sociopolitical phenomenon. In particular, I rationalize the interpretation of student resistance as behavior that preserves the sociopolitical context of White racial hegemony and control.

In the first section of this chapter I present student resistance as an obstacle to the learning essential to therapeutic intervention with future racial minority clients. In section two, I describe student resistance as it is presented in the contemporary literature in counseling and psychology. I argue that this literature is unduly limited by examining student resistance strictly in terms of the psychology of individual students.
In section three, I move beyond an intrapsychic explanation of student resistance to consider its connection to sociopolitical forces. From the perspectives of critical whiteness studies and social dominance theory, I describe whiteness (White dominance and control) and a hierarchy of social relations between racialized groups in the United States and consider their connections to student resistance and its underlying mechanisms.

The Problem of Student Resistance

In this section, which is divided into three parts, I explain student resistance as an obstacle to the learning necessary to counsel racial minority clients competently and ethically. In part one, I establish that inadequate counselor training contributes to the inadequacy of mental health care for racial minority groups in the United States. In part two, I chronicle events leading to professional mandates to include racially themed course content in training curricula as a means to prepare counselors to work effectively and ethically with racial minority clients. In the final part, I explain student resistance as an obstacle to the learning that racially themed coursework is intended to impart.

Inadequate Mental Health Care

Compared to the White majority in the United States, “racial and ethnic minorities bear a greater burden from unmet mental health needs and thus suffer a greater loss to their overall health and productivity” (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS], 2001, p. 3). This assertion of disparities in mental health care draws from extensive scientific evidence compiled in Mental Health: Culture, Race, and Ethnicity—A Supplement to Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General (Supplement) published in 2001. The Supplement documents that racial minorities in the United States
have less access than Whites to mental health care and are less likely to get the care they need. In addition, racial minority clients who do reach treatment are more likely than their White counterparts to terminate counseling prematurely and receive poor quality care (USDHHS).

The Supplement identified an array of barriers operating to reduce the quality of care for racial minority clients. They include: (a) clinician bias and lack of awareness of cultural issues; (b) client mistrust and fear of treatment; (c) differences in client and counselor communication; and (d) racism and discrimination. To address these barriers the Supplement suggests that mental health care providers be educated to meet the unique mental health needs of racial minority clients. Specifically, the Supplement encourages required coursework designed to educate students about issues of race and the importance of considering race in mental health, mental illness and mental health service (USDHHS, 2001).

The issuance of the Supplement did much to raise public awareness of racial disparities in the mental health field and stimulated legislative, scientific, and community efforts to respond to this deplorable situation (Chang, 2003). Yet, for many in the mental health professions, “the messages of the Supplement . . . [did] not represent ground-breaking news” (p. 373). Discussions of the failure of counseling and psychology to meet the needs of the nation’s increasingly racially diverse population were prevalent in the professional literature thirty years before publication of the Supplement (Reynolds & Pope, 1991). Calls for coursework designed to inform counselor students of the importance of considering race in the delivery of effective mental health services and to prepare them to counsel minority clientele effectively were widespread in the 1980s
(APA, 2003). Indeed, by the time the Supplement was issued in 2001, the inclusion of such coursework had already become standard practice in accredited programs for counselors throughout the country (Abreu et al., 2000). Events that led to this inclusion are reviewed in the next section.

Events Leading to the Incorporation of Race

Early Literature

New racial sensitivities emerging in the wake of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s inspired a surge of innovative research and writing throughout the 1970s exposing counseling and psychology’s mistreatment of racial minorities (Robinson & Morris, 2000). In a classic work called *Even the Rat was White*, Robert Guthrie (1976) provided a historical view that clearly illustrated the racist underpinnings of both the scientific work and the institutions of psychology. Guthrie chronicled psychology’s use of pseudo-science to justify racist beliefs and acts starting in the late 1800’s.

Other works documented decades of exclusion of racial minorities by the American Psychological Association (APA) in its organization as well as APA’s history of blatant disregard for the health needs of racial minority populations. APA was started by a group of White men and the first president of APA, G. Stanley Hall, openly denigrated Blacks saying they were an underdeveloped, primitive race of people (Robinson & Morris, 2000). Psychology’s hand in the historical mistreatment of American Indians is also well documented. It was reported that the United States government enlisted psychological services to further the American Indian assimilation and acculturation processes and employed psychological assessments that disregarded cultural differences between American Indians and Whites. This practice served to
promulgate denigrating stereotypes and misconceptions about American Indians (Choney, Berryhill-Paapke & Robbins, 1995).

Counseling, like psychology, was revealed as a historically White hegemonic system founded in part on racist theories, research methods, and applications. In the past, counseling has employed three deficit models to guide methodology and conceptualize findings in research on racial minorities: (1) the inferiority or pathological model which is based on the assumption that minorities are inherently more pathological than Whites because they are more primitive (i.e., lower on the evolutionary scale); (2) the genetically deficient model in which nonwhites are assumed to lack desirable genes; and (3) the culturally deprived model in which the cultures of minorities are considered deficient. Implicit in these models is the assumption of the superiority of Whites and White culture (Sue et al., 1992).

By the mid-1980s, a substantial body of literature attested to counseling and psychology’s culturally biased traditions of research and theory that were extrapolated from largely White populations and had little applicability to racial minority groups (Jackson, 1995). The ineffectiveness of traditional therapeutic practice for nonwhite groups was also well established (Ponterotto & Casas, 1987; Sue et al., 1992).

Various researchers traced ineffective practice with racial minority groups to the inadequacy of academic training programs to prepare counselors to address the unique mental health needs of these groups (Ponterotto, 1997; Sue, Akutsu, & Higashi, 1985). Traditional training neglects the needs of racial minority groups by either ignoring their existence or assuming that therapeutic practices that are infused with primarily White cultural values and perspectives are applicable for all groups (Ponterotto & Casas, 1987).
A number of mental health professionals expressed concern that practitioners without adequate training who are working with racial minority clients are practicing unethically and potentially harming clients (Reynolds, 1995). These concerns led to calls in the professions and eventual licensing mandates to transform the conventions of academic training to include coursework to educate students about racial minority issues, perspectives, and concerns. These changes were based on the assumption that education about race would prepare students to work competently with racial minority clients (APA, 2003). Competency to work with racial minority clients became defined in the literature as cultural competence (Abreu et al., 2000).

*Cultural Competence Defined*

Cultural competence is a broad-based approach to mental health care that underscores recognition of clients’ cultural concerns (e.g., languages, histories, traditions, beliefs, values). The term competence signifies that the responsibility to deliver culturally appropriate service is placed on mental health practitioners (USDHHS, 2001) — the majority of whom are White (Sue & Torino, 2005). The impetus for culturally competent mental health service is the conviction that services responsive to the cultural concerns of clients will be more inviting to racial minority clients, will encourage them to get treatment, and will improve their outcomes once in treatment (USDHHS).

One of the first models of cultural competence was developed by Derald Wing Sue and associates in the early 1980s (Abreu et al., 2000). This model identifies the competencies needed to provide effective, ethical mental health service to racial minority clients in three general areas: awareness, knowledge and skills (Sue et al., 1982).
In a later explication of the model, Sue and Torino (2005) described awareness, knowledge, and skills of a culturally competent counselor. First, a culturally competent counselor is increasingly aware of her or his values, assumptions and biases as they relate to issues of race and race relations. Second, a culturally competent counselor is knowledgeable of the cultural heritages, life experiences, and historical backgrounds of diverse racial client populations. She or he is also able to interpret and translate this knowledge into both sociological and psychological consequences for clients. Lastly, a culturally competent counselor is skillful in the use of an expanding repertoire of helping responses. This description by Sue and Torino emphasizes proficiency in the competency areas as an active, developmental process that is aspirational rather than actually achieved.

By the mid 1980s, cultural competence had been established as a goal for counselor training, and some programs started to incorporate consideration of race into curricula as a means to promote students’ cultural competence. By 2001, when the Surgeon General’s office published the Supplement suggesting the need to incorporate race into counselor training, it was already a component of substantial numbers of counseling and psychology graduate programs (Abreu et al., 2000).

Failure of Training Programs

Despite the increased coverage of racial issues in training, concerns remained that graduate programs were failing to prepare counselors to work effectively with racial minority clientele. Vasquez and Garcia-Vasquez (2003), for example, conducted interviews with recent graduates of counseling programs across the country and concluded that the students’ cultural competence training had not been adequate. They
claimed that these students “have not learned enough to be competent, but they have learned enough to develop a false sense of security in their practices toward minority populations” (p. 550). Other researchers pointed to utilization statistics as evidence of the failure of training. They hypothesized that racial minority individuals underutilize and prematurely terminate counseling because training programs have failed to prepare practitioners to meet the needs of these individuals (Sue & Sue, 2003). Researchers worked to discover why training programs were failing to produce culturally competent counselors. They quickly identified student resistance as one key cause (APA, 2003).

**Student Resistance as an Obstacle to Cultural Competence**

Counselor educators commonly reported encountering resistance from students when the class focus turned to issues, literature, projects, or discussions about race (Abreu, 2001; APA, 2003; Fouad & Arredondo, 2007; Ridley & Thomson, 1999). Students, in other words, were resisting the very content that had been incorporated into traditional curricula to educate them about the impact of race on mental health, mental illness, and mental health service provision. Scholars soon recognized such resistance as an obstacle to the knowledge and understanding students must develop to competently and ethically serve racial minority clientele (APA; Arredondo et al., 2008; Jackson, 1999; Vasquez & Garcia-Vazquez, 2003).

Once scholars had identified student resistance as a significant impediment to cultural competence, they turned their attention to strategies to overcome it (APA, 2003; Arredondo et al., 2008; Mio & Awakuni, 2000). Formally defining student resistance and describing its underlying mechanisms were important first steps in this effort. The
literature providing a conceptualization of student resistance is reviewed in the next section.

**Student Resistance in Counseling and Psychology**

In this section, I describe student resistance as it is conceptualized in the fields of counseling and psychology. I begin with three examples and then present a formalized conception of student resistance and describe its dynamics using a model based on cognitive theory.

**Examples of Student Resistance**

Jeffrey Scott Mio, an experienced multicultural educator, has encountered many incidents of student resistance in his multicultural classes. Several are documented in written responses to racially themed course materials and activities (Mio & Awakuni, 2000). Critiquing the class textbook written by Derald Wing Sue and David Sue (1990), one student wrote:

>Sue and Sue are quite emotional in their writings. This indicates to me that they are overly invested in their work. Because of this, it is obvious that they are not very scientific in their writing, and their work lacks credibility. . . . [T]he Sues are too blunt and undiplomatic. Our society is no more racist than any other society in the world, but even if it were, the way in which the Sues point it out will undoubtedly further entrench the establishment’s defensiveness. Thus, the Sues’ blatant hostility will be taken as inflammatory and ultimately be unsuccessful. They don’t come across as reasonable or level-headed, and no one will ever listen to the suggestions they propose. (Mio & Awakuni, pp. 94–95)
Mio indicated that this student is one of the most openly hostile, defensive students he has ever taught.

Another student, whom Mio described as being highly critical of his classes, reacted quite negatively to a class discussion of affirmative action policies (Mio & Awakuni, 2000).

Once again, I am feeling like because I am White, I am automatically privileged, prejudiced, you name it. I am truly sick of it. . . . Enough of the “Oh poor me. I’m a minority. I want to step on all the white people and make them pay for my hardships”. Saying that one will look at all of the qualifications, and then if they are equal, look at the background (which means race) to decide, is ridiculous and unfair. It is discrimination against any other race that did not get in because they weren’t “that” race. (p. 96)

As a third example of student resistance Mio (2005) described a White student’s reaction to an article he routinely assigns in his classes to raise awareness of White privilege, the unearned, unjustified advantages automatically afforded to White Americans. The article describes 46 ordinary and daily ways in which the author, Peggy McIntosh (1988), experiences having White privilege by contrast with her Black coworkers, friends, and acquaintances. For instance, McIntosh says she can, if she wishes, arrange to be in the company of people of her race most of the time and she can avoid spending time with people whom she was trained to mistrust and who have learned to mistrust her kind or her. She also states that she can choose blemish cover or bandages in “flesh” color and have them more or less match her skin and she does not have to educate her children to be aware of systemic racism for their own daily physical protection.
Mio (2005) described the student’s reaction to McIntosh’s article:

I don’t think this was a very insightful article, and most of the items did not apply to me. For example, I can’t arrange to be in the company of people only from my race, and I can’t avoid spending time with those whom I mistrust and who have learned to mistrust my race. (p. 129)

Mio (2005) contended that McIntosh (1988) writes in a clear fashion that is very easy to understand and believes that only the “most resistant” White person can deny her or his own privilege after reading the article. He described the student who responded to McIntosh’s arguments as the “most resistant” of students and suggested that changing the thinking of resistant students such as this one is a responsibility of those who teach about multicultural issues.

Mio described resistance as an individual student’s strong negative reaction to racially themed course materials and activities (i.e., Sue and Sue’s text, the White privilege article, and the class discussion about affirmative action). He suggested that the resistance of students is related to the student’s thinking and personal qualities (i.e., “hostile,” “most resistant;” “highly critical”). His examples correspond to formalized conceptions in the literature that are based on a purely individual psychological understanding of student resistance.

A Formalized Conceptualization of Student Resistance

Scholars commonly draw from the literature on resistance to therapy to explain student resistance to multicultural (i.e., racial) issues in the classroom (Arredondo et al., 2008; Jackson, 1999; Ridley & Thompson, 1999). In most theoretical camps, client resistance is believed to be an issue of negative emotion triggered by the process of
therapy (Weiten, 2002) and is explained in terms of a client’s psychological functioning. For instance, Freud described resistance as a patient’s inability or unwillingness to call painful memories of the unconscious mind into consciousness and saw resistance as a patient’s natural defense against emotional pain. From an existential view, resistance is explained as a block to becoming fully aware of one’s threatening condition. It is considered a client’s protective “space suit” in an environment experienced as inhospitable to survival. In cognitive theory it is believed that individuals naturally resist the displacement of old meaning structures by new ones. Accordingly, resistance is often seen as a client protecting her or his construction of reality or way of organizing and predicting the world (Cowan & Presbury, 2000).

Similar to client resistance, student resistance is understood as an issue of negative emotion triggered by a class focus on racial issues and is explained in terms of an individual student’s psychological functioning. This conceptualization of student resistance was developed in the APA’s landmark publication “Guidelines on Multicultural Education, Training, Research, Practice, and Organizational Change for Psychologists” (Guidelines) (APA, 2003).

The strictly individual psychological understanding of student resistance in the Guidelines is problematic in two ways. First, it obscures how student resistance may be perpetuated and reinforced by the dynamics of sociopolitical systems in which it occurs. Second, it limits strategies for addressing it.

An individualistic understanding encourages a conception of student resistance as a student’s personal psychological shortcomings and stresses the need for intervention at the individual level and nothing more. Mio (2005) described students who resist as
“highly critical,” “openly hostile,” and “defensive” and suggested that the way to address student resistance is to change the thinking of individual resistant students. Other strategies emanating from an individualistic perception of student resistance concern the behavior of faculty. The Guidelines suggests that professors who teach about race can moderate student resistance by acting amiably, exhibiting a nonjudgmental demeanor, showing enthusiasm, and disclosing their personal struggles with racial issues (APA, 2003).

When strategies based on an individualistic conceptualization of student resistance fail, blame most often falls on the individual student. Mio (2005) warned that mediating student resistance will not always be possible because some students “may be beyond change” (p. 133). The Guidelines (APA, 2003) suggest that fault might also lie with unfriendly, judgmental, or disengaged instructors. However, if blame is placed entirely on the individual, whether the student, the teacher, or both, the contribution of social and cultural structures will likely be overlooked. A student’s resistance may be as much the product of systemic social and cultural values and beliefs as of her or his individual psychology.

In the next section I develop a definition of student resistance as it is conceptualized in the Guidelines (APA, 2003) using theoretical models based on Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy (REBT) and Cognitive Appraisal Theory (CAT). I use the conceptualization of student resistance from the Guidelines in this study because of the extensive research base and wide applicability of the Guidelines. The Guidelines culminated more than 40 years of attention to multicultural (i.e., racial) issues in counseling, psychology, and other mental health professions. It provides basic
information, relevant research, and a prescriptive framework for addressing issues of racial diversity in training (APA). Although written specifically for psychologists, the applicability of the Guidelines to counselors and other mental health professionals has been well established (Constantine & Sue, 2005).

Theoretical Models of Student Resistance

*Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy*

The Guidelines describes student resistance as an issue of negative emotion provoked by a class focus on race (APA, 2003). I explicate this conceptualization of student resistance in this section using the ABC process model of emotion which Albert Ellis used to explain the theoretical underpinnings of his system of therapy known as Rational Emotional Behavioral Therapy (REBT) (Ellis & Abrams, 2009). In this section I describe the ABC model of REBT theory, and then use the model to explain incidents of student resistance.

The ABC Model of REBT Theory

According to Albert Ellis (2002), REBT theory is derived mainly from philosophers. The foundational premise of REBT theory was stated by Epictetus more than two thousand years ago: “People are not disturbed by the events that happen to them but by their view of these events” (p. 14).

Ellis offered a simple mnemonic to explain REBT theory called the ABC’s of REBT (ABC Model). The first three components of the ABC Model (the A, B, and C components) illustrate how problems develop. The first component is A or the activating object or event. B stands for the thoughts and beliefs we hold about A. C represents the emotional and behavioral consequences of A followed by B. The D and E components are
the treatment steps. When C is dysfunctional (i.e., consists of disturbed emotional responses and self-defeating behavior), the client is encouraged to dispute (D) the irrational beliefs that are assumed to be the source of the dysfunctional emotions and behaviors. Disputing the irrational beliefs effectively leads to E, a new more effective philosophy of living (Robb, 2005).

Ellis (2002) explained that although the ABC Model is simple and uncomplicated, the components of the model are complex. For example, Ellis formulated B as beliefs to emphasize the effects of thinking and beliefs on emotions and behavior but explains that the B component should not be thought of as pure thinking and beliefs. The B component is actually a holistic integration that includes thinking, emotion, and behavior. Similarly, I focus on the beliefs element of B in this study for the purpose of examining beliefs that underlie student resistance. By narrowing my focus, however, I do not mean to discount emotion and behavior as important elements of a person’s thoughts or beliefs.

Coon (1998) offered an example that illustrates the A, B, and C components of the model. He said to imagine that a snarling dog has just lunged at you with its teeth bared. He explained:

An emotional stimulus (the dog) is appraised (judged) as a threat or other cause for emotional response. (You think to yourself, “uh oh, big trouble!”) Your emotional appraisal gives rise to autonomic nervous system arousal (your heart pounds and your body becomes stirred up). . . . At the same time, the appraisal leads to adaptive behavior (running from the dog) (p. 407).

In Coon’s example, the A or activating event is the dog. The B or beliefs the person holds (i.e., beliefs about “charging snarling dogs”) led to an appraisal of the dog as
“big trouble”. The C’s which are the emotional and behavioral consequences of B are the emotional response (i.e., fear) and running from the dog. Coon explained that the behavioral consequence which is often indiscriminate, can either be directed toward managing the distressing object or situation itself (i.e., walking or running away from a situation) or toward controlling the emotional reaction (i.e., deep breathing; employing a defense mechanism such as denying that a situation exists) (Coon, 1998). Although the ABC model is the basis of a system of therapy, its principles and methods have been applied in various educational settings under what has been called Rational Emotive Education (REE) (Nucci, 2002).

The A, B, and C components of the ABC Model can be used to explain the conceptualization of student resistance presented in the Guidelines: a negative emotional reaction provoked by a classroom focus on racially themed course content (APA, 2003). The A or activating event is “a class focus on race”. The beliefs (B) students hold about A lead to C, emotional and behavioral consequences. The ABC explanation corresponds to scholars’ conception of student resistance as behavioral strategies students use to manage uncomfortable emotions that are provoked by their beliefs about racially themed reading assignments and group discussions (Fouad & Arredondo, 2007; Utsey & Gernat, 2002; Jackson, 1999).

The A, B, and C components of the ABC Model can be applied to the examples of student resistance in Scott Mio’s classes described earlier. The As or activating objects and events in Mio’s example are the racially themed class materials and discussion (i.e., the Sue and Sue text, the White privilege article, and the class discussion of affirmative action policies).
The Bs or beliefs the students held led to their negative appraisals of the As. The students described Sue and Sue’s writings as unscientific and inflammatory, the White privilege article as lacking insight, and the discussion of affirmative action as both unfair and sickening. Jackson (1999) also reported that discussions of race in her classes were sometimes viewed by her students as personal assaults or humiliation. Neither Jackson nor Mio, however, discussed the Bs, the thinking and beliefs of their students that caused them to react negatively to the As, the racially themed subject matter. Judging from the comments made by Mio’s students, however, one could speculate that their appraisals were based on some rather rigid beliefs about what constitutes scientific credibility, insightfulness, and equality of opportunity in the United States.

The last part of the ABC Model to be applied to Mio’s accounts of student resistance is the C component (the emotional and behavioral consequences of B). Mio did not describe the emotional consequences of the students’ beliefs about the materials and discussion, but their comments indicated that students were upset. Other counselor educators described fear, anxiety and anger as the negative emotional responses of students in their classes (Fouad & Arredondo, 2007; Jackson, 1999).

The behavioral consequences in Mio’s classes consisted of the students’ intensely negative responses to the course subject matter. These responses included dismissive rejection of the writings of Sue and Sue, denial of the existence of White privilege, and effort to portray White people as the real victims of affirmative action. These defensive behavioral responses can be verbal as in Mio’s examples where students made strongly critical statements or they may be nonverbal conduct such as silence, avoidance, or passivity (Jackson, 1999).
A second cognitive theory that I will introduce to further refine my definition of student resistance as a negative emotional process is Cognitive Appraisal Theory (CAT) which links particular appraisals of antecedent events to each emotion.

**Cognitive Appraisal Theory**

Using the cognitive appraisal emotional process model discussed by Lazarus (1991), student resistance involves a process that begins with a student consciously or subconsciously appraising an event such as a racially themed classroom lesson as personally harmful or harmful to a group the student affiliates with. This harm-related appraisal evokes negative emotion (i.e., anger, guilt, fear, or sadness) which, in turn, motivates action to defend against this unpleasant feeling. During this process, the student diverts her or his attention from the lesson to the perceived harm and what to do about it.

Research in CAT has linked particular appraisals of antecedent events to each emotion. Calling these links core appraisal-emotion themes, Lazarus (1991) claimed that appraising an event as a threat leads to feelings of fear, appraisals of loss lead to sadness, self-blame leads to guilt, and blaming others leads to anger. Lazarus also identified the particular biologically based coping action evoked by each emotion. For example, fear motives avoidance or escape, anger motivates attack, sadness motivates inactivity, and guilt motivates reparation. Lazarus is quick to point out, however, that biologically based coping actions are often undercut by conditioned ones. For example, when a person appraises an event as something she or he is to blame for, the person will more likely act to exonerate herself or himself rather than to make amends.

To summarize, within the purview of cognitive appraisal theory, these students’ behaviors (making harm-related appraisals of racially themed classroom content,
experiencing negative emotions, focusing on the appraised harm, and taking defensive action) are manifestations of the emotional process of student resistance.

The defining principle in all cognitive theories of emotion (i.e., REBT, CAT) is that a person is not disturbed by an event such as a classroom lesson on race, but by her or his view of the event (Lazarus, 1991; Ellis, 2002). This means that two students who are exposed to the same racially themed classroom activity can have different emotional responses depending on how each one appraises the activity. One student, for example, might consider a classroom lesson on race to be beneficial and feel happy about it while another student may appraise the same lesson as harmful and feel angry or threatened as a result.

The last component of student resistance involves disengagement. During the process of student resistance, students disengage from the learning intended with the racially themed classroom materials and activities to focus on the appraised harm and what to do about it. This makes student resistance a problem because it constitutes a barrier between the student and the knowledge and understanding she or he must develop to serve racially diverse clientele competently and ethically (Arredondo et al., 2008; Jackson, 1999; Vasquez & Garcia-Vazquez, 2003). Tatum (1992) explained that “student resistance to oppression-related content areas . . . can ultimately interfere with the cognitive understanding and mastery of the material” (p. 2). In the next section, I use learning theory to explain student resistance as an obstacle to learning.

**Student Resistance: An Obstacle to Learning**

Learning research suggests that negative emotions may obstruct students’ learning in at least two ways: (1) negative emotions occupy attention needed for performing
academic tasks; and (2) negative emotions induce intrinsic avoidance motivation (Pekrun, 1992).

Negative Emotions Occupy Attention

From learning theory we know that in order to learn something we must pay attention to it. We also know that human beings are severely limited in the number of things they can pay attention to at a given time. In fact, people can usually only attend to one thing at a time (Bruning, Schraw, Norby, & Ronning, 2004). Emotions (in particular negative emotions) tend to occupy a person’s attention. This is understandable from an evolutionary perspective. During past periods of human evolution, anxiety or fear might primarily have served to activate a motor response to escape attacks of wild beasts. Recurrent thinking about possible dangers is highly adaptive in such a situation (Pekrun, 1992).

The attentional demand of negative emotions can compromise a student’s performance on a cognitively complex academic task (Pekrun, 1992). A student who is preoccupied with negative emotions cannot devote necessary attention to a task such as processing the complex and challenging subject matter presented in racially themed course content (Tatum, 1992).

Negative Emotions Elicit Intrinsic Avoidance Motivation

Motivation is the general term for processes that start behavior, maintain it, and stop it (Reber & Reber, 2001). Motivation can be internally and externally focused. “Extrinsic motivation” refers to behaviors that are performed to achieve some externally prized consequence (i.e., a good grade, fulfillment of an obligation) whereas “intrinsic motivation” refers to behaviors that are engaged in for their own sake. For instance, a
student who is intrinsically motivated may learn a computer program because she or he is interested in the program or may solve unassigned math problems because she or he experiences this task as fun and satisfying (Bruning et al., 2004). Pekrun (1992) explained, “intrinsic task motivation is thus intimately linked to the experienced cognitive and emotional properties of tasks. In other words, emotions connected to task contents can trigger and sustain intrinsic motivation” (p. 366).

Pekrun (1992) contended that enjoyment associated with an academic task can be assumed to induce positive intrinsic motivation. But he also pointed out that positive intrinsic motivation is not the only type of intrinsic motivation. “The opposite type of motivation is negative intrinsic motivation aimed at not performing an activity (i.e., avoiding it) because it is inherently experienced as negative” (p. 367). Negative emotions connected to academic tasks can trigger and sustain intrinsic avoidance motivation. That is to say, students who associate feelings of humiliation, fear, or anger with racially themed course materials and activities will be motivated to disengage or otherwise avoid this class content.

I have thus far described student resistance as a process of negative emotion provoked by beliefs about racially themed class content and have explained student resistance as a problem that interferes with the learning necessary to develop cultural competence. In the next section I discuss thoughts and beliefs that mediate students’ appraisals of racially themed classroom content.

Thoughts and Beliefs Underlying Student Resistance

The main assumption in all cognitive process models of emotion is that it is not merely a “class focus on race” or “issues, literature, projects, or discussions about race”
that provoke student resistance. Instead, it is largely what a student believes about these subjects that leads to student resistance (Ellis, 2002). The beliefs that mediate students’ appraisals of racially themed course materials and activities are the subject of this section.

According to REBT theory, everyone has a personal philosophy or unique set of beliefs that was learned in the past. An individual’s continual indoctrination of herself or himself with these beliefs determines a person’s present interpretation of life’s events and the emotional reactions and behaviors that flow from them. The beliefs people hold that mediate the appraisals of events in their lives can be categorized as irrational and rational (Ellis, 2002).

**Irrational and Rational Beliefs**

Ellis defined irrationality in two general ways. The first definition of irrationality is based on formal rules of logic (Ellis & Abrams, 2009). For example, a belief is irrational if it contains illogical thinking patterns such as *all-or-none-thinking* (thinking something is all bad or all good, with no in-between) or *selective abstraction* (a general conclusion based upon only one detail of a situation) (Stanley, 2005).

The second definition of irrationality is more practical. Ellis defined thinking and beliefs that lead to disturbed emotional responses and self-defeating behavior as intrinsically irrational. Beliefs that are intrinsically irrational are extremely rigid or inflexible, create barriers to achieving goals, lead to distorted views of reality, or lead to unrealistic views of the self (Ellis & Abrams, 2009).

In contrast to irrational beliefs, rational beliefs are evaluative cognitions that lead to healthy emotion and functional behavior. Rational beliefs are described by four characteristics. First, rational beliefs are flexible and non-extreme in nature. People who
hold flexible beliefs think in the light of possible alternatives to their beliefs. They are continually testing their hypotheses about life events and readily adjusting their ideas when presented with contradictory evidence. Second, rational beliefs are appropriate or in accordance with some acknowledged goal or purpose. Third, rational beliefs are logical, and fourth, they are consistent with empirical reality (Dryden & Neenan, 2004).

Social and Personal Determinants

According to REBT theory, the rationality of a belief cannot be objectively determined because the criteria of rationality are determined by personal and social realities (Ellis & Abrams, 2009). To illustrate how the rationality of a belief is determined by personal realities, Dryden and Neenan (2004) explained that within REBT theory humans are seen as having two basic goals: to stay alive and to be happy. While the methods for pursuing life (air, adequate shelter, proper diet, etc.) are common to all human beings, the pursuit of happiness depends on what is personally meaningful and fulfilling. Therefore, the criteria of rationality are relative to goals and purposes deemed to be important by each individual.

In addition to individual goals and purposes, Ellis and Abrams (2009) explained that the rationality of a belief must be determined in the context of a social setting. For example, the belief, “If I love you greatly, you have to love me,” is irrational because it contradicts the social reality that no matter how much one may love another person, that other person chooses whether or not to reciprocate. According to Ellis and Abrams, “Ellis emphasizes that irrational beliefs underlying virtually all emotional disturbance are . . . . dysfunctional because the people who hold them live in a social system that is set up to make such beliefs impractical” (p. 499). In the next section, I apply Ellis’ criteria of
rationality to determine the rationality of beliefs in the context of a counselor education class addressing the subject of race.

Rationality in a Counselor Education Classrooms

Best practices in counselor training and program accreditation standards (i.e., Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, 2009) require that multiculturalism and social justice be fundamental elements in the curricula (Pieterse et al., 2009). Consequently, counselor educators routinely incorporate racially themed course materials and activities to educate students about diverse racial perspectives and race-based inequities.

Assuming the goals of students actually do correspond to professional training objectives, beliefs student hold that preclude the learning that racially themed coursework is intended to impart are irrational. For example, a student’s rigidly held belief that race is a taboo subject or that equal opportunity exists for everyone is irrational within this context. These beliefs are irrational according to Ellis and Abrahms’ (2009) definition of irrational beliefs: they are inflexible, create barriers to training goals, and present distorted views of reality. They are also irrational because if acted on, they lead to undesirable outcomes. These beliefs, in other words, would most likely result in harm-related appraisals of classroom materials and activities, emotional upset, and disengagement from learning students need in order to facilitate positive therapeutic outcomes with future clients.

REBT theory assumes that students can change the irrational beliefs that drive student resistance to rational beliefs that lend support to counselor education training goals and purposes. From this perspective, rational thinking might have led students in
Mio’s classes (Mio, 2005) to view the racially themed materials and discussion as opportunities to gain valuable perspective and insight into complex and challenging subjects and to appraise the content more thoughtfully and objectively.

Remedial education strategies based on cognitive understandings of student resistance focus on challenging and transforming the irrational beliefs that individual students hold (Ellis, 2002). Murphy (2007) described two ways that educators commonly address the irrational beliefs of resistant students. First, is the “Rational Persuasion Approach” of trying to talk students out of their opinions by providing factual information that challenges their beliefs. To challenge a student’s belief that the United States is a racially just society, for example, educators might present students with statistical evidence of social and economic inequality along racial lines. The second way that educators address students’ irrational beliefs is the “Fatalistic Future Approach”. This approach consists of informing students how their futures will be jeopardized if they cling to their irrational beliefs. For example, explaining to counselor students that passing their licensing exam depends on their knowledge of certain race-related issues may motivate them to reexamine the irrational belief that race is a taboo subject.

Opposition to Irrationality of Beliefs Explanation

Not all scholars agree with notions in counselor education that students’ irrational beliefs motivate student resistance and that challenging these beliefs with factual information and consideration of future goals are the best remedial strategies. Bonilla Silva et al. (2005), for example, criticized suggestions that problematic racial behavior such as student resistance is motivated by irrational thinking and beliefs. This view, according to Bonilla-Silva et al., neglects the possibility that such behavior has a rational
foundation. They suggested that a hierarchy of social relations between racial groups provides an alternate context in which to analyze race-related behavior such as student resistance to racially themed course content.

In the next section I use social dominance theory to explain student resistance as a logical consequence of the hierarchy of social relations between racial groups in the United States. Through a lens of social dominance theory, student resistance can be connected to a conscious or unconscious interest in maintaining status over others. In other words, students who resist course content that threatens to expose and dismantle the system of White racial hegemony and control may not be motivated by irrational beliefs. These students may be acting as agents of their racial status groups who are rationally invested in their position of dominance over others and the social, economic, and political benefits this racial location affords.

**Sociopolitical Context of White Racial Hegemony and Dominance**

The need to understand the influence of social, political, historical, and economic contexts on individual behavior is increasingly stressed in counseling and psychology (APA, 2003). Sidanius and Pratto (1999), for example, stressed that “though psychological predispositions are important, they are always enacted within specific sociopolitical context” (p.302). Envisioning the classroom as a microcosm of larger society, Fouad and Arredondo (2007) encouraged the use of a sociopolitical perspective or “lens” as a way to analyze the impact of larger sociopolitical forces on student classroom behavior. Social dominance theory and critical whiteness studies offer valuable frameworks to describe the larger sociopolitical context of whiteness (White dominance and control) and explore its connection to student resistance.
Social Dominance Theory

Two social psychologists, Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto, introduced social dominance theory in the 1990s to identify mechanisms that are responsible for the production and reproduction of group-based social inequality. The theory stems from the observation that human societies over history have tended to be structured as group-based social hierarchies with one group at the top of the social system and one or a number of other groups in relatively subordinate positions. In such hierarchical arrangements, dominant groups secure a disproportionate share of power, social status and other material and symbolic things of positive social value. At the same time, members of subordinate groups receive a disproportionate share of society’s miseries (i.e., relative powerlessness, low status, poor healthcare, poverty). Competition between groups for social rewards is a logical outcome of hierarchical social arrangements. (Sidanius & Pratto, 2012).

The idea of competition among groups for social rewards was conceptualized by German Sociologist Max Weber (1999). Opposing Karl Marx’s focus on class relations, Weber saw society as composed of various social groups competing for status. Schwalbe (2008) explained the concept of status.

Status refers to prestige, *esteem in the eyes of others*, or, as Max Weber called it, “social honor.” Generally speaking, a person with higher status receives more deference and respect than a person with lower status. How much status a person has depends on what is valued in a culture. In the contemporary United States status is determined by occupations, education (and other forms of achievement), fame and visibility, and wealth and power. It is also determined by the values
attached to racial and gender categories, sexual identities, and physical capability.

(p. 25)

According to social dominance theory, there are three qualitatively distinct systems of group hierarchy. The first is an age system in which adults secure a disproportionate share of power and status compared to children and younger adults. The second is a gender or patriarchal system in which men have more power, status, and other things of positive social value compared to women. The third is an arbitrary-set system in which arbitrarily defined, socially constructed group categories are hierarchically arranged and determine a group’s location in the hierarchical system. Socially constructed group distinctions include those based on race, clan, religion, caste, nationality, as well as just about any other arbitrary difference one can think of (Sidanius & Pratto, 2012).

Johnson (2006) explained the process of creating race from irrelevant differences for the purpose of forming a hierarchy of social relations between racial groups that ensured economic and social advantage to those racialized as White.

Differences that would otherwise have little if any inherent connection to social inequality are nonetheless seized on and turned into a basis for privilege and oppression. Race is perhaps the most obvious example of this. Biologists have long agreed that what are identified as racial differences—skin color being the most prominent—do not define actual biological groups but instead are socially defined categories. More important is that for most of human history, such “differences” have been regarded as socially irrelevant. When white Europeans began to exploit people of color for territorial conquest and economic gain, however, they developed the idea of race as a way to justify their behavior on the
grounds of supposed racial superiority. In other words, by itself, something like skin color has no importance at all in social life but was turned into something significant in order to create, justify and enforce privilege. (p. x)

Arbitrarily set hierarchies differ from age and gender systems in several ways. For one, arbitrary-set systems are characterized by fluidly defined group distinctions depending on the culturally situational context. Johnson (2006) described the inconsistencies and changes in the arbitrary-set distinction of race in the White-dominated hierarchy of racial groups in the United States.

When the Chinese were imported as cheap laborers during the 19th century, the California Supreme Court declared them not white. Mexicans, however, many of whom owned large amounts of land in California and did business with whites, were considered white. Today, as Paul Kivel points out, Mexicans are no longer considered white and the Chinese are “conditionally white at times”. (p. 20-21)

Another factor that distinguishes arbitrarily set hierarchies from age and gender hierarchies is that age and gender hierarchies tend to be universal across human societies but arbitrary-set hierarchies only emerge in societies that produce an economic surplus. Hunter-gatherer societies tend not to have arbitrary-set systems because they lack the technology to produce sustained economic surplus. According to Sidanius et al. (2001):

Within hunter-gather societies, every able-bodied male usually devotes most of his waking time to procuring food and nourishment and has precious little time left to specialize in the arts of war or intellectual sophistry. Because every adult male essentially possesses the same military tools and skills as every other adult male, there is also a rough military equilibrium among males. However, as soon
as social systems develop the technologies that enable them to produce economic surplus, role specialization and arbitrary social hierarchies begin to develop and are ultimately reinforced by legitimizing ideology and military force. (pp. 86-87)

Finally, compared to age and gender hierarchies, arbitrary-set hierarchies are maintained with more terror, violence, and brutality than age and gender hierarchies. Pratto et al. (2006) reported that only in arbitrary-set systems is total annihilation found. “That is, there are cases in which one clan or race or ethnic group has exterminated another (p. 274)”.

According to Sidanius and Pratto (1999), the use of systematic terror directed against subordinates is found in all societies with economic surplus including those societies with democratic and egalitarian pretension. “However, in general, the level of brutality and discrimination against subordinates within so-called democratic societies will tend to be somewhat constrained, indirect, or covert due to the cultural ideals espousing equality before the law” (p. 43).

Violence and terror against subordinate groups in “democratic” societies can manifest not only as brutal physical acts but as normal components of intergroup discourse that are designed to maintain group-based inequality and dominance systems. Vera et al. (1995) described “the imposition of systems of meaning on subordinated groups in an attempt to make the dominant group’s actions appear legitimate” (p. 297) as symbolic violence. In social dominance theory, symbolic violence in the form of discourse that serves the political purpose of maintaining group-based inequality (i.e., keeping low-status groups in their place) is discussed in terms of “legitimizing myths” (Sidanius & Pratto, 2012).
Central to social dominance theory is the proposition that behaviors of individuals are shaped by legitimizing myths or consensually held social ideologies that are used to justify the establishment and maintenance of group-based social inequality or equality. When the legitimizing myth rationalizes group-based oppression and inequality, it is called a hierarchy-enhancing legitimizing myth (Pratto et al., 2006).

In order to promote their own economic and social advantage, early American colonists promoted legitimizing myths that rationalized practices such as enslaving Africans and dispossessing Native Americans of their land. Roediger (2007) provided an example of these rationalizations:

The images developed by colonists to rationalize dispossession of Native Americans from the land had a strong connection to work and to discipline. Settler ideology held that improvident, sexually abandoned ‘lazy Indians’ were failing to ‘husband’ or ‘subdue’ the resources God had provided and thus should forfeit those resources. Work and whiteness joined in the argument for dispossession.

(p. 21)

Assertions of White superiority, inferiority of people of color, and traditional American values continue as hierarchy-enhancing legitimizing myths that rationalize and serve to maintain the present-day racial order of White dominance and control in the United States. Sue (2004a) expounded on these myths in his explanation of ethnocentric monoculturalism, a pervasive system of cultural racism in the United States. Like other forms of oppression, ethnocentric monoculturalism can be regarded as a manifestation of a more “basic human predisposition toward the formation of group-based social hierarchy” (Sidanius et al., 1999, p. 91).
I present the description of ethnocentric monoculturalism provided by Sue (2004a) in the next section with some hesitation because it does not exactly fit within a social dominance theoretical perspective. Rather than explain the behavior of dominant individuals in terms of competition among groups for status, Sue explains their behavior in terms of patterns of behavior they are socialized into and remain unaware of due to the fact that the behaviors are normalized in society. Although this perspective may have some credibility, it can be criticized for promoting an ideology of White innocence that protects White people from being held accountable for their complicity with a system of racial injustice that benefits them (Leonardo, 2009).

Having acknowledged the problem of Sue’s (2004a) explanation for the dominant group’s behavior, Sue’s description of ethnocentric monoculturalism nevertheless provides a helpful addition to the analytical lens for this study.

**Ethnocentric Monoculturalism: Two Defining Attributes**

According to Sue (2004a), individuals in the United States are born into a system of cultural racism called ethnocentric monoculturalism which acts as a powerful influence on the perspectives and beliefs from which they see and interpret the world. Two of the defining attributes of ethnocentric monoculturalism are: (1) a strong belief in the superiority of White American culture; and (2) a belief in the inferiority of other cultures.

Belief in White Superiority

Katz (1985) defined White culture as “the synthesis of ideas, values, and beliefs coalesced from descendants of White European ethnic groups in the United States” (p. 617). Hallmarks of White culture include individualism, competition, action orientation, the Protestant work ethic, capitalism, certain physical features (blond hair, blue eyes, and
fair skin) and monotheism (Christianity). Valuing the scientific method, progress and future orientation, communication in Standard English with controlled emotion, written tradition, and historical accounts elevating European immigrants’ experience in the United States are also components of White culture (Katz).

Sue (2004a) contended that people who possess or adhere to characteristics of White culture are privileged in society and therefore have an easier path to the rewards society has to offer. “This validation in society makes them feel special, chosen, and entitled” (p. 765), and these feelings of superiority often lead to the belief that their way of seeing and doing things is not just one of many possible ways, it is the right way. This thinking often blocks their ability and/or willingness to understand and empathize with other people’s differing perspectives or life experiences. In his discussion of feelings based on positional arrangement of racial groups, Blumer (1958) explained that members of the dominant group also feel a sense of proprietary claim in many important areas of life. Among other things, they feel entitled to:

- ownership of property such as choice lands and sites; the right to certain jobs, occupations or professions; . . . the right to exclusive membership in given institutions such as schools, churches and recreational institutions; [and] the claim to certain positions of social prestige. (p.4)

Belief in Nonwhite Inferiority

A second attribute of ethnocentric monoculturalism is the belief in the inferiority of nonwhite cultures which extends to their customs, values, traditions, and language. Individuals who possess or adhere to characteristics different from the White culture are
judged as less intelligent, less qualified, and even pathological. Their lifestyles, behaviors, customs, and practices are also considered inferior (Sue & Sue, 2003).

Other societies or groups may be perceived as less developed, uncivilized, primitive or even pathological. The group’s lifestyles or ways of doing things are considered inferior. Physical characteristics such as dark complexion, black hair, and brown eyes; cultural characteristics such as belief in non-Christian religions (Islam, Confucianism, polytheism, etc.), collectivism, present time orientation, and the importance of shared wealth; and linguistic characteristics such as bilingualism, non-standard English, speaking with an accent, use of nonverbal and contextual communication, and reliance on the oral tradition are usually seen as less desirable by society. (p. 70)

Belief in Traditional American Values

Sue (2004a) explained that in the process of White cultural conditioning “individuals are taught not only the prejudices and biases of society but also the many myths that serve to guide the interpretation of events” (p. 766). Three of these are: (1) the myth of meritocracy, (2) the myth of equal opportunity, and (3) the myth of fair treatment.

The myth of meritocracy suggests that the people (i.e., Whites) who rise and prosper in United States society are the people who deserve it. They are the ones who are intelligent and hard-working. Those who fail are less capable, intelligent and motivated. By concealing the role White privilege plays in the material, social, and psychological benefits White people in society enjoy, the myth of meritocracy works as a racial hierarchy-enhancing legitimizing myth by positioning Whites as superior (i.e., hardworking, intelligent) and nonwhites as inferior.
The myth of equal opportunity assumes that we all face the same obstacles in life; the playing field is level, and everyone has equal opportunity. By failing to acknowledge the racist conditions that thwart the life chances of people of color in this country, the rhetoric of equal opportunity works to perpetuate a hierarchy of social relations between racial groups in this country in at least two ways. First, it relieves us of the responsibility to remedy racism in society; after all, if racism does not exist or doesn’t amount to much, there is no reason to address it. Tatum (1997) admonished, “it is important to understand that the system of advantage is perpetuated when we do not acknowledge its existence” (p. 9). Second, the myth of equal opportunity suggests that victims of systemic racism have only themselves to blame.

The myth of fair treatment is equal treatment equates differential treatment to discriminatory or preferential practices. One important way that this myth perpetuates White dominance and control is by suggesting that policies and programs designed to counter White privilege and widespread discrimination against racial minority groups (i.e., affirmative action) are inappropriate because they are unfair to White people. Sue (2004a) explained that all these myths combine to obscure inequities and discrepancies in society that oppress racial minorities.

When considered from the perspective of social dominance theory, assertions of White superiority, inferiority of people of color, and traditional American myths that are used to justify White racial dominance serve as ideological mechanisms to maintain the interests of the dominant White group. The field of critical whiteness studies has described other behavioral practices that serve to maintain the racial status quo. In the
following section I present an overview of whiteness studies and describe some of these behaviors.

Introduction to Whiteness Studies

In this section I introduce whiteness studies and describe the conceptual tools it provides for interpreting student resistance within the sociopolitical context of White hegemony and dominance.

History, Scope, and Intent of Whiteness Studies

Pamela Perry (2007) described whiteness studies as an emergent, interdisciplinary field of inquiry that focuses on the nature and function of the White group. Critical versions of whiteness studies emerged with the mission of “particularizing, making visible, and assessing ‘whiteness’ ” (p. 243). Whiteness is defined as “the constellation of identities, processes, and practices that systematically privilege white people and reproduce white domination” (p. 243). According to MacMullan (2009), the conceptual basis of whiteness is White supremacy. White supremacy is a socially fabricated “idea that there exists a certain group of people who are by virtue of their heredity, entitled to greater rights and privileges than other groups” (p.168).

The whiteness studies project of interrogating whiteness assumes important liberatory and anti-racist outcomes. According to MacMullan (2005), “Over the last half century, notable scholars of race have argued that White people would continue to deny or ignore systemic racism until they studied whiteness” (p. 268). McIntosh (1988) claimed that describing whiteness (i.e., White privilege) makes one newly accountable for actions against it. A key outcome of critical studies of whiteness according to Kincheloe
& Steinberg (1998), is providing “a space for Whites to rethink their identity around a new, progressive, assertive, counter-hegemonic, antiracist notion of whiteness” (p. 12).

Not all scholars agree on how to describe whiteness studies. Sara Ahmed (2004), for example, stated that she would not describe the mission of whiteness studies as “making whiteness visible” because, as a person of color, she has never known whiteness to be invisible. Similarly, Bush (2006) stated, “For those people subordinated and oppressed by white dominant society, knowledge of the ‘white world’ has been a matter of survival” (p. 366). Other scholars question the notion that whiteness is invisible to White people. Leonardo (2009), for example, contended that “whites do know a lot about race in both its everyday sense as a lived experience and its structural sense as a system of privilege” (p. 107). Coming from the perspective that whiteness is visible, Ahmed asserted that the whiteness studies project should be described as “making what can already be seen, visible in a different way” (para. 2).

Some critics question the purported anti-racist political agenda of whiteness studies. Ahmed (2004), for example, cautioned against rushing too quickly to the assumption “that whiteness studies can provide the conditions of anti-racism” (abstract). Others have expressed concern that studies centered on the White experience and White point of view might actually be a means to sustain whiteness (MacMullan, 2009). Some believe that the most effective anti-racist campaign involves empowering those who are victimized by racism. For example, Dei (2007) told about a student of color who was surprised by the White-centered focus in a class he was teaching called Principles of Anti-racism. The student wondered “whether an anti-racist practice should today not be preoccupied foremost with the ways to empower racialized and minoritized bodies
(spiritually, politically, and intellectually) to come to terms with our social oppression and, ultimately, to suggest ways to resist dominance” (p. viii).

The emphasis on the White group in whiteness studies contrasts earlier work on race relations that focused mainly on racial minority groups. Merger (2009) noted that in the United States “black-white relations for many decades were portrayed as ‘the black problem in America,’ and most studies dealt with the social and psychological problems faced by blacks because of their minority status” (p. 33). New racial sensitivities that emerged during the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, led to criticisms of race-relations studies that focused on only one of the parties involved (Merger). In the 1960s, mainstream race scholars began to acknowledge that “intergroup relations between blacks and whites were just as much a white problem because it was the dominant white group that controlled the character and course of those relations more than did blacks themselves” (p. 33).

Exposure of the White group’s complicity in problematic racial relations sparked academic interest in the White group that resulted in a proliferation of books and articles. Drawing on over a century of works by scholars of color that heretofore had been largely ignored in mainstream academia, this newly created body of scholarship was foundational in the establishment of whiteness studies (Perry, 2007).

I was introduced to whiteness studies in a graduate level “whiteness seminar” taught by a professor who is an established whiteness scholar. Through discussions of interdisciplinary materials, the class explored cultural assumptions of the White group and the nature and mechanisms of whiteness. We also considered the implications of what we learned for the creation of just societies.
In the following sections, I describe various topics from whiteness studies that help inform this dissertation study. First, I discuss how race and a superior White identity were socially constructed as a basis for privileging White people at the expense of people of color. I next present some historical policies and processes that reinforced White supremacy and helped create the present system of White privilege and advantage which is the legacy we have all inherited. After explaining the nature and some of the consequences of the current system of White privilege, I describe how White and White-minded individuals participate in the system in ways that reinforce White supremacy and bolster the status quo of racial inequality. Although the purview of whiteness studies is global, my discussion relates mostly to issues and groups in the United States.

The Social Construction of Race and White Supremacy

One of the first topics addressed in the whiteness seminar was the term “White”. Coming into the class, many of us thought of White as synonymous with Caucasian or as a term to describe someone who originated in Western Europe with light skin and European appearance. The class moved far beyond these definitions to understand White as a ‘social construct’. Kendall (2006) explained social construct as “academic language for an idea or concept created to serve a social purpose” (p. 43). In the case of White racial identity, “the concept is that some people have greater inherent worth than others—white people being superior to people of color” (p. 43). As the class eventually discovered, the idea of a superior White race or White supremacy was constructed by a White power structure to justify and ensure economic and social advantage to those racialized as White.
The social construction of a superior White race or White supremacy is based on the more basic social construct of race: the process of creating race from irrelevant differences for the purpose of justifying and enforcing White privilege and disadvantage for people of color. Johnson (2006) described this process. Johnson, like other whiteness scholars, is critical of diversity programs that are based on the assumption that racial difference itself is a problem and tolerating, appreciating, or celebrating difference is the solution. The failure to acknowledge that White privilege in the United States and elsewhere has been organized around racial difference is the reason, according to Johnson, that diversity programs are basically ineffective. He said, “Clearly, racial diversity isn’t just about the ‘variety’ that the word suggests. Diversity could just be about that, but only in some other world” (p. 17).

James Baldwin (1984) pointed out the insignificance of racial categories outside systems of White privilege when he wrote, “No one was white before he/she came to America” (p. 178). He explained that Polish people in Warsaw are simply members of the Polish community and there is no reason for them to think of themselves as White. However, once a Pole comes to live in Chicago and discovers that being White is significant and carries privilege, she or he eagerly adopts a White identity and is anxious for others to acknowledge it.

Creation of categories of race and a superior White group image were important in establishing a system of advantage and oppression that served the economic and social interests of early American colonists. According to Roediger (2007), the term White was initially used to distinguish the European explorers, traders, and settlers that came to the Americas, first from the indigenous people they encountered and later from African
slaves. Likely drawing from religious symbolism of light versus dark (i.e., saintliness versus heathenism), White was used to distinguish ‘civilized’ and ‘hard-working’ Europeans from ‘savage’ and ‘lazy’ Indians; then it asserted the moral superiority of ‘Whites’ over heathen ‘black’ Africans (Perry, 2007, p.244). In order to promote their own economic and social advantage, Colonists developed these images of themselves and “the others” to rationalize practices such as enslaving Africans and dispossessing Native Americans of their lands (Roediger).

Reinforcement of White Supremacy

White supremacy, the social construct underlying systemic advantage for those racialized as White and disadvantage for those racialized as nonwhite, has, according to Perry (2007), been continually reinforced in the United States through laws, customs and culture. Kendall (2006) pointed to immigration policies and processes in United States history as evidence of the cultural support that ensured the maintenance of White supremacy.

The great majority of the thirteen million new immigrants—people from eastern central, and southern Europe—came into the country through Ellis Island between 1901 and 1915, a time when, essentially, only White people could immigrate. Although they came in as Italians, Greeks, Latvians, and so on, two things happened: first, over time they assimilated and “became” White; and second they learned and began to reinforce the bigotry that was already firmly ensconced in America. (p. 44)

Lack of educational opportunities for World War II veterans of color as compared to their White counterparts is another example of the supporting culture that ensured
White supremacy. Although the GI Bill which granted generous college financial aid to returning World War II veterans was race-neutral in legal terms, cultural barriers prevented nonwhite service members from benefiting from this provision of the bill to the extent that White veterans did. According to Herbold (1994/1995), “segregationist principles of almost every institution of higher learning effectively disbarred a huge proportion of black veterans from earning a college degree” (107). Herbold also pointed to two additional barriers to higher education that black World War II veterans had to face. First, “the poverty of most black families in the 1940s and 1950s made it problematic for blacks to seek education when labor and income were needed at home” (p. 105). Second, “Public education for blacks was in so deplorable a state that very few blacks had the academic qualifications for admission to competitive colleges” (p. 105). Herbold reported that budgets for White children’s education were four times that for Black children in most areas.

Other examples of cultural support for White supremacy were the practices by banks, real estate developers, and communities that allowed only White people to accrue wealth though home equities and small business endeavors. Kendall (2006) provided examples of these practices:

- Banks redlined neighborhoods, not giving loans to people [of color] buying in those areas; neighborhood covenants were drawn up saying that houses couldn’t be sold to Black people; realtors wouldn’t show houses in particular neighborhoods to Black or Latino people. (p. 44)

Shelby Steele (2006), an American author, described the effects of these types of discriminatory real estate and banking practices on his family. He told the story of his
ambitious Black father who, despite his hard work, was unable to realize his dream of
building up a small business. He also explained how his father had worked relentlessly to
restore three ramshackle homes into rentable property. When his parents died, the family
signed the houses his father had labored so hard to develop over to their nonpaying
renters for nothing in order to be rid of the liability. Steele lamented,

[My father] could not buy property where his sweat might become real equity, or
do business where real profits were possible and where banks didn’t run the other
way. His society quite literally labored to defeat his ambition even as it left him
entirely responsible for his life and family. (p. 49)

The benefits afforded to Whites throughout the history of the United States have
accumulated across generations to the present day. As was true in the past, people
maintain the current social system of White privilege through actions, decisions and
policies that reinforce White dominance and supremacy (Leonardo, 2009). Therefore, to
understand the current system of White privilege and advantage in the United States, we
must look at both the system itself and how individuals participate in the system to make
it happen (Johnson, 2006). I will begin with a description of the current system of White
dominance and privilege.

*The Current System of White Privilege*

The current system of White privilege and advantage in the United States is a
legacy that all Americans have inherited and participate in. It bestows unearned privilege
on those who are racialized as White and at the same time, subjects those racialized as
nonwhite to disadvantage and oppression. (Johnson, 2006; Sue, 2004a).
Johnson (2011) described four characteristics of any system of White privilege. First, it is White dominated. This means that White people are overwhelmingly in positions of power in organizations. Second, it is organized around an obsession with control. This means that people of color are coerced from the moment of birth in order to keep them in an inferior position and White people control other White people to assure the solidarity and loyalty necessary to maintain the White group’s superior position. The third characteristic of a system of White privilege is that it is White identified. In the simplest sense, White identification means that White people are the standard for all of humanity. The final characteristic is White centeredness. White people are always at the center of attention in a system of White privilege. In the next section, I explain “ethnocentric monoculturalism” as a model of the White-dominated, White controlled, White-identified, and White centered system of race privilege in the United States.

*Ethnocentric Monoculturalism: Three Additional Attributes*

Taylor (2006) presented the following definition of ethnocentric monoculturalism: Ethnocentric (valuing of one’s ethnic/cultural group over others) monoculturalism (belief in one “right”culture) is an unconscious or conscious overvaluation of one’s own cultural beliefs and practices, and simultaneous invalidation of other cultural worldviews. In application, ethnocentric monoculturalism posits the individual’s culture as normal and valid. Other cultures are viewed as abnormal, inferior, or pathological, with corresponding differential treatment. (p. 203).

In the United States, ethnocentric monoculturalism is a pervasive system of cultural racism which defines a social reality of privilege for Whites and disadvilege for people of color. Attributes of the system include: (1) a belief in the superiority of White
culture; (2) a belief in the inferiority nonwhite cultures; (3) power of the dominant
(White) group over other racial groups; (4) manifestation of White cultural values and
beliefs in institutions; and (5) Operation as an Invisible Veil (Sue, 2004a). Having
described the first two attributes earlier in this chapter, I will discuss the others here.

Power of the Dominant (White) Group

Ethnocentric monoculturalism is based on the concept of dominant group power. The White group holds the majority of social and political power in the United States and thus holds the ability to create dominant cultural values that are imposed on less powerful groups. Thus, White American cultural standards and beliefs are considered normal and other cultures are considered deviant. (Sue & Sue, 2003). Sue (2004a) explained that because White culture represents normality, White people think of their lives as morally neutral, average, and ideal.

White domination in the United States, according to Johnson (2006), means that members of the White group overwhelmingly occupy positions of power. The farther up you go in the power structure of almost every mainstream organization, the more Whites and fewer people of color you will find. Furthermore, people in White dominated societies tend to identify power with Whites (especially males) in “ways that make it seem normal and natural for them to have it” (p. 91). Since power in the hands of people of color is not culturally legitimate, they have difficulty exercising it in any situation. It is not unusual for professors of color, for example, to have colleagues and students (especially White students) challenge their authority, teaching competency, scholarly expertise, and professional commitment (Johnson).
Manifestation in Social Institutions

The values and beliefs of the dominant group are manifested in the institutions of the society. Institutional structures, programs, policies and practices are based on White cultural values and beliefs and represent potential sources of cultural oppression for racial minorities. For example, performance appraisal systems (promotion and tenure in academia) based on White cultural values of aggression and competition may create cultural conflicts for individuals from collectivist groups that stress cooperation instead of individual achievement (Sue, 2004a).

Operation as an Invisible Veil

Finally, ethnocentric monoculturalism operates as an invisible veil outside the level of conscious awareness and thereby keeps individuals from recognizing the ethnocentric basis of their beliefs, values, and assumptions (Sue, 2004a). According to Katz (1985):

Because White culture is the dominant cultural norm in the United States, it acts as an invisible veil that limits many people from seeing it as a cultural system. . . . White culture is . . . . so interwoven in the fabric of everyday living that Whites cannot step outside and see their beliefs, values, and behaviors as creating a distinct cultural group (pp. 616-617).

The deception of ethnocentric monoculturalism, according to Sue (2004a), also encourages a universal stance: the viewpoint that regardless of race, the nature of reality and truth is the same for everyone. Hitchcock (2002) described a universal stance as one in which a person purports to speak for all of humanity and interprets the behavior of other cultural group members as if they are motivated by the same forces that motivate
members of her or his own group. Hitchcock contended, “In the United States, our ‘universal’ point of view that claims to speak for everyone is often a white American point of view that speaks from the standpoint of white culture” (p. 32).

According to Sue (2004a),

the invisible veil of . . . [ethnocentric monoculturalism] inundates the definition of such expressions as ‘human being,’ being ‘just a person,’ and being an American.’ The speaker is usually saying something like this: ‘Differences are divisive, so let’s avoid acknowledging them and seek out our commonalities. I’m uncomfortable with racial differences, so let’s pretend they don’t exist’ (p. 764).

Sylvia Lazos Vargas (1998) described some consequences for those people racialized as White living in a system of White privilege:

White privilege means having entry to structures and institutions that mete out important economic opportunities; having access to neighborhoods, jobs, credit, and tax benefits that by and large are off limits or available in limited fashion to minorities; it means being presumed competent, intelligent, and hardworking; it means not being discriminated against daily by anyone ranging from a restaurant attendant to a car salesperson. (p. 1527)

Statistical studies reveal other consequences of the system of White privilege in the United States. Johnson (2006) reported on statistical evidence suggesting that “Whites are less likely than blacks to be arrested; once arrested, they are less likely to be convicted and, once convicted, less likely to go to prison, regardless of the crime or circumstances” (p. 25). He also found that, when compared to their White counterparts, Black athletes are held to higher standards, Black loan applicants are less likely to receive approval, all
people of color are less likely to control conversations and have their ideas taken seriously, and all people of color are underrepresented in government and the ruling circles of corporations, universities, and other organizations. Neville, Worthington, and Spanierman (2001) also reported on statistical studies comparing Whites and people of color. They found that Whites are more likely to graduate from college, to have health insurance, and to have access to health care. In addition, Whites live in housing conditions that are less crowded and crime ridden, have less litter and deterioration, and have fewer problems with public schools. Finally, Johnson (2011) quoted statistics that showed Whites as a group have employment advantage, income advantage and higher net wealth than groups of color.

Participation in the System of White Privilege

All of social life happens only as people participate in social systems. Therefore, to understand how the world works we have to understand not only the systems but also how we as individuals participate in them (Johnson, 2006)

There is, according to Johnson (2006), a dynamic relation that exists between people and social systems that consists of two parts. First, as people participate in the system, they are shaped as individuals in two ways. One way is through the process of socialization, by which people acquire a personal identity and learn how that identity positions them in various social hierarchies based on inequalities of power. For instance, when people learn that they have a White racial identity and are socialized into a White dominated society like the United States, they discover that they are on top of the racial hierarchy. As a consequence, they are encouraged to feel a sense of superiority and entitlement in relation to people of color and behave accordingly. A White person, for
instance, may feel entitled to judge a person of color’s account of an event as inaccurate or feel justified in ignoring or interrupting a person of color when she or he is speaking.

Sue (2004a) explained that socialization into the system of White privilege and advantage in the United States means that “individuals are taught not only the prejudices and biases of society but also the many myths that serve to guide the interpretation of events” (p. 766). Three common myths are: (1) the myth of meritocracy; (2) the myth of equal opportunity; and (3) the myth of fair treatment.

The second way that people are shaped as individuals by participation in social systems is through “paths of least resistance”. The path of least resistance in any social situation is the alternative that has the least social resistance attached to it. It is the easiest thing to do; the thing that won’t get other people upset (Johnson, 2011). Kinser (2005) describes paths of least resistance as “paths of behavior that we choose (such as going along with a racist ‘joke’) because we will confront less resistance from others than we would for choosing some other path (such as asking the ‘joke’ teller to stop)” (p. 256). Johnson (2006) explained that social systems “are organized in ways that encourage people to follow paths of least resistance” (p.84).

The second part of Johnson’s (2006) dynamic relationship between people and social systems is “individuals are the ones who make social systems happen” (p.82). Johnson used the game of Monopoly as an analogy to clarify how people make social systems happen. He notes, “If no one plays Monopoly, it’s just a box full of stuff with writing inside the cover” (p. 83). When people open up the game, identify themselves as players, and follow the paths of least resistance (i.e., follow the rules of the game that are printed on the inside cover), Monopoly starts to happen.
The system of White privilege, like a game of Monopoly, only happens when we participate in it through paths of least resistance. We are born into the system of White privilege and learn the rules of the “game” (i.e., the paths of least resistance) through socialization. The paths of least resistance encouraged by the system of White privilege are paths or patterns of behavior (i.e., thinking, feeling, and acting) that reinforce White dominance and supremacy. Examples of these behaviors are thinking that blue eyes are more attractive than brown eyes, feeling angry when a person of color says that something is racist, and choosing a White faculty candidate over a candidate of color because she or he will “fit in” better and not have a racial agenda to promote.

Johnson (2006) explained that these paths of least resistance and decisions to follow them create and perpetuate the system of White privilege. To change these patterns, people must change how they participate in the system of White privilege and thereby “eventually [change] the system itself and its paths of least resistance” (p. 85).

Johnson (2006) gave an example of how four African American students changed their participation in the system of White privilege and made it happen differently. During the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s these students stepped off the path of least resistance and sat down at a White-only lunch counter at a Woolworth’s store in Greensborough, North Carolina. This action set similar actions in motion in cities across the South that led to the desegregation of several public and private facilities and eventually put an end to segregation laws.

The Civil Rights Movement, with people of color at the forefront, effectively changed United States society by virtually eliminating the legal support for White privilege and oppression of people of color (Johnson, 2006). In spite of these legal
victories, statistical data show that the United States continues to be a White supremacist society in both material and ideological terms (Jensen, 2005; Johnson, 2006).

Racial inequality in the United States and elsewhere persists because White people, the ones with disproportionate wealth and power, have not taken the responsibility for changing it (Jensen, 2005). Most White and White-minded people stay on paths of thinking, feeling and actions that reinforce White dominance and supremacy and sustain the patterns of advantage and oppression rooted in the system of White privilege (Johnson, 2006). When White and White-minded people are confronted with the reality of the system of racial injustice that they participate in and make happen, they resort to complex sets of tactics to protect their privilege and mask any sense of complicity or responsibility for the system (Dei, 2007; Kivel, 1996). Whiteness scholars have identified many of these tactics.

Strategies to Retain Privilege and Avoid Responsibility

Whiteness scholars have described many of the tactics that beneficiaries of the system of White privilege use individually and collectively in various social venues to avoid responsibility for making the system happen and thereby retain their advantage. Johnson (2006), for example, described denial as the simplest way for people who benefit to “get off the hook” for systems of privilege. The rationale for denial is that you can’t be responsible for or benefit from a system that doesn’t exist. Johnson explained that people simply deny that White privilege and racism exist by saying things like White people are the ones victimized by racism these days or the American Dream is alive and well and available to everyone.
Kivel (1996) explained another form of denial as redefining White privilege and racism or “calling them something else”.

If we don’t look at the overall context and take differentials of power into account, we can be susceptible to the tactic of redefinition. . . . Today we redefine racism as a mutual problem by saying, “This country is just a big melting pot.” “Anybody can be prejudiced.” Or, “People of color attack white people too.”

Another way to deny oppression and privilege is to claim they happened in the past but are not issues today. According to Kivel (1996), “Today we claim racism is all over by saying, ‘Slavery was over a long time ago.’ ‘The days of land grabbing are long gone.’ [Or.] ‘That was before the Civil Rights Era’ ” (p. 45). If faced with indisputable evidence of current day violence toward people of color, people may diffuse responsibility by characterizing it as isolated incidents perpetuated by a few bad eggs. Kivel claimed that people are using this tactic when they argue, “‘Housing and job discrimination are the result of a few bigoted people.’ ‘The Far Right is behind the scapegoating of immigrants.’ ‘It’s only neo-Nazis and Skinheads who do that sort of thing’ ” (p. 45).

At other times when White privilege and racism are too obvious to deny, people may acknowledge them but minimize their effects. People employing the tactic of minimization may claim that currently racism is not all that bad or it is not bad enough to interfere with the life chances of people of color (Johnson, 2006).

Another elusive strategy is blaming the victims. Kivel (1996) explained, “Today we blame people of color for racism by saying, ‘Look at the way they act.’ ‘If they weren’t so angry...’ Or, ‘They are immoral, lazy, dumb or unambitious’ ”(p.43).
People also diffuse responsibility for White privilege and racism by focusing on intentions instead of outcome. Johnson (2006) gave a rationale for this tactic:

Because U.S. culture encourages us to use an individual-guilt model to explain just about everything that goes wrong, it’s easy to confuse intentions with consequences. In other words, if something bad happens, someone’s conscious bad intentions must be behind it. A corollary is that if your intentions are good, they cannot result in something bad. . . . [People] seem to think that if they don’t mean it, then it didn’t happen, as if their conscious intent is the only thing that connects them to the consequences of what they do or don’t do. (p. 114)

According to Kivel (1996), “We continue to claim racism is unintentional by saying, ‘Discrimination may happen, but most people are well intentioned.’ ‘She probably didn’t mean it like that.’ Or, ‘It was only a joke’ ” (p. 44).

Kivel (1996) stressed the importance of exposing the above tactics as attempts to displace responsibility away from those (i.e., White people) who are invested in the current system of White privilege and who use their positions of power to reinforce it. Awareness of the true nature of the tactics, as Kivel insinuated, is important to the process of undermining their effects.

Those with power have many resources for having their view of reality prevail, and they have a lot at stake in maintaining the status quo. They will employ the above tactics to defend their interests. We must be aware of these tactics and able to counter them. When unchallenged, they can be used to justify further inequality and violence. (p. 46)
In this study, I explore student resistance as a sociopolitical phenomenon occurring within counselor education classrooms by comparing student resistance to behavior described by Kivel (1996) and other Whiteness scholars as tactics that reinforce White hegemony and dominance in society. In the next chapter I described the study methodology used to make this comparison.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I reviewed literature that contributes to a rationale for investigating student resistance as a sociopolitical phenomenon by connecting it to behavior that reinforces White racial hegemony and domination in society. I began by establishing student resistance as an obstacle to the learning necessary for counselors to develop cultural competence. I then presented a conceptualization of student resistance from the contemporary counselor literature and explicated it with the ABCs of REBT and a cognitive appraisal theory emotional process model. Arguing that understandings of student resistance are unduly limited by an individualist psychological approach, I established the importance of considering the impact of sociopolitical forces on the phenomenon. Using social dominance theory and critical whiteness studies, I described whiteness and a hierarchy of social relations between racial groups as major structuring forces in society and thereby set the groundwork for a study of their relationship to student resistance. In the next chapter I present the methodology used in this study.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

As a student, teaching assistant, and lead instructor I have experienced numerous classes in which racially themed issues, literature, projects, and activities triggered intensely negative student reactions. The more visible reactions included dismissive rejection of course literature, sharp criticism of the professor, verbal attacks on classmates, and storming out of the classroom in tears. These are overt examples of student resistance; other, equally resistant reactions may be subtle and more difficult to discern. This study grew from my desire to understand student resistance and the factors that motivate it.

In the context of this study, student resistance is a negative emotional process evoked by the introduction of racially themed course content into the classroom. Student resistance is a problem because it impedes student engagement with such content and thereby obstructs the intended learning.

Scholars recognized student resistance as an obstacle to the knowledge and understanding counselor trainees must develop and have identified remedial strategies. These strategies, however, are based on individually focused psychological understandings that do not consider how student resistance may also reflect the dynamics of sociopolitical systems and influences. In this study, I conducted a phenomenological investigation of students’ experiences of a racially themed classroom video presentation to explore whether students’ resistance reactions may be linked to underlying socio-
political motivations. The goal is to contribute to better understanding of student resistance in the belief that better understanding will produce more effective strategies to facilitate desired learning and positively impact the counseling process.

In this study, masters’ level counselor students described their experiences (i.e., thoughts, feelings, actions) in viewing two racially themed video lectures. I, the researcher, analyzed these reported experiences and my observation notes to identify components of the experiences that reflect student resistance as it is defined by cognitive appraisal theory. Analyzing these experiences through a lens informed by social dominance theory and critical whiteness studies, I addressed one fundamental research question and six auxiliary questions.

The fundamental question that guided this study is: In what ways does student resistance evoked by a racially themed classroom video presentation qualify as a sociopolitical phenomenon? Six auxiliary questions are: 1) How do students describe what it was like watching the videos? 2) How do students describe the feelings they experienced during the video presentation? 3) How do students describe the thoughts they had during the video presentation? 4) How do students describe the beliefs underlying those thoughts? 5) How do students describe their opinions of the video as a tool to teach counseling students about ethnicity and race? 6) How does student resistance define behavior that reinforces White hegemony and control in counselor education classrooms?

This chapter describes events that led to this qualitative phenomenological study, discusses phenomenological methodology, and details the particular methods that were employed in the study.
Events Leading to the Study

When I received my counseling degree in the 1970s, the vast majority of students in my counselor education program were White. We were trained by an all White, mostly male faculty in counseling practices and procedures that emanated from theories based on Western European, White male perspectives and assumptions.

Not until the fall of 2002, when I returned to the university to take a required class for my next level of counselor licensure, was I exposed to course materials and activities that represented racial minority group perspectives. I resisted much of this course content, particularly content that addressed White privilege, White racism, and White ideology. I judged these materials and class discussions as largely inaccurate and certainly not pertinent to me.

For the duration of the class I imagined myself to be racially unmarked and I remained ignorant of what it means to be White in our society. Hitchcock (2002) described this type of ignorance: “Ignorance is not the same as stupidity. To be ignorant means a person has the ability and opportunity to learn, and has ignored that ability and opportunity” (p. 34). Or perhaps I was neither ignorant nor stupid regarding racial matters. Maybe I was refusing (albeit unwittingly) to acknowledge what I knew about race as a tactical maneuver to excuse myself and other Whites for our complicity in a system of racial injustice that benefits us. According to Leonardo (2009), claiming ignorance of race promotes “the ‘innocence’ of whites when it comes to the structures of race and racism” (p. 107). Regardless of the reason, I remained firmly ensconced in my White mindset for the remainder of the class.
In a subsequent class where a group format was employed to encourage deeper discussion of racial issues, I was exposed to perspectives of many of my classmates of color. Through this experience, I acknowledged awareness of myself as a White person and began to understand how my socialization into an ideology episteme of White supremacy and White cultural values acted as a powerful influence on the perspectives and beliefs from which I saw and interpreted the world. This socialization, I realized, had also shaped the beliefs I held that led me to judge negatively and disengage from course materials and activities that presented diverse racial perspectives and exposed a system of White privilege and advantage in this country.

With this new awareness I was able to dispute my White beliefs and replace them with thinking and beliefs that allowed a more favorable assessment of racially themed course content. I began to view the materials and discussions addressing race as opportunities to gain valuable perspective and insight into complex and challenging subjects. As a result, I appraised the content of racially themed materials and discussions more thoughtfully and objectively and acquired knowledge and understandings that positively affected both my professional and my personal lives.

While I believe I have made progress, my greatest professional challenge remains understanding the depth and dimensions of my Whiteness and the meaning of Whiteness to those who are not White. Even so, I realize also that whatever personal satisfaction better understanding may provide, it still is not action. With better understanding, however, comes the hope of better actions and better results.

My personal experience led to my decision to explore the beliefs driving student resistance to gain understandings that would encourage development of effective
pedagogical strategies to mediate it. Drawing from the insights I gained, I assumed that the dynamics of ethnocentric monoculturalism, the White supremacist system of cultural racism in the United States, is the source of beliefs that drive student resistance. I found support for this position in the literature. For instance, Derald Wing Sue and his associates suggested that ethnocentric monoculturalism underlies most individual and organizational resistance to racial minority group perspectives and assumptions (Sue et al., 1998; Sue, Bingham, Porché-Burke, & Vasquez, 1999). One assumption emerging from this experience that influenced my choice of methodology for this study is that behaviors of individuals are shaped by consensually held social ideologies.

Two additional incidents led to other assumptions that influenced my choice of methodology. The first incident occurred in a racially diverse counseling education class where I observed a student’s presentation on Native Americans. When addressing historical intergroup relations, I noticed that the student neglected to include materials and discussion that exposed the historical mistreatment of Native Americans by the more powerful White group. When I asked her about this omission she said that she found many good articles and videos documenting historical and present-day unfair treatment of Native Americans by Whites but she decided not to include them because it might upset the class. Unfortunately, I did not have an opportunity to discuss this further with the student and gain a better understanding of her decision.

I speculated on her decision to omit the materials and decided she believed she needed to present the White version of racial relations that often leaves out discussions of power relations. In her case she decided to ignore how the dominant White group perpetrates acts of violence against people of color to maintain control and advantage. I
also speculated that when she said she did not want to upset the class, she meant she did not want to upset the White people in class; after all, she had either failed to consider or was not particularly concerned that her presentation might not represent the Native American experience and might upset the Native Americans in the class. This incident reminded me of the importance of considering the context of student behavior (i.e., student resistance) when trying to explain it. For my study, I decided it would be important to consider how the context of White racial hegemony in university-level counselor education classrooms may influence student resistance.

The second influence on my choice of methodology was a discussion I had with my whiteness studies professor. After telling him about the student who omitted the story of mistreatment of Native Americans by Whites, he asked if I had considered the possibility that she might be acting as an agent of the White group who is invested in reinforcing White racial hegemony in the classroom.

In thinking about what he said, I realized that I had considered how the classroom context of White hegemony might have influenced the student’s behavior but I hadn’t thought about how her behavior might also reinforce White hegemony in the classroom. By omitting accounts of White violence perpetrated on Native Americans in her presentation, the student essentially hid the fact that the White group used violence to reinforce White dominance and privilege. According to Whiteness scholars, obscuring processes that sustain the system of White dominance and privilege reinforces the system (Jensen, 2005; Johnson, 2006; Leonardo, 2009). I decided that studying how student resistance may promote White racial hegemony in the classroom could broaden
understandings of the phenomenon that might ultimately lead to strategies to facilitate personal reflection and growth among counselors-in-training.

In summary, my personal experience with student resistance, observation of students’ behavior in the classroom, and a discussion with my professor led to certain assumptions that rationalized my choice of methodology for this study. First, I assumed that students’ own explanations of their behavior (thinking and beliefs, emotions, and actions) are important sources of data. As Davitz (1969) pointed out, “It hardly seems necessary to belabor the obvious fact that the experience of another person cannot be observed directly. Experience must be studied as it is reported” (p. 2). Second, I assumed that student resistance occurs within a context of White racial dominance and affects the classroom context. Finally, I assumed that students’ behavior and the effects of their behavior are varied and complex. In order to gain optimal understanding of student resistance, I decided I would have to use a research methodology that allowed examination of these complexities. Such an examination required putting aside preconceived notions and explanations, staying open to previously unnoticed possibilities, and waiting for the students’ actual descriptions of their experiences.

Although I believed that a greater understanding of students’ thoughts, feelings and actions comes from setting aside presuppositions to see what the data indicated, I assumed that larger sociopolitical forces of White hegemony and dominance are impacting students’ behavior. I believed that methodology which allowed for both unseen possibilities and analysis of the data through the lens of whiteness studies and social dominance theory would facilitate a greater understanding of students’ behavior. After reviewing the literature on research methodologies and consulting with professors who
teach research methods courses, I chose a qualitative phenomenological research design for this study.

**Phenomenology**

Phenomenological research methodology is based on phenomenology, a philosophical doctrine that was developed by German philosopher Edmund Husserl around the turn of the 20th Century. Husserl and his followers believed that reality consists of objects and events as they are perceived or understood in human consciousness rather than as facts or occurrences that exist independently (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). Human consciousness is defined as the power of the mind to pay attention to what we are perceiving, thinking, feeling, and doing (Reber & Reber, 2001).

Groenewald (2004) described Husserl’s philosophical view:

He [Husserl] argued that people can be certain about how things appear in, or present themselves to, their consciousness. . . To arrive at certainty, anything outside immediate experience must be ignored, and in this way the external world is reduced to the contents of personal consciousness. Realities are thus treated as pure ‘phenomena’ and the only absolute data from where to begin” (p. 4).

During the 1970s, phenomenological psychologists established a methodological realization of phenomenological thought that allowed researchers to fix on conscious experience (Groenewald, 2004). Phenomenological methodology is an attempt to understand empirical matters by entering the field of perception of those being studied in order to see life as these individuals see it (Creswell, 1998). This is similar in some respects to the counseling profession’s concept of empathy which describes a counselor’s ability to gain understanding of the client’s phenomena of experience (Corey, 2008).
The phenomenological researcher begins a search for the truth not via deductive inferences from prior assumptions but through participants’ faithful and detailed descriptions of their own experiences of a phenomenon that the investigator is seeking to understand. These descriptions become the raw data of the research and once the researcher has the descriptions, she or he analyzes them to determine the meanings of experience (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003).

Long dominated by quantitative research techniques borrowed from the experimental sciences, the field of counseling has begun to recognize phenomenology as an important means of inquiry. In the late 1980s, counselor educators were urged to incorporate the phenomenological, with its emphasis on the meanings of human inner expressions, into their studies. Beginning in the 1990s, phenomenological studies begin to appear in professional counseling journals (Berrios & Lucca, 2006).

Phenomenological research has several advantages for this study of students’ experiences of a classroom focus on race. First, it has been established as an effective means to study a wide range of educational phenomena; for example, how students experience a classroom lesson. Second, the use of interviews to collect phenomenological data is wide-ranging and therefore capable of capturing the nuances of students’ experiences that may prove to be important variables in future qualitative or quantitative studies (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). Third, phenomenological research allows for my epistemological position that data are contained within the perceptions of students that are involved with the experience of a classroom focus on race. Groenewald (2004) and Creswell (1998) emphasized the importance of choosing a methodological design that incorporates the researcher’s assumptions about knowledge. Finally, phenomenological
analytical methods allow for the use of a sociopolitical perspective or “lens” as a way to consider the impact of sociopolitical forces on data (Moustakas, 1994).

**Methodology**

The Video Presentation

In the first phase of this study I gathered data regarding students’ shared experiences of a racially themed classroom video presentation. The video presentation consisted of clips from two video lectures given by Dr. Derald Wing Sue, a Chinese American who is a prominent psychologist and multicultural educator. The first clip consisted of the first 22 minutes of a video entitled *Racial Microaggressions: Impact and Implications for Counseling Practice* (Sue, 2007). In the video, Dr. Sue discusses racial microaggressions, which he defines as common, everyday acts of racism and then he shares some experiences when he had been the victim of racism.

The second clip consisted of the first 15 minutes of a video entitled *What Does it Mean to Be White? The Invisible Whiteness of Being* (Sue, 2004b). In this video, Dr Sue discusses several aspects of being White in the United States and explains differences in the racial realities of White people and people of color.

I chose these videos for two reasons. First, the videos are based on the book, *Counseling the Culturally Diverse: Theory and Practice* (Sue & Sue, 2008) which is the most frequently used text on multicultural counseling (Sue & Sue). The content of the video is thus commonly introduced in counselor education classrooms. Second, many concepts highlighted in the video, according to Sue and Sue, are resisted by students.
Theoretical Orientations

I used a cognitive appraisal theoretical model of emotion to frame students’ experiences in terms of their appraisals of the videos and the emotional and behavioral consequences of their appraisals. I also used a cognitive appraisal theoretical framework to identify students’ experiences that reflect student resistance (i.e., harm-related appraisals, negative emotions, defensive coping actions).

In the second phase of the study, I analyzed students’ descriptions of their experiences and observed students’ behaviors that reflected student resistance to determine the meanings of the experience (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). In the interpretation phase of the study, I was guided by two theoretical perspectives: critical whiteness studies and social dominance theory.

Critical whiteness studies describe the sociopolitical context of White hegemony and privilege in which all student behavior occurs and explicates individual and institutional actions that reinforce systemic White hegemony. The explication of these actions in the whiteness studies literature encourages focus on the parts of student experiences that reflect coping actions.

As a second analytical tool, social dominance theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) explains group-based social hierarchies that structure societies and the processes that keep them in place. In the United States, a White dominated racial group hierarchy is perpetuated by the imposition of White supremacist social ideologies that justify the racial arrangement. The theoretical stance of social dominance theory encourages focus on the parts of students’ experiences that reflect students’ beliefs. The choice of this
analytical lens introduces my own personal experience of student resistance into the study.

Setting

Finding meaning in context is an important aspect of phenomenology (Mason & Bramble, 1997). The context of this study is five counselor education classrooms (beginning, middle and advanced levels) at a large Research One university in the southwest area of the United States. The Counselor Education department selected is located within the College of Education and is accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). CACREP accreditation standards (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, 2009) require that multiculturalism and social justice be core elements of the counselor education curriculum (Pieterse et al., 2009).

Student participants in one of the classrooms were enrolled in an introductory counselor education class which is available to students beginning master’s level counselor training. Participating students in two other classrooms (middle level) had completed the majority of coursework required for a master’s degree in counseling. Finally, students in the last two classrooms (advanced) were in the final class (counseling internship) required for a degree.

Participants

There were 37 student participants in the study. Eleven students were in the beginning class, 10 students in one of the two most advanced courses and eight in the other, and four students in each of the two middle level classes. Each student filled out an informed consent (see Appendix A) and a demographic survey sheet (see Appendix B).
handed out at the beginning of the study. Questions on the demographic sheet were chosen for their potential to aid in the interpretation of data.

Data Collection

There are no prescribed, step-by-step techniques to guide researchers who use phenomenology (Groenewald, 2004). The primary justification or authority for a chosen method or procedure, according to Patton (1990), is its usefulness in describing what people experience and “how it is that they experience what they experience” (p. 71).

Webb and Kevern (2001) argue that the goal of phenomenological research, describing what people experience, is best accomplished through individual interviews. They contend that the process of interviewing each respondent separately is best suited to the requirement that individuals describe their experiences in an “uncontaminated” way. Creswell (1998) concurred by suggesting that describing the meaning of a number of individuals who have experienced a phenomenon primarily involves in-depth interviews with up to 10 people.

Other researchers argue that the goal of describing individual experiences of a phenomenon is better achieved through a group process. Bradbury-Jones, Sambrook, and Irvine (2009), for example, contended that individual experience can be preserved within a group context and “group interviews in phenomenology are actually beneficial because they stimulate discussion and open up new perspectives” (p. 663). Other scholars report that phenomenological group interviews are beneficial because they enrich the data, help researchers bracket prejudices, and give participants time for reflection before adding their own perspectives (Bradbury-Jones et al.).
For part of the data collection phase of the study, I asked students to describe their experiences of the video presentation individually on the Description of Experience questionnaire (see Appendix D). For additional data collection I used a phenomenological group interview much like Bradbury-Jones et al. (2009) described. The group interview consisted of participants sharing their experiences of the video followed by input from other group members. I chose this format because of its suitability to a class setting and because it supports both the notion of individuals describing their experiences in an uncontaminated manner and the notion of enriching the data through group collaboration and dialogue. I provided for the option of doing follow-up interviews with students individually but decided that examining the students’ descriptions of their experiences and my observation of the experiences in the context of the classroom was germane to the study. This was, after all, a study of an educational experience and the context of the classroom is an integral part of the experience. Several writers have identified a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena under study in context-specific settings as the hallmark of phenomenological inquiry or qualitative research (for example, see Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994).

Position of the Researcher

Although I describe myself as “the researcher” in this study, I do not place myself outside the data gathering or interpretive phases of this investigation. I brought to this research certain prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about the setting and issues I studied. As a White woman born in the United States, many of my presuppositions are the result of my socialization into an ideology episteme of White supremacy and White cultural preferences. Through formalized education, independent study, and interactions
with White peers and professors as well as peers and professors of color, I have gained awareness of how my socialization acts as a powerful influence on my perspectives and beliefs. Nevertheless, there are times when I am oblivious to my complicity with White racial dominance.

On the other hand, my position as a White person with many classroom experiences focusing on issues of race and my insider position as a student in Counselor Education are advantageous. They provide me a specific and critical entry point into understanding students’ experiences (especially White and White-minded students’ experiences) in classes focusing on racially themed course materials and activities.

Traditionally, it was thought that the personal baggage of the researcher needed to be eliminated from the design of the study (Maxwell, 2005). From the perspective of phenomenology, however, it is not possible for researchers to be detached from their suppositions (Groenewald, 2004); and even if it were possible, it wouldn’t necessarily be beneficial (Maxwell). In a classic essay, C. Wright Mills (1959) argued:

The most admirable scholars within the scholarly community . . . do not split their work from their lives. They seem to take both too seriously to allow such dissociation, and they want to use each for the enrichment of the other (p. 195).

Because researcher subjectivity is inevitable, phenomenological researchers, according to Groenewald (2004), must strive to recognize their own preconceptions and consciously bracket them or set them aside in order to enter the research subject’s life world and use the self as an experiencing interpreter. A common conception in phenomenology and other qualitative research designs is that the researcher is an instrument of the research (Maxwell, 2005).
How the Study Unfolded

I was granted permission by three professors in the Counselor Education department to conduct my study in their classes. I obtained access to their classes by sending a note (see Appendix C) to each professor in the department explaining the study and how much class time I needed. I followed up with each professor to make arrangements to conduct the study in a one-hour (approximate) increment in each of two class periods. The data collection phase of the study was completed within a five-week period.

I determined that five classes provided sufficient data because many of the experiences students described in later classes were repetitious. Morgan (1998) suggested that when participants’ responses become repetitive the study has reached a point of saturation and there is little to be gained by adding more groups.

I conducted the study during two regular meetings of each of the classes on dates that the professor determined were convenient to the class schedule. During the first class meetings, I took approximately one hour and fifteen minutes to conduct the informed consent process, to have students complete the demographic questionnaire, to show the two videos, and to have students complete the Description of Experience questionnaires. The second class meetings which consisted of a group discussion of students’ experiences took approximately one hour.

To ensure ethical research, I began the study by distributing and explaining the Informed Consent Agreement (see Appendix A). As part of the explanation, I described the study as an investigation of student experiences watching two video lectures used to educate students about racial issues. As part of the informed consent process, I
encouraged students to ask questions and I answered all questions honestly and completely and informed students that all study activities would be recorded. I assured students that there would be no penalty for not participating.

I told students that the class would be divided into two groups. I explained that Group one, the participant group, consisted of students who signed the consent form indicating their willingness to volunteer for the study. The other group, the non-participant group, was a combination of: (1) students who did not sign the consent form; (2) students who were not eligible to be in the study (i.e., any student who was enrolled in a class taught by me); and (3) students who signed the consent form but were randomized into the non-participant group. I explained that students in the non-participant group are not part of the study and would meet in a separate room where they would engage in activities that paralleled those of the participant group. The only difference, I explained, is that non-participants would not complete the demographic questionnaire, their activities would not be recorded, and a doctoral student would facilitate their classroom activities.

After I explained the consent process and the non-participants left the room, I asked the participating students to complete the Student Demographic Survey Sheet (see Appendix B). I told students that if I was going to contact them about a follow-up meeting, it would be within two weeks of the class discussions. I then showed the first 22 minutes of a video lecture entitled *Racial Microaggressions: Impact and Implications for Counseling Practice* (Sue, 2007). Next, I asked students to describe their experience of the video using the Description of Experience questionnaire. I gave students approximately 10 minutes to do this. I then showed the first 15 minutes of a video lecture entitled *What Does it Mean to Be White? The invisible Whiteness of Being* (Sue, 2004b). I
asked the students to describe their experience of this video using a separate Description of Experience questionnaire and gave them an additional 10 minutes to complete it. I collected the sheets and told the students the sheets would be returned to them when I returned to their next class meeting for a discussion of their experiences. I then dismissed the class.

I returned the following week to the next scheduled class meeting to conduct the group interview. The group interviews consisted of students describing their experiences of the videos and group discussions of those experiences. In the first class discussion, in one of advanced classes, I did not organize the discussion; I simply offered a general invitation to students to discuss their experiences. Some of the more vocal students monopolized the conversation and others didn’t participate. To encourage participation by all students, in all subsequent class discussions I began by giving each student an opportunity to say something and then followed with unstructured group discussion.

My Role as Group Facilitator

Because the study was held during class time, the Institutional Review Board for the university approved the study with the provision that the study be an appropriate educational experience for the students. The videos shown to students qualified as an educational experience because they were specifically developed to foster understandings of the relevance of race to the various roles of professional counselors and are commonly used in counselor education classes. Classroom discussions are also commonly employed in counselor education classes to facilitate students’ knowledge of multicultural issues (Villalba & Redmond, 2008). These classroom discussions, however, are commonly facilitated by course instructors with a particular learning objective in mind. I considered
my role as a group facilitator as one where I not only facilitated the discussion of students’ experiences but also facilitated their learning. During one of the classroom discussions, for example, I clarified the definition of racism. I explained that racism could be used to refer to an individual’s prejudicial behavior or to describe a societal level practice that oppresses people of color. I described racist real estate practices as an example of system level racism. In another classroom discussion where some students argued that their interpretations of the video were more accurate, I pointed out how differences in group and individual life experiences and values might better explain students’ differing experiences of the video presentation.

**Data Analysis**

The sources of data for this study included: (1) a videotape of students watching the video lectures; (2) the Description of Experience questionnaires; (3) video and audio recordings of the group discussion; (4) a written transcript of the group discussion that I personally transcribed from the video and audio recordings; (5) my notes on the observed behavior of participants; and (6) the Student Demographic Sheets.

Data analysis began with a complete review of the data to obtain a high level sense of the results. In this review I performed each of the following steps at least twice: I read the students’ written descriptions; I read my notes describing my observation of students; I watched the videotapes of the group sessions; and I read the written transcripts. This allowed me to form a sense of the overall experiences of the participants and the relative experiences of the study groups (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003).

Because I was studying student resistance, my next task was to identify aspects of students’ experiences that reflected student resistance. Using a predetermined coding
scheme informed by cognitive appraisal theory, I searched the data for aspects of their experiences that consisted of harm-related appraisals, negative emotions, and defensive coping actions. I limited my search to core relational themes associated with the negative emotions of anger, fear, sadness, and guilt since scholars writing about student resistance most commonly associate these emotions with the phenomenon (Fouad & Arredondo, 2007; Jackson, 1999; Jensen, 2005; Johnson, 2006; Tatum, 1997). I analyzed the data looking for expressions of the following: (1) harm related appraisals of threat, offense, loss, and blame; (2) emotions of fear, anger, sadness, and guilt; and (3) coping actions reflecting avoidance, attack, inaction, and escaping responsibility.

At this point in the analysis I compared the harm-related appraisals, negative emotions, and coping actions I had identified to behaviors that whiteness scholars (i.e., Cohen, 2011; Dei, 2007; DiTomaso, Parks-Yancy, & Post, 2003; Jensen, 2005; Johnson, 2006; Kivel, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Leonardo, 2004, 2009; McIntyre, 1997; Parker & Chambers, 2005; Rattansi, 2007; Sleeter, 2002; Sue, 2003, 2004a, 2007; Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009; Sue, Rivera, Capodilupo, Lin, &Torino, 2010; Tatum, 1997;Wise, 2009) have identified as behavior that reinforces whiteness (White dominance and control). I found that behaviors to reinforce whiteness matched most readily with the identified coping actions. I organized the coping actions that reflected behavior that reinforces whiteness into the following four umbrella categories: (1) avoiding race-related discussions; (2) attacking the person talking about racism and White privilege; (3) becoming resigned to racism and doing nothing; and (4) escaping responsibility for racism and White privilege.
The next phase involved analyzing beliefs students expressed in the descriptions of their experiences that reflected student resistance. I used a predetermined coding scheme informed by the concept of hierarchy enhancing legitimizing myths explained in social dominance theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) and descriptions of White superiority, nonwhite inferiority, and myths of meritocracy, fair treatment is equal treatment, and equality of opportunity provided by Sue (2004a). I went slowly over the data to identify the following three categories of beliefs: belief in White superiority, belief in nonwhite inferiority, and belief in American myths that are used to justify White domination.

Verification of Interpretation

As mentioned earlier, my socialization into an ideology episteme of White supremacy and White cultural norms acts as a powerful influence on my perspectives and beliefs in ways that I may not notice. Therefore, I relied on established literature and theory to guide my analysis and on feedback from three professors, who are well versed in issues of race, to strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings and conclusions.

Summary

This chapter described the phenomenological investigation of students’ experiences of a racially themed classroom video presentation. The chapter began with a description of events that led to the study and the researcher assumptions that led to the choice of a phenomenological design to guide the study. I reported that students’ written descriptions of their experiences, videotapes of the students’ shared experience of the video presentation, a videotape and transcript of the classroom discussions, students’ demographic information, and researcher observation notes were the main sources of data
subjected to analysis. The setting, participants, position of the researcher, theoretical frameworks, and how the study unfolded were also addressed.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

REINFORCING WHITENESS IN COUNSELOR EDUCATION CLASSROOMS

Introduction

The focus of this dissertation project is sociopolitical influence on student behavior. Having previously explained whiteness as an omnipresent, potent, political force in all sectors of the American society, my goal in this chapter is to analyze its connection to student resistance within the context of a counselor education classroom. To this end, I present students’ descriptions of their experiences of a racially themed classroom video presentation that reflect student resistance to information imparted in the videos. Drawing from whiteness studies literature (Cohen, 2011; Dei, 2007; DiTomaso, et al., 2003; Jensen, 2005; Johnson, 2006; Kivel, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Leonardo, 2004, 2009; McIntyre, 1997; Parker & Chambers, 2005; Rattansi, 2007; Sleeter, 2002; Sue, 2003, 2004a, 2007; Sue et al., 2009, 2010; Tatum, 1997; Wise, 2009) and social dominance theory (Pratto et al., 2006; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999, 2012), I analyzed these incidents of student resistance to suggest that sociopolitical processes that reinforce whiteness and perpetuate the existing racial order in larger society are also operating in counselor education classrooms.

Presentation and Analysis of Students’ Described Experiences

Orientation

In this section, I present student accounts of their experiences of a race-related classroom video presentation and interpret these experiences through interaction with
social dominance theory and whiteness studies literature. The experiences students
described came from the Description of Experience questionnaires (see Appendix D) that
students completed and transcriptions of audio and video recordings of the classroom
discussions. I also present my observations of students’ behavior during the video
presentation and classroom discussion as part of the data to be analyzed.

Considerations Guiding the Presentation and Analysis

Certain considerations guide my presentation and qualitative analysis of student
participants’ experiences. I present these considerations in the next four subsections.

A Study of Student Resistance

Considering my goal to study student resistance, I present only those aspects of
students’ experiences that reflect student resistance. To identify the components of
students’ experiences that reflect student resistance, I draw from counselor education
literature to define student resistance as an emotional process evoked by racially themed
classroom content (APA, 2003). To explain student resistance, I used a process model of
emotion based on cognitive appraisal theory (Lazarus, 1991).

From the perspective of cognitive appraisal theory, the emotional process of
student resistance involves a student consciously or unconsciously appraising an evoking
event (i.e., the classroom video presentation) as harmful to her or his own well-being or
the well-being of a group with which the student affiliates. The harm-related appraisal
leads to a negative emotion which, in turn, motivates a coping activity to deal with the
difficult feelings. During the process, students focus their attention on the appraised harm
and what to do about it.
Using a predetermined coding scheme informed by cognitive appraisal theory, I identified and presented representative examples of students’ experiences that reflected: (1) harm-related appraisals of the video presentation; (2) negative emotions; and (3) coping actions.

Cognitive appraisal theory describes core relational themes connecting particular appraisals and emotions. It also describes the coping behavior related to each core relational theme. Of the nine core relational themes of negative emotion that Lazarus (1991) reported, I identified four that were most clearly represented in the data: (1) threat, fear, and avoidance; (2) loss, sadness and inaction; (3) blaming others, anger, and striking back; and (4) self-blame, guilt, and escaping responsibility. I organized my presentation of representative examples of student resistance found in the data around these four core-relational themes.

Not All Students Resisted

By describing only those aspects of students’ experiences that reflect student resistance, I do not mean to imply that all students were resistant. To the contrary, several students described experiences of the video presentation that included praise for the videos and positive emotions. One student, for example, described the video presentation as validating and reported feeling happy during the video presentation:

The second video . . . made me feel more validated as I often question my thoughts regarding White privilege and microaggressions. So . . . just hearing those comments . . . I felt more, I felt better! I almost felt, I actually kind of felt happy. . . He [Dr. Sue]. . . really validated all the things that I have ever felt. . . . I
was really happy and I felt really good that there is somebody out there that has a 
voice for people who are minorities. And a lot of times there is not.

Analytical Lenses

To examine the connection of student resistance to sociopolitical behavior that 
reinforces White dominance and privilege, I used whiteness studies literature and social 
dominance theory as frames of analysis.

Once I identified representative examples of student resistance, I compared them 
to a list of behavioral tactics that critical whiteness studies scholars have identified as 
sociopolitical behavior to reinforce White domination and privilege in society. The 
component of student resistance that connected most readily to these behaviors was 
coping actions students took to defend against their negative emotions. Using this list of 
behaviors as a predetermined coding scheme, I identified four categories of coping 
actions that define behavior to reinforce whiteness: (1) avoid race-related discussions; (2) 
attack the person talking about racism and White privilege; (3) become resigned to racism 
and White privilege and do nothing about them; and (4) escape responsibility for racism 
and White privilege. I used these categories to organize my presentation of the data.

Social dominance theory describes how group based dominance in society is 
structured and maintained. One method of maintenance is through the use of narratives of 
support for the established order. Called hierarchy enhancing myths in social dominance 
theory, these narratives of support are described as consensually held social ideologies 
that influence the behavior of individuals (Sidanius & Pratto, 2012).

Whiteness scholars have identified White supremacy as the conceptual basis of 
support for systemic White domination and privilege in society (MacMullan, 2009).
Using concepts of White supremacy described by Sue (2004a) as a predetermined coding scheme, I identified three categories of hierarchy enhancing mythical beliefs expressed by students in the data: (1) belief in White superiority; (2) belief in nonwhite inferiority; and (3) belief in American myths that are used to justify White domination. These categories organized my presentation of this data.

Presenting Representative Examples

Considering my goal to illuminate nuances of student resistance that were evoked by the video presentation, I will identify representative incidents of student resistance without considering how many times these incidents occurred. Even if I were to decide that the frequency of occurrence was of academic interest, the methodology of the study would undermine the validity of conclusions based on these numbers. The following interaction between two students after the class discussion, for example, suggests that a tally of responses might give a false impression because students did not always mention incidents they considered relevant.

Student 1: The more it went around the table, the less that was said about the video and the more it was about personal experience.

Student 2: I did that because what I had to say about the video was already said by somebody else.

Student two’s comment suggests: (1) she considers repeating what someone else said to be an inappropriate contribution to the classroom discussion; and (2) she did not mention something that she found to be relevant in the classroom discussion. This means that a tally of responses would not accurately portray the number of times an issue had relevance for students and inferences drawn from the tally would likely be questionable.
Confidentiality of Participants

The final consideration guiding my presentation of students’ experiences concerns my obligation to maintain confidentiality of participants. To ensure anonymity, I use pseudonyms for study participants and alter or omit any unique demographic information (i.e., exact age; name) that might compromise their confidentiality or that of anyone they mention.

Before I present the actual experiences students described, I will include two subsections to facilitate understanding of the experiences. In the first subsection, I briefly describe the students whose experiences I highlight in the analysis. The second subsection describes parts of the video presentation that students referred to in their descriptions.

Students

In this section, I present a brief description of students whose experiences I detail. In these descriptions, I use beginning, intermediate, and advanced to indicate their level of progress in the counselor education program. Those students enrolled in the first class recommended for beginning students were designated as beginners. Students enrolled in the advance practicum, typically the last class taken before graduation, were identified as advanced students. Students enrolled in the beginning practicum class had completed several prerequisite courses and were designated as intermediate students. I took additional information from the Student Demographic Sheets that each participant completed at the beginning of the study. In presenting the information, I quoted students’ own written words from the demographic sheets when feasible. Students are represented by pseudonyms listed here in alphabetical order.
Aileen  Aileen is an intermediate student in her middle twenties. She described her ethnic identity as German, Scottish, Irish, English, Cherokee, and Swedish and her racial identity as Caucasian. Others describe her as White or Caucasian. She took two courses that significantly addressed issues of race and ethnicity. She believes counselor students need to know that: (1) people of different ethnicities, races, and cultures may have different worldviews; (2) it is important that counselors “not push their personal values on their clients” whose worldviews they don’t agree with; and (3) individuals within “a culture vary greatly and may or may not follow various beliefs of their culture.”

Andrea  Andrea is an intermediate student in her late thirties. Describing her ethnic identity, Andrea said that she is from Columbia, South America and she considers herself Hispanic and Columbian. Her racial identity is “Hispanic Latina” and others assume she is Hispanic. She took one class that significantly addressed issues of race and ethnicity. She believes counselor students need to realize how important ethnicity and race are for each individual because it defines identity.

April  April is a beginning student in her middle twenties. She described both her ethnic and racial identities as “White-Nonhispanic” and that is how others describe her. As an undergraduate, she took seven courses that significantly addressed issues of race and ethnicity. She wrote that counselor students need to know “everything” about race and ethnicity. They also need to know that “even though there are groups of ethnicity/race, it is crucial to understand the individual first.”
Ben  Ben is an advanced student in his early thirties. He described both his ethnic and racial identities as “American Indian (Mayan, Yachi, Hopi and Apache) and German.” Others describe him as “mixed (mut [sic]).” He wrote that all the classes he took in the counseling program significantly addressed issues of race and ethnicity. In response to the question about what counselor students need to know about ethnicity and race, Ben stated, “It is always present even if you think you are similar to your client. Never overlook it.”

Candy  Candy is an intermediate student in her late thirties. She described both her racial and ethnic identities as European American; she wrote that others describe her as “White or honkey.” She took one class that significantly addressed race and ethnicity in her graduate program and 15 or so in her undergraduate program. She said that counselor students need to know that “race and ethnicity are cultural constructs. People’s cultures are not a result of race and ethnicity. Culture is always to be respected and familiarity with cultural differences is crucial.”

Celia  Celia is an advanced student in her middle thirties. She described both her ethnic identity and racial identity as Native American and that is how others describe her. She took four courses that significantly addressed issues of race and ethnicity. When asked what counselor students need to know about ethnicity and race she wrote, “I think that a course addressing ethnicity and race should be a requirement for high-school students and college students, because the world around us is constantly changing and evolving.”
Dawn  Dawn is a beginning student in her late twenties. She described both her ethnicity and race as “Navajo! Diné!” Others describe her as Native American. She took five courses in undergraduate school that significantly addressed issues of race and ethnicity. Dawn believes that counselor students “need to be sensitive and openminded [sic] about everyone’s background, religion, and education level.”

Ella  Ella is an advanced student in her early thirties. She described her ethnic identity as “Native American Navajo Tribe” and her racial identity as Native American. Others describe her as American Indian, Native American, or Navajo. She took two classes that significantly addressed issues of race and ethnicity and believes that counselor students should know that “race/ethnicity may have some impact on clients. Acculturation of the client is important in their development. Racial/Ethnic identity does influence the impact of the counselor relationship.”

Faith  Faith is a beginning student in her early twenties. Her ethnic identity is “Hispanic/White” and her racial identity is multi-racial. Others describe her as White or Spanish. She took five classes that significantly addressed issues of race and ethnicity. In answer to the question about what counselor students need to know about race and ethnicity, Faith wrote, “It is not a box that one can check and gain a full understanding of someone or the[ir] identity.”

Fran  Fran is an advanced student in her middle thirties. She described her ethnic identity as Mexican, her racial identity as Mexican and said that others describe her as Mexican. She moved to the United States from Mexico when she was a teenager. Most of the courses she took have significantly addressed race,
ethnicity and multicultural issues at some point. She believes that counselor
students need to know how important race and ethnicity are “when trying to
relate to the client and how much they can impact us as clinicians and clients in
setting up values and meaning about life.”

Galen  Galen is an advanced student in his middle fifties. He described his ethnic
identity as Irish, Eastern European, and American. His racial identity is
Caucasian and that is how others describe him. He took one class that
significantly addressed issues of race and ethnicity. He believes the following
about counselor students: (1) they need to know ways of perceiving the world of
different people; (2) they need to understand that others have a different
experience than they do; and (3) they need to understand issues around White
privilege.

June  June is an advanced student in her forties who described both her racial and
ethnic identities as “Italian/Irish American.” She said, “Most people think I am
white-washed.” She took “3+” courses that significantly addressed issues of
race and ethnicity. She said it is important for counselor students “to be aware
of the impact of ethnicity and race on some people’s lives.”

Lisa  Lisa is an advanced student in her early fifties. She identified her ethnic identity
as Caucasian and her racial identity as Australian. When asked how others
describe her ethnic and racial identities she stated that they describe her as “not
from here!” She said that all the classes she took in the counselor program have
significantly addressed issues of race and ethnicity. She believes that counselor
students “need to know their own values and beliefs and not to impose them on others.”

Louis

Louis is a beginning student in his middle twenties. Regarding his racial identity, Louis said that he identifies “strongly with his Latin heritage.” His ethnic identity is Spanish and Mexican. At first glance, people think he is Anglo because he has light skin compared to most Latin Americans. Louis took five classes that significantly addressed issues of race and ethnicity. He believes that counselor students “need to be aware of their own biases based on their ethnicity & race and how that affects their counseling style. They must also learn to be sensitive to the race and ethnicity of others.”

Lucy

Lucy is a beginning student in her early thirties. She described her ethnic identity as “Mixed European-German, Irish, Scottish American” and her racial identity as White. Others describe her as a White American. She took several courses that significantly addressed issues of race and ethnicity. She thinks that counselor students need to know that self-awareness and awareness of how others perceive you are key.

May

May is an advanced student in her middle forties. She described her ethnic identity as Welsh, English, and German and her racial identity as Caucasian. Others describe her as White. She took four courses that significantly addressed race and ethnicity. May stated that counselor students need to know the following about ethnicity and race: (1) they contribute to our identity; (2) for some people they are much more significant factors than for others; and (3) they should never be discounted in the counseling relationship.
Pamela  Pamela is an intermediate student in her middle twenties. She described her ethnic identity as half Caucasian and half Hispanic and her racial identity as bi-racial. Most people believe she is Caucasian. She took two courses that significantly addressed issues of race and ethnicity. Pamela stated that counselor students need to know that “the multicultural aspect is extremely important when working with clients of a different race. It is important to know and understand how much one’s ethnicity and race can affect the way they act. For instance, values and beliefs may vary from culture to culture and it is important that we not impose our values onto others.”

Regina  Regina is a beginning student in her late twenties. She described her racial identity and ethnic identity as “Jewish/Native American” and said that others think she is “Hispanic/Mexican.” She has not taken any courses that significantly addressed race and ethnicity. Regina believes that counselor students need to know “that everyone is different.”

Rhonda  Rhonda is a beginning student in her early forties. She described her racial identity as “mixed-morena” and her ethnic identity as Puerto Rican. Other people describe her as “Hispanic/White.” She took one class that significantly addressed issues of race and ethnicity and wrote that counselor students need to know that ethnicity and race impact “people’s perceptions, ideologies, value systems, etc & race must be a consideration in evaluation.”

Rose  Rose is an advanced student in her early fifties. She described her ethnic identity as “Euro-American-Danish German.” Her racial identity is Caucasian and others describe her as Caucasian. She took two courses that have
significantly addressed issues of race and ethnicity. Rose believes that counselor students need “a general knowledge of the different races, ethnicities, and religions among people.”

Susie Susie is an advanced student in her late thirties. She described her ethnic identity as “Scottish/Irish” and her racial identity as Caucasian. Others describe her as White. She took one class that significantly addressed issues of race and ethnicity. She believes that it is important for counselor students “to know that both ethnicity & race affect an individual’s identity and their relations with others. It is not ‘the elephant in the room’, it is the room.”

Trudy Trudy is an intermediate student in her late twenties. She described her ethnic identity as “White, European-American” and says that her “family is Irish, German, English, Scottish.” The state she resides in is also part of her ethnic identity. She described her racial identity by saying “I am a white person, but I believe race is a fiction.” Others describe her as White, as a resident of her state, or German-Irish. She indicated that she took 25 classes that significantly addressed issues of race and ethnicity. Trudy believes that counselor students need to know as much as possible about ethnicity and race and they “should be incorporated into everything/every class.” According to Trudy, race and ethnicity should even be incorporated into statistics classes when, for instance, IQ scores are being discussed.

Will Will is an intermediate student in his late twenties. He described his ethnic identity as “Hispanic and Scott Irish” and his racial identity as “a typical Hispanic heritage with family values.” Others describe him as “a proud
Hispanic wanting to learn more.” He took six classes that significantly addressed issues of race and ethnicity. He believes “counseling students need to understand that there is so many things going on when it comes to ethnicity and race. There is no way to understand it all.” His advice to counseling students is, “just be yourself and be willing to learn new things.”

A summary of students’ demographic information is provided in table one on the next page.

The Video Presentation

The video presentation that students experienced consisted of two video clips featuring lectures by Dr. Derald Wing Sue who is a prominent psychologist and multicultural educator. In the first clip, Dr. Sue (2007) lectures on racial microaggressions which he defines as common, everyday acts of racism that send denigrating messages to people of color. To illustrate the phenomenon of microaggressions, Dr. Sue gives examples of everyday racism that he, as a Chinese American, has personally experienced. In the second video, Dr. Sue’s lecture addresses different racial group realities and perspectives based on interviews he conducted with White people and people of color.

Students referred to particular video segments when describing their experiences of the video presentation on the Description of Experience questionnaires and in the classroom discussions. In the next three subsections I describe the following parts of the video presentation that students referred to most commonly: the airplane incident, the trip to Harvard, and the on-the-street interviews.
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<th>Race (Self-described)</th>
<th>Ethnicity (Self-described)</th>
<th>Race &amp; Ethnicity (Other-described)</th>
<th># of Courses</th>
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The Airplane Incident

Many students referred specifically to Dr. Sue’s (2007) account of an incident of everyday racism that he personally experienced while on an airplane. The story began with Dr. Sue and an African American female colleague boarding a small commercial plane. As they entered the plane, a White flight attendant greeted them and told them that they could sit anywhere. They chose two seats across the aisle from each other near the front of the plane. Other passengers came in and also chose seats near the front. Just before the flight attendant closed the hatch of the plane, three White men in business suits hurried on board. The flight attendant told the men that they could sit anywhere and the men took seats two rows in front of Dr. Sue and his colleague. After she shut the plane door, the flight attendant scanned the entire plane and then approached Dr. Sue and his companion and asked them to move to the back of the plane to balance the load. Dr. Sue and his companion immediately looked at each other and realized they were both wondering if they were being asked to move because they were passengers of color. Although Dr. Sue was annoyed by the flight attendant’s request, he chose not to voice his irritation; his companion, however, was not so forgiving. As they moved to the back of the plane and took their seats, his companion complained to Dr. Sue about how irritated she was that the flight attendant chose two people of color to move rather than making the more logical choice of asking the late arriving White businessmen to move. His companion’s comments resonated with Dr. Sue’s experiential reality, and he felt himself becoming increasingly agitated and angry. When the flight attendant came through the cabin to shut the overhead bins, Dr. Sue could not contain his agitation any longer. In a very tense voice he asked the flight attendant if she realized that she had asked two
passengers of color to move to the back of the bus. Dr. Sue explained that perhaps he should have said plane rather than bus, but moving to the back of the bus had symbolic meaning for him.

The flight attendant was greatly disturbed by Dr. Sue’s comment, and she denied that the incident had anything to do with race. When Dr. Sue asked her why she had not asked the White men who boarded after them to move, she said that she had chosen the two of them to move so that they could carry on their conversation in private. Dr. Sue and the flight attendant ended up in what Dr. Sue described as a no-win argument about the incident. Dr. Sue (2007) said,

There was no way that I could convince her that in my perception it had everything to do with race and in her perception it had nothing to do with race. In fact she had legitimate reasons that may actually be true. See, this is the nature of microaggressions in terms of the clash of worldviews and the differences that people perceive happening. (17 min.)

Dr. Sue (2007) stressed that all incidents of racial microaggressions are not simply verbal or behavioral in nature as was the case in this airplane incident; they can be environmental as well. In the next segment, Dr. Sue describes his experience at Harvard University to illustrate an example of an environmental microaggression.

*The Trip to Harvard*

Students also commonly cited Dr. Sue’s account of his trip to Harvard. In the following transcript of the video, Dr. Sue (2007) describes his trip and explains that having all White deans at Harvard University constitutes an environmental microaggression that works against faculty, students, and staff of color at the university.
Last year I was asked to go to Harvard University as part of a training team to work with Harvard in terms of talking about how to make Harvard a more welcoming and inclusive environment. During that session, I met with all the deans of the college and was introduced to the group as someone who had done great work in terms of understanding multiculturalism. As I sat there during the . . introduction, I looked around the entire room and noticed that every single face of the deans was White. Nothing wrong in terms of being White, but it struck me that every single dean was White and they were primarily men who were in that particular room. So when the moderator turned to me after the introduction and stated that, I wonder if you could start off by telling us some of the studies and findings that you’ve had on multiculturalism, well, I said that, let me first of all make an observation. As I stand here in front of all of you, I notice that every single face before me is that of a White person. And I could tell there was shuffling around and some degree of discomfort. And I said that do you know since this is a part of a program aimed at making Harvard a more welcoming and inclusive environment for students, faculty, and staff of color, do you realize what it says to me as a person of color? As I stand here before you and see this sea of White faces, there is a hidden message being communicated to me. It is saying to me that you will not be comfortable here; that you are not welcome here; if you stay here, there is only so far you can rise in the hierarchy of Harvard University. Whether intentional or not, that is the hidden message that is given to me as a person of color. . . . Environmentally, this represents a microaggression that has clear implications for me as a person of color. (5 min.)
On-the-Street Interviews

In the second video, Dr. Sue (2004b) described a series of on-the-street interviews where he asked White people and people of color this question: What does it mean to be White? Many students also referred to this segment. I present a brief description of the interviewee’s answers below.

42 Year-Old White Businessman

When asked what it means to be White, this man said he didn’t know what Dr. Sue (2004b) was talking about. When Dr. Sue asked him if he is White, he said yes, but then explained that he comes from Italian heritage and he is actually Italian and not White. When Dr. Sue asked him what it means to be Italian, he became agitated, mentioned Italian food and wine, and then said, “this is getting ridiculous” (2 min.).

26 Year-Old White Female College Student

In answer to the question she said, “Is this a trick question? I’ve never thought about it. Well, I know that lots of Black people see us as being prejudiced and all that stuff. I wish people would just forget about race differences and see one another as human beings. People are people and we should all be proud to be Americans” (Sue, 2004b, 3 min.).

65 Year-Old White Male Retired Construction Worker

When Dr. Sue (2004b) asked him what it means to be White, this man said that it was a stupid question. When Dr. Sue asked why, he said, “Look, what are you? Oriental? You people are always blaming us for stereotyping and here you are doing the same to us” (4 min.). When Dr. Sue asked him whom he was referring to when he said “us”, the man said,
I’m referring to Americans who aren’t colored. We are all different from one another. I’m Irish but there are Germans, Italians, and those Jews. I get angry at the colored people for always blaming us. When my grandparents came over to this country, they worked 24 hours a day to provide a good living for their kids. My wife and I raised five kids and I worked every day of my life to provide for them. No one gave me nothing. I get angry at the Black people for always whining. They just have to get off their butts and work rather than going on welfare. At least you people work hard. The Black ones could learn from your people. (4 min.)

34 Year-Old White Female Stockbroker

When Dr. Sue (2004b) asked her the question, this woman laughed and said she didn’t know; she had never thought about it. Dr. Sue asked her if she is White and she said she supposed so. When asked why she had never thought about what it means to be White, she said because it is not important to her. When asked why it isn’t important, she said, “It doesn’t enter into my mind because it doesn’t affect my life. Besides, we are all individuals. Color isn’t important” (7 min.).

After reporting on the responses of these four White interviewees, Dr. Sue (2004b) said that their ideas and responses are not atypical for many White individuals. He said that if the identical question is posed to people of color, “we get a different perspective, a different worldview; there is no hesitation in terms of talking about what whiteness means” (7 min.).

29 Year-Old Latina Administrative Assistant

When Dr. Sue (2004b) asked this woman the question, she said:
Do you really want to know? Okay, it means you’re always right. It means that you never have to explain yourself or apologize. You know that movie, “Love is Never Having to Say You’re Sorry”? Well, being White is never having to say you’re sorry. It means you think you’re better than us. (8 min.)

39 Year-old Black Male Car Salesman

When Dr. Sue (2004b) asked the question, this man asked him if he wanted a politically correct answer or what he really thinks. Dr. Sue asked him to say what he really thinks. The man said, “If you’re White, you’re right. If you’re Black, step back” (9 min.).

When Dr. Sue (2004b) asked him what he meant, the man said,

White folks are always thinking they know all the answers. A Black man’s word is worth less than a White man’s. When White customers come into our dealership and see me standing next to the cars, I become invisible to them. Actually, they may see me as a well-dressed janitor, or actively avoid me. They will search out White salesmen. Or, when I explain something to a customer, they always check out the information with my White colleagues. They don’t trust me. When I mention this to our manager who is White, he tells me I’m oversensitive and being paranoid. That’s what being White means. It means having the authority or power to tell me what is really happening even though I know it’s not. Being White means you can fool yourself into thinking that you’re not prejudiced, when you are. That’s what it means to be White. (10 min.)
21 Year-Old Chinese American Male College Student (Ethnic Studies Major)

Before describing this man’s answer, Dr. Sue (2004b) explained that this man’s response deals with “White privilege” which is a main theme addressed in the video. When Dr. Sue asked this young man what it means to be White, this man said that this very question was recently discussed in his cultural heritage class. Dr. Sue asked what conclusion he drew from the discussion. The student said,

Well, it has to do with White privilege. I read an article by a professor at Wellesley. It made a lot of sense to me. Being White in this society automatically guarantees you better treatment and more unearned benefits and privileges than minorities. Having white skin means you have the freedom to choose the neighborhood you live in. You won’t be discriminated against. When you enter a store, security guards won’t assume you will steal something. You can flag down a cab without the thought that they won’t pick you up because you’re a minority. You can study in school and be assured your group will be portrayed positively. You don’t have to deal with race or think about it. (12 min.)

Dr. Sue asked him if White folks are aware of their White privilege. He answered, “Hell no! They are oblivious to it” (13 min.).

The two video clips in this study address two issues that are most likely to evoke student resistance: White racial group advantage (Ridley & Thompson, 1999) and oppression of racial minority groups (Tatum, 1992). Yet it is important that counselor students learn about these issues. Learning about racial microaggressions, for example, is an important part of counselor students’ education since these acts of racism have been found to contribute to heightened stress that puts people of color at increased risk for
mental and physical illness (Carter & Reynolds, 2011). Furthermore, as Dr. Sue (2007) explained in video one, counselors must learn to recognize and address racial microaggressions because they “may manifest . . . in the counseling clinical encounter . . . [and] cause impasses or ruptures in the therapeutic process” (2 min.).

Another way the videos are a valuable resource for learning is that they challenge mainstream ideology that supports White dominance and racial injustice in counselor education classrooms and larger society. Tim Wise (2008) explained how mainstream ideology maintains White dominance and control in all levels of society. Wise contended that the biggest part of White hegemony in the United States is the predominance of a narrative that supports it. He explained that the predominant national narrative that reinforces the status quo of White privilege and disadvantage for people of color portrays the United States as a post-racial society. This narrative tells us that there is no longer racism against people of color in this country or, if racism does exist, it is of no significant consequence. As Wise explained, the rhetoric of racial transcendence rips us from the context we need to understand race-related causes of racial injustice.

In the classroom video presentation, Dr. Sue (2004b, 2007) challenges the post-racial narrative by presenting evidence of the persistence of racism in the United States and its devastating effect on people of color. Giving both study findings and personal accounts, Dr. Sue shows that racism remains pervasive in this country and that dominant Whites manifest racist behavior toward people of color at both individual and systemic levels.

In this dissertation project, I argue that students who resist challenges to the prevailing post-racial narrative are, by default, reinforcing this narrative and the status
quo of White dominance and privilege that it supports. In other words, students who resist the more accurate narrative of racial injustice presented by Dr. Sue (2004b; 2007) in the video presentation are effectively reinforcing the racial status quo. As Tatum (1997) admonished, “It is important to understand that the system of advantage is perpetuated when we do not acknowledge its existence” (p. 9).

I presented the two video clips in each of five classrooms and asked each student to describe her or his experience of the videos on the Description of Experience questionnaire and in classroom discussions. The questionnaires, transcripts of the classroom discussions, and notes of my personal observations comprise the study data.

Students’ Experiences of the Video Presentation

In this section I use a cognitive appraisal process model of emotion to frame students’ experiences of the classroom video presentation that reflect student resistance. In other words, the experiences that I present in this section are my observations and students’ own stories of appraised harm, negative emotions, and struggles with emotional distress. I use critical whiteness studies and social dominance theory to connect these incidents of student resistance to behavior (i.e., cognitions, emotions & actions) that reinforces White domination and control in counselor education classrooms as well as larger society.

Experiences of Imagined Threat, Fear, and Escaping/Avoiding

Some students described fear as part of their emotional experiences of the video presentation. According to Smith and Lazarus (1993), fear is a negative or harm-related emotion commonly evoked when an event is evaluated as a danger or threat. Efforts to cope with fear “tend to express the biological urge to avoid or escape the appraised
threat” (Lazarus, 1991, p. 238). June, for example, expressed the urge to escape the video presentation in this excerpt from the classroom discussion:

June:  [Dr. Sue] made me extremely tense. I was almost a wreck after his first video. I wanted to leave.

May experienced the video presentation as a threat and explained her fear of exposing herself as a racist in this comment she made during the class discussion:

May:  I think the video is useful as thought provoking; I’m still not sure if it would engender a genuine discussion. It could be very threatening to people. . . . We don’t talk about issues of race and prejudice very easily in the world, and so I have discomfort with it because it’s unfamiliar for me. And I think as a White person I have feelings like, well, I’m going to say the wrong thing. I know I have unconscious racism. I know I have unconscious prejudice. I know something’s going to come out. So I get anxious about it.

Sharing her answers from the Description of Experience questionnaire and information about her upbringing in the class discussion, Lisa spoke about her experience of the video presentation in terms of the threat and fear it evoked:

Lisa:  [The Description of Experience questionnaire] says, “What was it like watching the video?” My first word was uncomfortable. I found it uncomfortable. Sue gave some examples of microaggressions and I put, we have to be so aware not to do this to others. . . . My parents were not very accepting of other cultures and growing up in a family that was not very accepting of other cultures, it really upset me. And it is still something we can’t discuss and I’ve tried to come at it but they are not accepting at all and very vocal in that. . . . I’m always concerned that
those things that were said [in the videos] were obviously there in my family.

Does that still come through? Despite going to university—I was a
teacher, I had to be very aware of my beliefs and my values and everything. Is it
possible that still comes through? So it’s a real concern for me because you can
say, oh, I’m not like that anymore at all and I really try not to be. But you just
don’t know. It could still, it could still be there. It’s a real concern.

Although May and Lisa both described feelings of fear as part of their
experiences, they were threatened by different things. May, who clearly acknowledged
her unconscious racism and prejudice, felt threatened by the possibility of saying
something that would expose her as a racist (lines 6-9). Lisa, on the other hand, was
threatened by the possibility of discovering that, despite her education and concerted
effort, she still holds the racist beliefs and values of her family and may be acting on them
(lines 16-22).

Both May and Lisa alluded to their compliance with the dominant narrative that
tells us that race is a taboo subject. May, for example, stated that talking about racial
issues is unfamiliar (line 5) and Lisa said that racism is something she and her family
cannot discuss (line 15). The narrative of race as a taboo subject works to maintain the
racial status quo by keeping the system of racial injustice and processes that sustain it
mystified (Tatum, 1997).

Ben discussed the threat of being labeled a racist in this excerpt from the class
discussion:

Ben: I mean, basically being called racist is probably the worst thing you can deem
anybody in society anymore. That’s worse than any racial slur you can throw at
In this excerpt, Ben expressed fear of being identified as a racist in terms of the damage it might cause an individual. In a discussion I had with a counselor student a few years back, the student also talked about the damage caused by being identified as a racist in individualistic terms. He said if fellow students in the counselor education class thought he was a racist, they wouldn’t refer clients to him in the future.

Ben’s comment, however, also alludes to group-level damage when he compares being called a racist to throwing racial slurs at “them” (lines 24-25). In other words, Ben suggests that “we” (White people) damage “them” (people of color) by throwing racial slurs at them and “they” in turn, damage “us” by throwing the term racist at us.

An interesting side note to Ben’s comment is that by saying that racism is “worse than any racial slur you can throw at them” (lines 24-25), Ben assumes to know the effects of disparaging racial terms on racial minorities and feels able to speak to that. Presuming to know what people of color experience and imposing one’s conclusions are examples of what Sue (2004a) called culturally authorized behavior of Whites that comes from feeling superior and entitled.

Johnson (2006) explained Lisa’s fear of exposing herself as a racist, May’s fear of discovering that she is a racist, and Ben’s fear of the damaging effects of being labeled a racist as stemming from new pressures on White people in society to be appropriately antiracist:

[This] fear has probably always haunted White people but has become more powerful since the society has formally rejected overt racism: The fear of being
seen, and seen through, by nonwhite people. Virtually every White person I know, including myself, carries some level of racism in our minds and hearts and bodies. In our head, we can pretend to eliminate it, but most of us know it is there. And because we are all supposed to be appropriately antiracist, we carry that lingering racism with a new kind of fear: What if nonwhite people look at us and can see it? What if they can see through us? What if they can look past our antiracist vocabulary and sense that we still don’t really know how to treat them as equals? What if they know about us what we don’t dare know about ourselves? What if they can see what we can’t even voice? (pp. 54-55)

Sue et al. (2010) discussed how White students’ fears of realizing, acknowledging, or having someone point out their racist behavior often provoke defensive behaviors aimed at avoiding discussions on race. In this next excerpt from the class discussion, May explains how she defends against the imagined emotional threat that multicultural discussions present, by using the defense mechanism of intellectualization. In other words, she avoids the emotional threat by focusing only on intellectual components of the discussion. By eliminating emotional aspects of the discussion she eliminates critical understandings of the emotional fallout from racial injustice and the havoc it wrecks on people of color.

May: My experience has been that conversations about multiculturalism can often be too intellectual and too analytical because . . . it can be such threatening material for people. I guess I have to speak for myself. I move up into my head very easily and intellectualize about things and I think that’s been my experience with multicultural classes. It’s like we sort of dance around the topic. . . . So I bring to
that conversation some anxiety. And I was going to say some defensiveness. But

[it] could be defensiveness is just a way to deal with anxiety; which is what I do! I

just realized it.

Sleeter (2002) characterized intellectualization as a strategy that people use to distance themselves from “participation in a racist system” (p. 42).

Although Lisa did not acknowledge specific coping behaviors, she defended against the threat of realizing she is a racist through the language practice of substituting the term culture for race in the classroom discussion. In an excerpt previously presented, Lisa said, “Sue gave some examples of microaggressions and I put, we have to be so aware not to do this to others” (lines 12–13). Since the microaggressions highlighted by Dr. Sue in the video were acts of racism against people of color, this must be what Lisa was talking about. Lisa, however, substituted “cultures” for “races” in her statement (lines 13-14) to the class. She said, “My parents were not very accepting of other cultures and growing up in a family that was not very accepting of other cultures, it really upset me.” Making the conversation about “not being accepting of cultures” rather than “being racist against people of color” is a way to defend against her fear of discovering she is a racist. With her choice of words, she diffuses the potential of realizing that she is a racist; she (and her classmates) can only discover that she is “not very accepting of other cultures”.

According to Johnson (2006), avoiding troubling conversations about race by calling race something else (i.e., culture) is a problem because, “if we dispense with the words, we make it impossible to talk about what’s really going on and what it has to do with us” (p. 2). In the case of Lisa, her language practice of substituting the word culture
for race not only allows her to avoid conversations about race but also to avoid the possibility of exposing her complicity with racism.

By bringing up the issue of damaging effects, intellectualizing, and substituting culture for race, Ben, May, and Lisa all worked to avoid critical discussions on race that are necessary to expose and undermine racial injustice (Johnson, 2006).

Another strategy to avoid or escape discussions about race is expressing fear and thereby putting others in the classroom on notice that they should protect the fearful student by hindering or discontinuing the activity that the student finds threatening. This strategy is based on the theory of “emotions as communications” as discussed by Brian Parkinson (1996). Going beyond the usual psychological interpretation of emotions as private experiences that can be spontaneously expressed, Parkinson explained emotions in terms of their interpersonal functionality. According to Parkinson, when we express emotion it is often for the purpose of communicating our evaluations or appraisals of an event to a particular audience.

Using the core relational themes put forth by Lazarus (1991) in his explanation of cognitive appraisal theory, Parkinson (1996) described the evaluations that are being expressed to others according to each emotion. For example, Lazarus described the core relational theme of evaluating an event as an offense and becoming angry. Using this theme, Parkinson described the communication agenda of a person who expresses anger as “Take me seriously and give me the respect I deserve!” (p. 677). Lazarus described another example of a core relational theme in which a person perceives an event as a threat and becomes afraid. Based on this relationship, Parkinson explained that the communicative agenda of someone who expresses fear is “Help/protect me!” (p.677).
Parkinson (1996) further explained that the communication agenda for each emotion is consensually accepted by both the person expressing the emotion and the audience member(s) to whom it is directed. In other words, when someone expresses emotion, it sets up a social obligation of sorts. Parkinson explained, “We get emotional in order to notify some audience that they should acknowledge one of our concerns, and behave in accordance with the conveyed evaluative position with respect to this concern” (p. 676).

According to the theory of “emotions as communications” as Parkinson (1996) explained it, when students like Lisa, May, and Ben express fear of being identified as racists in the classroom, they expect the instructor and classmates to protect them and the instructor and classmates are aware of this expectation. Many times instructors and classmates meet their perceived obligation to protect these fearful students by hindering or completely shutting down classroom discussions about race and racism. As Tatum (1997) contended, “fear-induced silence” (p. 195) about race and racism is a common occurrence in college and university classrooms. White people, the power-holders in higher education, are unlikely to oppose decisions to omit discussions that threaten to expose racial arrangements that afford them privilege.

When discussions about race and racism become taboo and are stifled or avoided, students miss the opportunity to critically evaluate the social context of racial inequity and how they participate in it. Without critical discussions that demystify the system of racial inequity and processes that sustain it, strategies to dismantle the system remain elusive and the system continues unabated (Johnson, 2006).
Sue et al. (2009) identified fears that plague some students of color when the classroom focus turns to issues of race, and described resulting avoidance behavior. In Sue et al.’s study of reactions of students of color to difficult classroom dialogues on race, participants reported feeling anxious (i.e., tense, fearful, uncomfortable) when they believed there could be negative consequences for what they say. Some of the things they worried about were: (1) having their experiences invalidated; (2) reinforcing negative stereotypes about their racial groups; and (3) being ostracized by classmates. Several of Sue et al.’s participants explained that they always assess the possibility of negative consequences before deciding whether to speak or not. One participant said:

You kind of measure the consequences, especially if you’re in a school setting, you know? So that’s really the key factor there, what the consequences are going to be if you speak out and say what’s really on your mind. (p. 187)

The perceived threat of negative consequences might help explain why Dawn, a participant in the present study who identified as Diné/Navajo, did not share her experience of the video presentation during the classroom discussion. A beginning student in the counselor program, Dawn indicated on her Description of Experience questionnaire that she was quite engaged with the video presentation. She wrote, for example, that she really liked the stories Dr. Sue told about Harvard and the airplane and she particularly liked the Black man’s response during the on-the-street interviews. She noted that she felt “a little angry about the airplane story” and wrote, “I get angry about these microaggression bursts. I get them everywhere”. She also wrote about what she observed in the video. She noticed, for example, that the Whites who were interviewed were “using nationalism to describe themselves” and she pointed out how the White
construction worker that was interviewed “stereotyped African Americans and Asian American[s].” She also noted that Native Americans were not mentioned at all in the videos.

Giving her opinion of the first video as a teaching tool, Dawn wrote:

“It’s like stepping on eggshells—a touchy subject. But being aware of these little racial slurs or behaviors will help guide around these bombs. Or even when we hit it, [guide us in] how to nurse ourselves, and protect ourselves from other bombs.

Dawn reacted very positively to the second video on the questionnaire. She wrote, “I like it. Very good.”

According to Lazarus (1991), her positive appraisal of the video presentation represents recognition of its benefit for her personally or a group she associates with. Perhaps she considered the on-the-street interviews to be accurate representations of racial realities that aren’t often voiced. She mentioned how the first video was helpful in learning how to protect against and nurse the wounds of racism (lines 35-37).

The classroom discussion of students’ experiences in which Dawn participated occurred as follows: one student started by talking about her experience, and then the student to her left shared her experience, and it continued like this around the room. In general, students who spoke before Dawn expressed only negative appraisals of the video and negative emotions. I, as the researcher, did not express any judgment of their experiences but only listened and, in a couple of instances, asked for clarification of something they said. When it was Dawn’s turn to speak, she had little reason to think that she would receive support for any positive comments she might make about the videos.
When Dawn discussed her experience of the videos in the classroom, she did not mention any of the reactions she described in the questionnaire. Instead, she gave the impression that she had paid little attention to the video.

Dawn: I was bored. The room was hot. So I wasn’t really paying attention; just here and there. . . . I was really bored and got lost.

Evonne: The room was hot and it wasn’t a good video for you.

Dawn: Yeah. [Laughter.] It’s kind of hot in here and there’s a camera back there. I keep looking at it, looking at it. . . . It was kinda boring. Honestly, I was just like la-a-a-a-a-a.

Like the participants in the study by Sue et al. (2009), Dawn may have considered the possible consequences of sharing the experiences she described in the questionnaire with her peers in the classroom and decided it was too risky. By saying that the room was so hot that she did not notice too much about the video (lines 38-39), Dawn avoided the threat of several negative consequences. By remaining silent, she avoided being castigated by any of her classmates for something she said. If she had said, for example, that she liked the videos, this may have upset the White students in the class who considered the information in the video to be threatening or accusatory. On the other hand, if she said she disagreed with Dr. Sue or contradicted the information in the videos, her classmates of color may have become angry with her for not supporting Dr. Sue in his attempt to promote a social justice agenda. According to Neuliep (2012), Native Americans represent collectivistic cultural groups in which the needs of the group take precedence over individual needs and maintaining group harmony is a priority. Being
Diné, Dawn may have felt that not sharing her reactions to the video was the best way to maintain harmony among students in the classroom.

Dawn’s response also eliminated the possibility of reinforcing negative stereotypes of her group. Saying that she felt angry during the airplane story, for example, might have evoked the stereotype of the angry Native American who has an axe to grind with White people such as the flight attendant in the video. Finally, choosing not to talk about her experience of the videos protected Dawn from having her experience invalidated by her White classmates.

Ella, a Native American student in the final stages of the program, said she would not have participated in a classroom discussion of the videos when she first started in the program. She made this point in the following excerpt from the class discussion where she talked about using the video presentation as a tool to teach counseling students about race and ethnicity.

Ella: I think it should probably be used for students who are mid-way through the program and then at the end again maybe as a refresher course of some sort. . . . I think when you’re beginning, you have a lot of defenses, and . . . I think that is too much of a sensitive issue to start at the very beginning. I mean I think it can be addressed, but not as this intense. Because I know my multicultural class in the middle of the program was very intense because we started looking at White privilege, Christian privilege, acculturation levels. For me, intergenerational trauma from my ancestors being . . . placed on reservations, I mean there is a lot of emotional impact. So I don’t think beginning students would be open to that because their guards would be up. You know there’d be too many defenses. . . . I
think, for me, at least, I mean sitting back now, thinking about my first several classes, I didn’t know what I was doing. It’s finding that grounding and that footing. As a beginning graduate student, until you really get the rhythm of things and then your defenses do go down once you feel like, ok, I’m in a safe environment. I can accomplish this! I can do this! Then I think it is great to then bring in the multicultural aspect.

Evonne: [You] would be uncomfortable at the beginning.

Ella: I think so, because I could say from my personal experience, I wouldn’t have said a word about it. I mean . . . I can see it. I’ve seen it happen. It happened to me, and it has happened to my loved ones, friends. And it makes me angry. But that is too much anger to open in an academic environment.

Students of color just starting in the counselor education program were not the only students to avoid the classroom discussion. Celia, an advanced student who racially identified as Native American, avoided a discussion about race by walking out of the room immediately before the classroom discussion of the video began. I assumed she was only going to get a beverage or run to the restroom like a couple of other students had done; but unlike the other students, she never came back. Comments she wrote on her Description of Experience questionnaire indicated that she anticipated that a discussion about race led by me, a White person who probably has internalized White perspectives, would be stressful and something she wanted to avoid.

Celia wrote several comments about the video presentation on her Description of Experience sheets. She noted, for example, that during the videos she thought about her own experiences with racial microaggressions and the “many stereotypes held against the
Native American population.” As evidenced in the following excerpts from her Description of Experience sheets, Celia also thought about what she considered to be her responsibility to educate others who are ignorant of racial issues.

On the sheet: What was it like watching the video?
Celia wrote: Made me look at demographics of other participants and wondered if they had any experiences like that of [Dr. Sue].

On the Sheet: How did you feel during the video?
Celia wrote: Felt that what he [Dr. Sue] was talking about had some truth to it.

On the sheet: What thoughts went through your mind during the video?
Celia wrote: I wondered if the Whites in our room agreed with the statements or if they disagreed. What went through their thoughts as they watched the video?

On the sheet: What personal beliefs underlie these thoughts?
Celia wrote: My personal belief is that I am aware of this challenge but I must also face these challenges to educate those who are ignorant of their own stereotypes or biases.

From these comments, it appears that Celia expected that the White students in class might come from a place of ignorance of their biases and stereotypes and disagree with her assessment of the videos. Knowing that I, a White person who may also be unaware of her White mindset would be in charge, Celia may have anticipated an unpleasant discussion of the video. She may have expected, for instance, that I and the other White students would impose an ideology episteme of White supremacy on her and the other students of color to make sense of the video. In this case, she would have the
choice of enduring it, trying to present her perspective of understanding which may be
disaffirmed, or leaving. Leaving may have been the most appealing choice.

In a study of reactions by students of color to difficult racial dialogues, Sue et al.
(2009) reported that:

Participants noted that these racial dialogues were “exhausting,” “sucks [them]
dry,” and “unfair” having to “constantly be the one to keep on stepping up to the
plate to educate people.” One participant noted, . . . I also think it is very
exhausting to constantly be the teacher . . . to constantly stand up and preach and
be singled out just based on your own life experiences. (p. 188)

If Celia had anticipated an experience similar to what the students in Sue et al.’s study
described, she had reason enough to escape the classroom discussion.

A final example of contributions made by students of color to classroom
discussions was highlighted by Will in this excerpt from the class discussion.

Will: In one of my counseling classes I was teamed up with my partner. My partner
was a different minority. And one of the things . . . she said [is] I don’t feel
comfortable expressing myself with other people in the counseling program
because I speak funny and I talk differently and I don’t think they respect what I
say. And then I remember I heard it and I was like, you’re kidding me. And I was
like, I feel comfortable talking to everybody else. But it was from her
perspective that she didn’t feel comfortable.

In describing her experience in the counseling program, Will’s classmate who is a
“different minority” (line 79) said she felt uncomfortable and disrespected (lines 79-82).

According to scholars (Sue and Sue, 2013; Tatum, 1997), this is a typical experience for
students of color in White dominated learning institutions. Typically, only Standard English and thinking that reflects dominant White experiences are respected and rewarded in these institutions; and beliefs in nonwhite inferiority that prevail in larger society are also prevalent on campus.

When students of color have experiences that contradict White racial narratives but avoid discussing them because of imagined threats of negative consequences, they may be reinforcing whiteness in at least two ways. First, they allow predominant narratives representing White experiences and serving White goals to go unchallenged. Second, their silence is often misinterpreted as support for the beliefs and values reflected in the predominant narratives. Singleton and Linton (2006) explained:

- Many beliefs concerning race are based on misconceptions and half-truths. This can occur when a member of one race believes that a member of another race agrees with or supports her simply because the other person said nothing. Without speaking his truth, the . . . [person] who has remained silent has allowed his own beliefs or opinions to be misinterpreted or misrepresented. (p. 61)

According to Hitchcock (2002), people in dominant cultural groups often take a universal stance. “This stance is one in which we purport to speak for all of humanity. . . . In the United States our ‘universal’ point of view that claims to speak for everyone is often a White American point of view” (p. 32). According to Hitchcock, when this view goes unchallenged, it appears to be warranted.

It is important to recognize the complexity of reasons that students of color may choose not to contradict dominant group perspectives. In addition to the imagined threat posed by powerful Whites who expect compliance with standardized scripts, students of
color may not challenge dominant narratives because these narratives represent an authentic reflection of their experiences. Students of color, for example, may have been socialized into and internalized White supremacist ideology and narratives (Meyers, 2005).

Having discussed avoidance of race-related discussions as support for White hegemony and dominance, I now turn to another form of support: attacking the person who talks about racial injustice to undermine what she or he is saying.

*Experiences of Imagined Offense, Anger, and Attacking*

In describing their experiences of the video presentation, some students mentioned becoming angry. Lazarus (1991) explained that anger is triggered when an event is interpreted as an offense against oneself or a group with which one identifies. Strategies to cope with angry feelings tend to reflect the biological link to anger which is “attack on the agent held to be blameworthy for the offense” (p. 226).

Jensen (2005) described two types of anger that result when people interpret a discussion of social injustice as offensive: “righteous anger” and “self-righteous anger”. According to Jensen, righteous anger

[is] rooted in a commitment to justice. . . . [It is the] kind of anger that comes from desperation when we realize how powerful an oppressive system is, how deep are the injuries it causes, how destructive it is to everyone’s lives including the privileged. (p. 58)

Similarly, Zembylas (2007) used the term “moral anger” to describe anger that is evoked by a perceived injustice and motivates opposition to that injustice.
An important aspect that distinguishes moral anger from other kinds of anger is the notion of someone becoming angry as a witness of gross violations of justice, humanity and dignity; in other words, moral anger is what motivates someone to oppose injustice. (p.16)

A second type of anger that can be triggered by a discussion of social injustice is self-righteous anger. This type of anger, according to Jensen (2005), comes from interpreting an event as offensive because it contradicts proclamations of one’s own righteousness. In other words, the angry person is convinced that her or his thoughts, views, and conclusions are superior to those of other people. This provides justification for disregarding contradicting opinions and perspectives. Students in the study who believed in the rightfulness of their interpretations of Dr. Sue’s experiences in the video, for example, expressed irritation and anger at being subjected to Dr. Sue’s differing interpretation of events.

Confidence in one’s own righteousness and intolerance of the behavior and rights of others is often culturally authorized for members of dominant groups. Sue (2004a) explained, for example, that people who possess or adhere to characteristics of White culture are validated in the United States, a society based on White cultural norms and White supremacy. “This validation in society makes them feel special, chosen, and entitled” (p. 765) and these feelings of superiority often lead to the belief that their way of seeing and doing things is not just one of many possible ways, it is the “right way”. This thinking, according to Sue, blocks their abilities and willingness to understand and empathize with other people’s differing perspectives or life experiences. Students in the present study, for example, were quick to judge the opinions expressed by Dr. Sue and the
people of color that he interviewed as unwarranted assumptions, untruths, and aggressions against White people.

Using Parkinson’s (1996) theory of “emotions as communications”, the communication agenda of a person who expresses anger is “Take me seriously and give me the respect I deserve!” (p. 677). A person who experiences self-righteous anger believes her or his interpretation of an event is superior to that of others and considers people’s differing accounts of the event as offensive untruths. When a person expresses self-righteous anger, the communication agenda of that person is give me the respect of confirming that I am correct.

Feelings of superiority and entitlement also lead privileged members of society to believe they deserve the privilege that systems of advantage and oppression afford them, and they are offended and angered by efforts to undermine their sense of self worth (Sue, 2004a). Merely bringing up race can be considered offensive to someone who is locked in an ideology episteme of White supremacy. In the class discussion, for example, Ben described race-related reports in the media as offensive acts of shoving something down his throat and Dr. Sue’s interviews about what it means to be White as offensive accusations.

Ben: I understand where I think the one gentleman [that Dr. Sue interviewed] was coming from when he was talking about well, they accuse us of this and accuse us of this. And I mean that’s what’s literally pounded down our throat[s] all over the media and everything is that, well, there was a race hate crime and all this.

Coping with righteous anger evoked by discussions of racial injustice usually entails attacking the structures and sources of the injustice. Coping with self-righteous
anger, on the other hand, often entails attacking the person or persons who discuss and thereby threaten to undermine racial arrangements in society that advantage dominant racial groups (Sue, 2003). In the present study, for example, some students coped with self-righteous anger evoked by the video presentation with verbal attacks on Dr. Sue that called his credibility into question.

Experience of Moral Anger

Ella described the moral anger she experienced in response to what she considered unjust treatment of Dr. Sue and other racial minorities. The event in the video that triggered Ella’s anger was when Dr. Sue was discredited. In this part of the video, Dr. Sue (2007) explained that all the airline passengers turned around to look at what was going on during the dialogue between him and the flight attendant. Dr. Sue said, “I know what is going on. All the passengers are imputing to me that I’m paranoid and I’m oversensitive and ‘isn’t this typical of people of color raising a fuss’ ” (18 min.). He goes on to say that, “many of us, as people of color, when we raise these issues of race . . . we are discredited. In fact, our responses are often times pathologized as indicative of something wrong with us” (18 min.). In the following excerpt, Ella described the emotional impact this part of the video had for her.

Ella: I agreed with his [Dr. Sue’s] basic assumptions and definitions of microaggressions. I felt some anger, frustration and discomfort and the word ‘discredited’ really resonated with me because he talked about how he was discredited in his anger when he was told to sit in the back. . . . Because we get, because minorities get discredited. . . . I have been impacted by microaggressions. I have been discriminated against in situations and again, like
discredited—that word. You know, “You are blowing it out of proportion”.

“You are being too sensitive”. . . . I can see it, I’ve seen it happen, it happened to me, and it has happened to my loved ones, friends. And it makes me angry. . . .

Evonne: It’s like reliving it to hear someone else talk about it.

Ella: Yeah.

In their study of students’ experiences of classroom dialogues on race, Sue et al. (2009) gave some reasons that students of color get incensed (i.e., angry, annoyed, frustrated) that might shed light on Ella’s experience. First, they become angry when they believe that their integrity is being assailed. Ella’s comment, “because we get, because minorities get discredited” (lines 92-93) indicates that she identifies with minority group members like Dr. Sue who was demeaned and “discredited in his anger when he was told to sit in the back” (line 92).

Sue et al. (2009) also found that students of color were angered when the classroom dialogues evoked memories of being victimized by racism and caused them to relive the negative emotions associated with those memories. Part of Ella’s experience was recalling incidents when she, her friends and her loved ones were discredited. In recalling these incidents, she likely reexperienced some of the anger evoked by those incidences.

Experience of Self-Righteous Anger

Aileen described self-righteous anger as part of her experience of the videos. In the following excerpt from the class discussion, Aileen judged Dr. Sue’s perspective of the airplane incident as an offence that made her angry rather than understanding it as a
valid point of view emanating from a perspective and life experience that differed from her own.

Aileen: And I actually didn’t even think about the flight attendant’s point of view. . . like until now. I mean it made me really angry listening to it from Sue’s point of view.

Ben also described self-righteous anger as part of his experience of the video presentation. In the following excerpt from the class discussion, Ben considered his assumptions about the incidents in the video to be superior and was offended and angered by Dr. Sue’s accounts which he judged to be offensive distortions of the truth.

Ben: Maybe as a discussion piece, I can see using this video. But as a teaching tool . . . I’d be a little less apt, just because that particular . . . narrator, whatever, he makes a LOT of assumptions that I think aren’t necessarily true. And . . . that, I mean quite frankly pissed me the hell off. Just especially the first video; that he automatically assumed the stewardess was racist— that that was why they were moved. It couldn’t be they were having an in-depth discussion and she heard it and wanted to move them away. It couldn’t be anything else. He automatically assumed it.

With this comment, Ben not only described his anger, he also attacked Dr. Sue by accusing him of “automatically assuming the stewardess was racist” (line 107). A response on Ben’s Description of Experience sheet sheds light on the thinking that led to his accusation.

On the sheet: What thoughts went through your mind during the video?
Ben wrote: I . . . think when people are a minority, they jump to conclusions that race is the reason for being mistreated.

By thinking that people who are racial minorities (i.e., Dr. Sue) “jump to conclusions that race is the reason for being mistreated” (lines 112-113), Ben demeans people of color and justifies his disregard for their perspectives and interpretations of race-related experiences.

In the next statement, Ben continued to demean Dr. Sue and others who say members of the dominant White group are racist, by saying that they are exhibiting pathological behavior that counseling professionals need to recognize and address.

Ben: You say [we need to] validate . . . [client’s] feelings. What happens, I mean, when it starts becoming dysfunctional or starts becoming a problem? As counselors that is our job to help them through that. And if their reality is that everybody is racist, that all White people are racist, that is something that becomes a problem.

Ben’s claim that a person who thinks all White people are racists is pathological is an example of a self righteous belief that denies social reality. Johnson (2006) explained:

It is tempting for members of dominant groups to suppose they could be raised in a society organized around privilege and participate in it day after day without being touched by it on a personal level. But it’s a dream that, for everyone else, is a nightmare of denial. There is no way for a member of a dominant group to escape that kind of immersion unscathed. Nobody is the exception who miraculously doesn’t internalize any of the negative ideas, attitudes, or images that pour in a steady stream from the surrounding culture and make privilege and
oppression happen as they do. . . . The assumption that some racism resides in every white person, for example, is a reasonable one in this society. . . .To assume otherwise is to engage in wishful thinking and live in a world that doesn’t exist.

(p. 107)

In my many classes and workshops addressing race, I have found the most formidable challenge is getting White students to acknowledge the evitable influence of the White supremacist context of their lives.

Ben made several other comments in the classroom discussion that were additional affronts to Dr. Sue. In the following excerpt, for example, he suggested that Dr. Sue was not acting like someone with a PhD is expected to act.

Ben: Someone who is, I’m sorry, a PhD, you’d think he would at least [ask], “Why do I have to move?” You know, just simple questions, instead of assuming.

After suggesting that Dr. Sue was not a legitimate PhD, Ben went further to undermine his professional credibility. In the next excerpt, Ben disparaged Dr. Sue’s ability and ethics as a researcher:

Ben: Well, I mean just a lot of generalize-ability, too, that he [Dr. Sue] is putting out there. Saying, well these are the points that I found . . . that White people have. You know, he brought . . . four different interviews basically, and said, “Well, this is the way White people are or at least the way people view em”. And to me, I mean that is not legitimate on any level. I mean . . . if I go walk around to people, well, I’ll eventually find a racist idiot who is going to say something boneheaded and I can use that in my [study].
Ben’s suggestion that Dr. Sue is inappropriate might be based on the common belief held by White people that they are the only ones who can be legitimate PhDs or researchers. In a discussion of feelings based on positional arrangement of racial groups, Blumer (1958) explained that members of the dominant group feel they have exclusive rights to certain prestigious jobs, occupations, or professions.

June also leveled criticism at Dr. Sue in the class discussion. In the following excerpt, she suggested that he is too emotional to be an effective educator.

June: I really like the whole concept of microaggression. I thought it was fascinating. I think that whole issue should be brought up early in the program — just the whole issue of microaggression and what that means. I’m not sure Sue should be the one to present it because he is quite emotional. I mean, maybe if he had just like a little lecture series on it, without all the other stuff.

In this comment, Lucy expressed a belief in White superiority by suggesting that controlled emotion, a hallmark of White culture (Katz, 1985), is required behavior for academics (lines 130-131). Lucy also expressed criticism of Dr. Sue as a researcher in the class discussion:

Lucy: I thought that the researcher [Dr. Sue] came across extremely biased and that hurts my personal opinion of his relevance and validity.

Why do students like Ben, June, and Lucy feel entitled to criticize Dr. Sue’s abilities as an educator and researcher? According to Stanley (2007), they are authorized by “a master narrative operating in academia that often defines and limits what is valued as scholarship and who is entitled to create scholarship” (p. 14). Like academic institutions themselves, the master narrative in academia reflects White values and
beliefs. For instance, control of emotions or a detached communication style is valued among Euro-Americans and in the educational institutions they dominate; while an attached style of communication is condemned (Katz, 1985). Stringer and Cassidy (2009) provided explanations of attached and detached communication:

Attached (emotive) Communication is carried out with feeling and emotion. Issues are discussed with a degree of passion and commitment. Communication is very expressive. Sharing one’s values and feelings about the issues is highly valued. Detached (non-emotive) Communication is carried out in a calm and impersonal manner. This is equated with objectivity, which is valued. Highly expressive, emotive, and engaged communication is inappropriate because this is seen as personalizing the issues and as biased. (p. 105)

The attached style of communication that Dr. Sue demonstrated is not authorized by the White dominated narrative in academia and not valued by White-minded students like Ben, June, and Lucy who uncritically endorse this narrative.

Rather than attacking Dr. Sue specifically, April coped with her anger by disparaging people of color in general. The part of the video presentation that activated April’s anger was Dr. Sue’s report on what the people of color said about what it means to be White. As indicated in the following comment, she judged the perspectives given by the interviewees of color as insensitive, unfair, and offensive rather than respecting the legitimacy of their views and trying to understand them. In the following excerpt from the class discussion, April portrays people of color as insensitive aggressors who say mean things about White people.
April: The second video really pissed me off. . . . Like all the stories are, were just so sucky. . . . It was just like I think that’s exactly why people don’t want to say that they are White because it has become like portrayed as insensitive. . . . The stories that were given, after that, it’s like, well of course . . . I don’t want to say I’m White because . . . so many of these other cultures and . . . races . . . talking about how horrible and unaware White people are. . . . If I, as an individual, had not worked to challenge what it means to be White to me I feel sure I would have left feeling, great! No matter what I try, I’m a sucking White person without an identity.

In April’s comment, which is a reflection of her self-righteous anger, April judges the opinions expressed by people of the color as offenses toward White people. Another theme reflected in her comment is the inferiority of people of color. She paints an unflattering picture of people of color as aggressive and insulting toward Whites whom she portrayed as innocent victims of their wrath.

Susie’s attack on racial minorities was in story form. During the classroom discussion, Susie recounted an incident which also fuels the stereotype of racial minorities as angry and aggressive toward Whites.

Susie: So I was at a public middle school here in town; I was 12 and had a crush on a guy whose skin color was black. So it was discovered that I had this crush. So, I was jumped in the bathroom by these three girls whose skin color was also Black. It totally bewildered me. And I can remember turning to them and saying, “Are you racist?” And that was the first time I remember ever using that word. And my, the
fear, and they threatened to beat me up on a regular basis until my parents pulled me and put me in a Catholic school.

Susie’s story of the incident reveals patterns of thought reflecting a White mindset. First, she portrays the Black girls as angry aggressors and herself as the White victim who is innocent in racial matters. She also glossed over issues of power relations between White and African American students by describing the girls in the bathroom and the guy she had a crush on only as having black skin (lines 145 and 146).

Another expression of the ideology of inferiority of people of color is evident in the following comment by Rose in which she describes people of color as physically aggressive and speculates that this may be the reason why people are afraid to openly discuss race.

Rose: I’ve read a lot of Sue’s stuff, I think he is really brilliant, but I think we still dance around culture and differences in so many realms. . . . And I don’t understand why it can’t be more, more open. . . . What’s the fear around the strong emotion? Why can’t we just feel the emotion and express it? You know? Is it partly because of some of the physical aggression and that, that minorities have? Is that the fear? I don’t know.

In this comment, Rose fails to consider the fact that Whites often want to avoid discussions that expose a system of White advantage. She suggests instead that people of color, who pose a threat when emotions are evoked, are the reason that Whites don’t talk about race.
Finally, in the following excerpt from the class discussion, Pamela reinforced the notion of White superiority and the inferiority of Hispanics when she equates being successful with transitioning out of the Hispanic culture to the White culture.

Pamela: So I’m half White and half Hispanic. And then just saying Hispanic is, because some people are like, “Oh, you shouldn’t say that. You should say this and that and that.” And I don’t know what I’m supposed to say. My mom refers to herself as Hispanic so that’s why I do. But it’s been hard for me because my name is [Olson]. It’s White. My dad is [White]. You know my whole dad’s side of the family is who I spend most of my time with... so that’s how I identified myself, you know, growing up. ... People just think I’m White. ... And the thing is I wish like I could express my Hispanic side more but my mom doesn’t even. Because she’s, you know, she is very successful, you know, went to school, had a job, you know, has my dad’s last name and everything. And so, it’s like she too was kind of transforming more to the White culture, so that’s what I’ve always identified more with.

In this comment, Pamela expressed the theme of White superiority by saying that she and her successful mother do not express their Hispanic sides (line 162-165) and associating going to school, having a job, and being successful with the White culture rather than Hispanic culture (lines 165-167).

Sue (2003) explained that “by discrediting the communicator, the information and assertions made by...[the communicator] are invalidated” (p. 29). Students who coped with their anger by denigrating Dr. Sue or people of color in general or the cultures of people of color casted doubt on the information about racism and the toll it takes on
people of color that Dr. Sue presented. This invalidation of the information and conclusions Dr. Sue presented, leaves the dominant narrative of “equality and justice for all” unchallenged and the system of White hegemony it rationalizes intact.

In the next subsection, I discuss another dynamic of support for White hegemony and dominance in the classroom and beyond which consists of becoming sad about racial injustice and doing nothing about it.

**Experiences of Imagined Loss, Sadness, and Inaction**

Some students described feelings of sadness as part of their experiences of the video presentation. According to Lazarus (1991), sadness is usually associated with the appraisal of something as “an irrevocable loss; in other words, there is a sense of helplessness about restoration of the loss” (p. 248). In sadness, the only clear action tendency reflected in coping strategies is inactivity. Lazarus explained that since the eliciting condition of sadness is irrevocable loss, “there is indeed nothing against which to mobilize” (p. 251). In agreement, Tatum (1997) described the act of despairing about something as “an act of resignation” (p. xi).

Some students’ expressed a loss of hope and feelings of sadness when describing their experience of the video presentation. Lisa, for example, made the following comment in the class discussion:

Lisa: “My next comment [on the questionnaire] was, ‘How did you feel during the video?’ I put ‘sad’ because despite learning [about] a certain microaggression, it still continues”.

In this comment, Lisa justified her resignation to racism by suggesting that it is inevitable even when someone endeavors to become knowledgeable about it.
Faith described hopelessness as part of her experience of the videos. From her perspective, the video presentation caused her to lose hope that the problem of racism could ever be solved because the video only described the reality of racism and not ways to address it. The following excerpt is from Faith’s Description of Experience sheet:

On the sheet: How did you feel during the video?

Faith wrote: Hopeless. I learned about the cognitive and behavioral components of RMA [racial microaggressions] but not examples or tools to change it as a potential counselor.

Faith also described her experience of hopelessness in the classroom discussion.

Faith: I had a sense kind of like hopelessness because constantly negative, negative, negative versus ‘this is what it is’ and maybe some application like ‘this is how we could address this differently’. So I kind of walked away with like, ‘oh, this is hopeless!’

Tatum (1997) described despairing about racism and becoming resigned to it, as an excuse to do nothing about it. By despairing about continuing racism and the futility of learning about it, Lisa excused herself from the responsibility of learning more and seeing how she could become part of the solution. In the same way, Faith opted out of her responsibility to address the problem of racism by becoming despaired and disempowered because the video provided no solutions to the problem.

Fran also described sadness as part of her experience of the video presentation on her Description of Experience questionnaire.

On the sheet: How did you feel during the video?
Fran wrote: I felt a little bit sad about the fact that White people (some of them) don’t feel privileged or realize what [it] really is like to be White.

She also expressed her despair over White people’s lack of awareness in this excerpt from class discussion:

Fran: I had a different experience with the video. I personally liked it. Um, I think, uh, um, I’m Mexican. And there are so many things I want to say. But, so I am married to a White person and the first time I brought the White privilege concept up to my husband’s aunt, who is White, she still had the same reaction as these White people that he [Dr. Sue] interviewed. Like, “What are you talking about?” I mean, right away defensive. Sort of like . . . “I don’t see myself as being racist.” . . . So my reaction [during the video] was also, so, here we go again. Sort of like White people not really seeing it, feeling, expressing that they carry these invisible tools [of White advantage] with them wherever they go.

By being sad about White people’s lack of awareness, Fran became resigned to it and opts out of doing the difficult work of facilitating White people’s acknowledgement of their advantage.

When students appraise racism and White people’s denial of privilege as hopeless situations, they are rationalizing the racial status quo. Furthermore, their inaction makes them complicit with the very racist conditions they are sad about. Tatum (1997) insists that we need not become resigned to racism because we all have a sphere of influence in which we can act to effectively promote antiracism.

In the same way that becoming resigned to racial injustice and doing nothing about it ensures that it will continue, getting off the hook for racial injustice also ensures
its continuance. In the following section, I discuss ways that people attempt to escape responsibility for racism.

_Experience of Imagined Blame, Guilt, and Avoiding Responsibility_

Some students described guilty feelings as part of their experience of the video presentation. Guilt, according to Lazarus (1991), is linked to blaming oneself or the group one identifies with for an event. Lazarus explained that we feel guilty when we believe that we or our group has “acted in a morally deficient way, all the more so if in so doing we have wronged or harmed an innocent other” (p. 240). Lazarus identified the universal action tendency evoked by guilt as making reparation for the harm done by oneself or one’s group. He was quick to add, however, that this universal action tendency is often undercut by emotion-focused strategies aimed at exonerating oneself or one’s group from blame. Johnson (2006) found that people who feel guilty about someone else’s misery usually respond by trying to get themselves or their respective groups off the hook for it.

Lisa was one of the students who mentioned guilt in describing her experience of the video presentation.

On the sheet: What is your opinion of the video as a tool to teach counseling students about ethnicity and race?

Lisa wrote: I think it perpetuates “White guilt”.

Rose described the wrongdoings of White people and her feelings of guilt that were activated by the videos in the following excerpt from the class discussion.

Rose: I think of our world that we have now and I think microaggression for me personally is not subtle. I think . . . about the President right now and what’s happening in our country. We have an Afro-American president, and this base
group of White people are just angry and doing all these bizarre things. “He’s not a president!” This hateful kind of montage that comes up around race has just resurfaced and come to this point where . . . the struggle for me is dealing with a sense of White guilt. Because I feel like, at times, I think to myself, White people suck. . . . I took a Native American class and I mean I got the deal in the textbooks growing up what that was about. But then when you take a real history of how bad it happened, how bad it was, and how insidious and how direct— it was so and not so— and . . . it’s just painful for me to watch that. And I have a kind of shame around America, the United States as a country.

Jensen (2005) made an observation about White people’s discussion of guilt that is particularly relevant to Rose’s comment. According to Jensen, even though guilt implies responsibility, White individuals commonly say they feel guilty about things they are not responsible for (i.e., historical acts of racism; White conservative’s behavior). Things they are responsible for (i.e., racist acts they have committed, not doing enough to change the racist system) are not as likely to be mentioned.

Whiteness scholars have identified many of the strategies that people with skin color privilege use to mask their responsibility for and complicity with racism and the misery it causes people of color. In general, these strategies reflect denial, minimization and avoidance behavior.

According to Johnson (2006), one of the easiest ways to escape responsibility for something “is to deny that it exists in the first place” (p. 108). Another way is “acknowledging that it exists but then claiming that it doesn’t amount to much” (p. 109).
Johnson explained that these closely related strategies let people off the hook because they cannot be blamed for something that does not exist or is not a problem.

One strategy of denial that was used by some students to avoid blame for racism is seeing people of color as better off than Whites. Johnson (2006) explained that when the subject of racism comes up, a White person demonstrating this form of denial may “counter with a list of Black ‘advantages,’ as if weighing them in the balance against her [or his] privileged position as a white [person]” (p. 109). Johnson explained that this form of denial rests on the fallacy that envy and privilege cannot exist side by side.

A second form of denial is claiming reverse racism or, as Johnson (2006) put it, “saying that affirmative action has actually turned the tables — if anyone is in trouble now, it’s whites” (p. 109). Parker and Chambers (2005) contended that reverse racism is a misnomer stemming from a false notion of racism. They claimed that when White people say they are victims of reverse racism, they are failing to acknowledge racism as a societal system of racial oppression carried out in White dominated educational, corporate, and legal institutions. This is to say that they ignore the system of oppression that effectively advantages White people while degrading the life chances of people of color.

Susie demonstrated the strategies of “claiming reverse racism” and “saying that people of color are better off” in the classroom discussion. In the following excerpt, when Fran brought up the subjects of racism against racial minorities and Whites denying their privilege, Susie got Whites off the hook by expressing envy of people of color who, according to Susie, have easier access to jobs and scholarships and more beautiful skin tones.
Fran: I just want to say about my experience about this video. So my reaction was so
here we go again. Sort of like White people not really seeing it, feeling,
expressing that they carry these invisible tools [of advantage] with them wherever
they go. And minorities, and I got to be truly thankful . . . that I have never felt
discriminated against or treated unequal, but I have seen it. And I know a lot of
people that have been discriminated against because they are minorities. So I do
believe in this.

Susie: I love you said an invisible tool that you carry with you, because growing up . . .
in the Southwest and being White, I have always been very jealous, VERY
jealous of anyone who had, who was Mexican, Hispanic, Black, because they
got the scholarships over me. They got the jobs over me.

Ben: Yeah!

Susie: And I always . . . felt that same thing you just said. I thought they have this
invisible . . . tool of this beautiful skin and this thing that stands out that says I
am different. And I don’t have anything. I am the white crayon in the box that no
one wants. What do you color with a white crayon? I remember thinking that in
elementary school and feeling so envious inside. And it’s so fascinating that you
. . . have the same thing coming from your culture.

Susie’s tone is what Johnson (2006) called “a mixture of longing and resentment, as if
she feels put upon to have to consider white privilege for even a moment when she feels
such a lack in her own life” (p. 109-110).

Going back to Fran’s previous comment (lines 208-214), Fran said, “I have never
felt discriminated against or treated unequal, but I have seen it. And I know a lot of
people that have been discriminated against because they are minorities. So I do believe in this” (lines 210-213). On her demographic sheet, Fran, who is in her middle 30s, indicated that she was born in Mexico and moved to the United States when she was teenager. When she participated in the class discussion, I noticed that she spoke English with a distinct Mexican accent. Given the vast amount of evidence indicating that people who speak with Mexican accents in the United States routinely face ridicule, condescension and outright hostility (Lippi-Green, 1997), I was surprised to hear Fran say that although she has seen discrimination against other minorities, she has never felt personally that she was being discriminated against.

Cose (2011) offered an explanation for Fran’s claim. He described cases where racial minority individuals see racism as a barrier for others but not themselves as “a self-survival kind of bias” (p. 14). Rather than being devastated by the thought that they are living in a world where the deck is stacked against them and there is nothing they can do about it, these individuals find reasons other than racism to explain situations in their own lives where racism might be implicated. In this way, according to Cose, racial minority individuals empower themselves with the thought that all options are open to them rather than letting racism rule their lives and limit their possibilities. It is possible that by refusing to acknowledge racism in her own life, Fran was employing this strategy of psychological self-survival.

After Susie described her jealousy of people of color (lines 215-217) and referred to herself as a White crayon in the box that no one wanted (lines 221-222), Ben took up the argument of White victimization.
Ben: And I . . . get frustrated. Like . . . I agree with you as far as the topic, and the understanding that . . . should be part of it more than it is now. But as far as that, I don’t see being White as an invisible tool. I see there’s more tools to help minorities today than there ever will be to help White people. . . . If you go try and find an Anglo scholarship, if you’re lucky you might find one. And they just don’t exist.

Ben also commented on how people of color are better off than Whites because they get to freely express racial pride.

Ben: You cannot celebrate the fact that you are White. You can’t! Or it’s all of a sudden you’re deemed a racist. But . . . the other people can walk around in Brown pride shirts, Indian pride shirts, Black pride, all these different things. The big . . . fist that’s up and all that stuff. They can do all that. But if we challenge it, we say anything, then it’s offensive. Nope, you’re a racist!

Ben’s comments suggesting that the scarcity of Anglo scholarships and lack of opportunity to express White racial pride are unfair are based on the myth that “fair treatment means equal treatment”. The idea expressed by this myth ignores the greater wealth of Whites and superior images of White people that are consequences of our racist society. It also ignores the fairness of trying to level the playing field by offering scholarships to racial minority students and fails to acknowledge that promoting positivity in the White group within a White supremacist society is unnecessary.

In the next excerpt, Ben minimizes racism and the need for affirmative action by employing another strategy described by Johnson (2006): saying that racism is no longer a problem.
Ben: I am . . . not trying to deny . . . that there was a time and a place [for affirmative
action] and a need for it at the time. I think that need is coming, going down. I . .
. am not saying . . . it isn’t needed at all. But I am just saying that I think it’s not
as big as a problem as it was when . . . everything was segregated. In the 70s . .
[and] before the 70s . . . there were people legitimately going out of their way to
not give people jobs and cutting their legs off from under them. That . . . was a
whole other era.

In the next excerpt, Fran challenged Ben’s contention that racism is no longer a
problem by saying she has personally witnessed racism against minorities and pointing
out that Whites are still advantaged in employment and education. In response, Ben
exonerated Whites by employing another strategy of denial that Johnson (2006) referred
to as: “call it something else” (p. 111). Ben denied the racism and White advantage Fran
discussed by calling them matters of money and morally responsible behavior that
involves not firing people just because they are old.

Fran: When you go and look at all the facts, like, for instance, people getting
education, how many and what’s the percentage of Whites getting that kind of
education versus the rest? You’ll see the White people still are on the top.

Ben: Yeah, and I agree, but now you are talking about historical issues. With, now it
is coming down to money. Now it’s not necessarily a race issue per se. It
stemmed from the race issue that happened 40, 20, 30, 40, 50 years ago, but now
it’s about money. I don’t think the people that are involved in all these deals are
necessarily racist. I don’t think they are looking at them and saying no, we can’t
do this. But you’ve got a guy over here that happens to be White that’s offering more money.

Fran: No, I don’t think it is racism. But that is what she is trying to incorporate into our thinking because it’s this invisible tool that still Whites carry with them.

Ben: Right. But the invisible tool is money. It’s not race anymore, it’s money. And it’s associated with

(At this point Fran interrupts Ben.)

Fran: The first example that he [Dr. Sue] gave, was it last week? The last video about . . . [going] to Harvard to talk to all the deans and he sat there and he said they were all White. And it might have been one woman or maybe all men. So if you go and look at every single person on top of corporations, government, everything, it’s mostly White.

Ben: Yeah, but you have to look at how long a lot of those people have been there. I am not saying it’s not racist, unequal or anything. I’m agreeing with you. But a lot of those people that are in those positions have been in those positions since the 70s and . . . it’s hard to say well, it’s racist. Because I mean you can’t just get rid of someone because they happen to be old if they are still doing their position.

In his comment, Ben invoked a moral imperative (i.e., loyalty to older workers) to supersede the moral gravity of institutional racism. Providing a moral cover, in this case, might be considered an example of what Leonardo (2009) called a “sleight of mind” (p. 79) maneuver used in service to White dominance and supremacy. Just when we were
exposing institutional racism at Harvard, Ben quickly and cleverly made the discussion about loyalty to older workers.

Lucy minimized the racism that Dr. Sue highlighted in the video and the impact it has on the life of Dr. Sue and other people of color in this excerpt from her Description of Experience questionnaire:

268 On the sheet: What was it like watching the video?

269 Lucy wrote: It was somewhat strange watching this video. At first it felt like I was in a classroom receiving a lecture that was difficult to follow (strange powerpoint), and then it just felt like someone was complaining.

Johnson (2006) claimed that when people of color are accused of whining and complaining “they’re essentially being told that whatever they have to deal with isn’t that bad and they should “just get on with it” (p.109).

In the following excerpt from her Description of Experience sheet, Regina minimized the impact of racism for Dr. Sue and other people of color by suggesting they make too much of it and need to “chill”.

272 On the sheet: What thoughts went through your mind during the video?

273 Regina wrote: The whole airplane scenario, people need to chill. White! White! White! I feel the way he says it, he hates it. Is it worth the argument? The three [business men] could have been another minority. They could have been gay. If they were asked to move they would have thought the same things.

277 People need to chill!

In presenting the airplane incident as a problem only because Dr. Sue won’t “chill”, Regina demonstrated another strategy described by Johnson (2006): arguing that
racism and the problems associated with it are caused by talking about them. Johnson explained,

When people of color call attention to the divisions caused by white privilege, for example, they’re often accused of creating those divisions, as if racism isn’t a problem unless you talk about it. Talking about privilege rather than privilege itself gets defined as the problem. (p.113)

Another way to exonerate perpetrators of racism and maintain the racial status quo is to blame the victims. Johnson (2006) explained “that one can acknowledge that terrible things happen to people and still get off the hook by blaming it on them” (p. 110). In the video, Dr. Sue accused the White flight attendant of committing a racist act when she asked him and his African American companion to move to the back of the plane. In the following excerpts, Lucy shifted blame for racism from the White flight attendant to Dr. Sue by blaming him for not standing up for himself. The following is from Lucy’s Description of Experience sheet:

On the Sheet: What thoughts went through your mind during the video?
Lucy wrote: I thought that it gave poor examples about racial discrimination/racial microaggressions.

On the Sheet: What personal beliefs underlie these thoughts?
Lucy wrote: I think that if people like the narrator [Dr. Sue] do not speak up for themselves when they perceive racism, they have no right to claim discrimination. Every person faces discrimination in some form. Ex[ample]. He should have refused to move on the plane instead of getting bitter about it and claiming discrimination.
Lucy expressed the same sentiments in the class discussion:

Lucy: The airplane incident he talked about, I was just thinking to myself, “well, it’s not the 1950s!” You could have just said, “Well, we don’t want to move.” You can figure something else out, you know. When . . . the airline attendant asked them to move, and he got very offended and then decided to tell her about it later, it’s like, well you have rights. Like, you didn’t have to do that.

Lucy’s belief that Dr. Sue had rights in this situation and should not have moved may reflect her experience as a White person living in a White dominated society who thinks her rights are universal. A student with dark skin and a thick Spanish accent who came up to me on campus a couple of days after I had shown the videos in his class, had a different idea about what his rights are in a White dominated society. He said he wanted me to know that he would never have told the flight attendant that he did not want to move or that she was being racist, because if he had, he was sure a White air marshal would have been there to arrest him when he got off the plane.

Ladson-Billings (2006) presented another strategy to get the dominant White group off the hook for racial injustice: framing racial issues in ways that avert attention from “the way power organizes and deploys race and racism” (p. ix). An example of this strategy, according to Ladson-Billings, occurs when someone “reinscribes the notion that individual actors bear sole responsibility for our current racial state” (p.x). Sleeter (2002) noted a tendency among White people “to adhere to individualism and to think of racism as an individual belief rather than a collective act” (p.43). Individualistic explanations of racism work to exonerate the dominant White group by diverting attention from their
responsibility for systems of power that maintain the current racial order and advantage Whites.

DiTomaso et al. (2003) also expounded on the strategy of framing racial issues in individualistic terms in order to avert attention from the role of power in producing inequities. They claimed that despite “calling attention to the institutional or structural processes that reproduce racial inequality, . . . [people] still insist on labeling these processes as ‘racism’ of one sort or another” (p.190).

Tatum (1997) illuminated the notion of racism as individual behavior in relation to a statement she frequently hears when she talks about racism: “You keep talking about White people. People of color can be racist, too” (p. 10). People who make such statements, according to Tatum, have limited their understanding of racism to personal expressions of prejudice and failed to acknowledge racism as “a system involving cultural messages and institutional policies and practices. . . . [that] clearly operates to the advantage of Whites and to the disadvantage of people of color” (p. 7).

As Tatum explained, although prejudice is something that people of all races are prone to, only Whites can be racist because they alone benefit from systemic racism and have the power to institutionalize their prejudices and the cultural sanction to act on them. Tatum’s observation that Whites are racist because they benefit from systemic racism adds support to the aforementioned argument that all White people are racist regardless of any individual intention or action.

During the classroom discussion, students averted attention from the power relations underlying racial injustice in society by reinscribing the notion of racism as individual acts of prejudice. In one of the classroom discussions, for example, I raised the
issue of historic racist real estate practices as an example of how powerful Whites ensure built-in advantages for themselves and their descendants through systemic racism. In the following response, Ben took the White group off the hook for using their political power to reproduce inequality, by framing my example of systemic racism as acts of prejudice carried out by a few, flawed individuals.

Ben: I can’t even begin to deny the fact that . . . there have been and still are inequalities. But . . . it’s tapering off to a certain extent to where . . . the charge of racism and stuff like that, I just think it is way overused. And . . . it’s assumed, I think too much that the average person on the street is more racist than they are. I . . . don’t even know if it’s the average person that . . . even thinks that. Again, I think it is a lot of extremes. I think it’s just like anything else; it’s what you see on the media. It’s what you hear about. Yeah, you always hear about the person that had a problem; you never hear about the 500,000 people before that that had normal conversations and went about their day. You hear about the one that had a racist problem with race or got told something.

Fran: But she [Evonne] didn’t even talk about racism. . . . She was just talking about inequality and how it has been affecting all these generations and the ones to come, too.

Ben: But it was racist that he wasn’t allowed to buy in other areas. I mean essentially, that’s what it was. It was racist. It’s just however you want to call it, that or an inequality. That was ultimately what it was.

Despite my explaining racist real estate practices as an example of systemic racism and Fran’s distinction between inequity in society and individual racism (line 302-304), Ben
clung tight to the notion of racism as individual acts of prejudice. Thus, he was able to avoid acknowledging systemic advantage for Whites and oppression of people of color. Ben’s comment, “it’s assumed, I think too much that the average person on the street is more racist than they are” (lines 294-295), contains interesting phraseology. Ben seems to be suggesting that there are degrees of racism and although the average person on the street is somewhat racist, it’s only those who are really racists that are doing harm.

In the following excerpt from the class discussion, Galen averted attention from issues of power and systemic racism by describing political conservative Glen Beck as one of those flawed individuals responsible for our present state of racial injustice.

Galen: Well, I have an interesting experience . . . and I’ll talk about my opinions and my thoughts about it. I was watching television and there was Glen Beck with . . . these three other . . . White people. And Glen Beck was saying, “Well, you know, Americans don’t see race.” And he is saying this to three other White people. And I had just seen this and it struck me that . . . it’s like we are saying, “Well, it’s all cured!” You know we solved this in the sixties. We don’t have race issues anymore. We’re all one. There is no color. And it just takes away the entire experience of anybody who is not White. And . . . intellectually I know that happens. But after seeing the films that . . . really popped up.

In this next excerpt from the class discussion, Rose described low-income Southern Whites as a flawed group of individuals responsible for racism.

Rose: I grew up in the South where racial prejudice is rampant. And I grew up in a very low socioeconomic place and . . . a lot of my playmates growing up were Black. And I had neighbors that would call us n-lopers, you know, cuz, oh, this is awful!
In this comment from the class discussion, Trudy assigned responsibility for racism solely to ignorant Whites:

Trudy: I think it’s so important because there is so much oppression that still exists; and at the same time I’m like . . . I’m doing my best and learning all the time. I’m listening, I’m checking in, I found people I can check in with so I can learn; and hopefully they’ll tell me the truth. And so when he [Dr. Sue] just says, “White privilege” [and] “White” and then we hear these people who are identified as White [but] not as ignorant; and some of those people were, I felt, really ignorant. And it wasn’t like this person is an ignorant White person. It was like this person is White. I was like, I would not have answered like that; and they didn’t ask me.

Naming others (i.e., extreme racists, Glen Beck, Southern Whites, Ignorant Whites) as the ones who are responsible for racism is also an example of how people divert attention from their own responsibility for racism by saying that racism is “out there, not here”. As Leonardo (2004) put it,

“It must be the position of a good white person to declare that racism is always about ‘other whites,’ perhaps ‘those working class whites.’ This is a general alibi to create the ‘racist’ as always other, the self being an exception. (p. 143-144)

Another example of averting attention from White culpability by reinscribing the notion of racism as individual acts of prejudice is saying “everyone is racist”. This is similar to the previously mentioned comment that Tatum (1997) discussed: “You keep talking about White people. People of color can be racist, too” (p. 10). Expressions of racism as individual acts of prejudice that persons in every racial group commit averts
attention from the fact that Whites alone have the power to act on and institutionalize their prejudices (Tatum).

In the following excerpt from the class discussion, Andrea obfuscates White culpability with a story of her experience of racism that both reinscribes the notion of racism as prejudicial behavior and establishes the prevalence of racism in all racial groups.

Andrea:  You also can find a lot of problems between or among the minorities, too. . . . I came from South America. Here in this town there are not too many people from South America, from specifically Columbia. And it was hard for me to find a place. “Where do I belong?” Because everyone was saying, “Oh, I’m Mexican! I’m Italian! I’m”. But they were groups. But where are the Columbians? So . . . I was trying to go to: “OK, because Mexican people, they speak Spanish, so I am going to be part of them”. But I felt also some rejection from them in some ways. So . . . I don’t like that. I know that racism exists also between the minorities and that’s what I saw.

Rhonda also talked about prejudicial behavior among racial groups.

Rhonda:  A lot of my friends are Latinos. But they are Mexican American. They are not . . . Puerto Rican or Cuban. So when they talk about Puerto Ricans, they talk down about Puerto Ricans. They talk about Puerto Ricans being the lowest Hispanics of the low.

Louis:  We’re good at that.

Pointing out the pervasiveness of racism in all racial groups is closely related to another strategy to get powerful Whites off the hook for racism: saying that racism is
natural human behavior. Rattansi (2007) explained this strategy as claiming “that what the critics decry as racism is simply the product of “natural” human attributes. . . . It is only “human nature” to act in this manner” (p. 126). Cohen (2011) gave examples of psychological research that fuel understandings of racism as natural behavior. These studies, which are familiar to most counseling students, describe universal human tendencies to create categories, distinguish racial in-groups (us) and out-groups (them), and form evaluations of out-groups that are less favorable than those of in-groups. In classroom discussions about racism, Louis and Susie brought up the subject of natural human tendencies to differentiate and categorize.

342 Louis: Well, we stereotype by nature. It’s just how we function as human beings. We can’t be this blank white board for every person we meet.

343 Susie: I mean obviously societies are going to differentiate. Uh, in Rwanda, it was the size of your nose and your height. Uh, apparently in America, it is really the color of your skin.

In a subsequent comment, Susie averted attention from the violence perpetrated on native peoples by the more powerful early White settlers who were intent on promoting their own social and economic advantage by explaining it in terms of in-group / out-group dynamics.

347 Susie: Couldn’t it be as simple as that the people that came to this country and found it, named it first, their skin was white. And when they ran into the Native Americans their skin was not. So they were shallow enough to say, so, you’re less, we win, we own it, we have bigger guns, let’s go! And then this country just has followed in this development of “skin color matters”. It’s what we see
first. You know, we see you, Hispanic, you can be German and it’s really as simple as it turns into divisiveness.

The following entry on Susie’s Description of Experience is a further example of a limited conception of racism as simply a matter of differences.

On the sheet: How did you feel during the video?
Susie wrote: The question “What does it mean to be White?” Brings the question to mind, “Are we talking about my skin color?” Because that is all it is.

On the sheet: What thoughts went through your mind during the video?
Susie wrote: Skin color is obviously highly (sadly) important in our society.

On the sheet: What personal beliefs underlie these thoughts?
Susie wrote: Something will always be used by societies to differentiate others.

On the sheet: What is your opinion of the video as a tool to teach counseling students about ethnicity and race?
Susie wrote: Needs more balance. What is the educational value of teaching society’s differentiation of skin color?

By discussing racism in terms of in-group group preferences, Susie diverted attention from issues of power that define racial group relations. Johnson (2006) claimed that conceptualizing racial injustice as simply a matter of difference ignores issues of “privilege and power—the existence of privilege and the lopsided distribution of power that keeps it going” (p. 12). The misrepresentation of racial injustice as an issue of difference (i.e., different worldviews) encourages misguided solutions to promote racial equality and justice. For example, it encourages educational efforts directed toward the
appreciation of difference or “celebrating diversity” rather than toward understanding and
dismantling the inequality of power that is responsible for racial injustice.

Leonardo (2004) described another strategy to avert attention from the powerful
White group’s responsibility for racism: talking about the state of White privilege without
mentioning the process of domination that sustains it. Leonardo described the process of
domination as “acts, decisions, and policies that white subjects perpetrate on people of
color” (p. 137).

Leonardo (2009) discussed this strategy in relation to the work of whiteness
scholar Peggy McIntosh (1988). According to Leonardo, McIntosh’s writings have done
much to facilitate understanding of “the taken for granted, daily aspects of white
privilege: from the convenience of matching one’s skin color with bandages, to opening
up a textbook to discover one’s racial identity affirmed in history, literature and
civilization in general” (p. 75). Although Leonardo recognized the contribution of
McIntosh’s work, he also criticized it for elevating the experience of White privilege over
processes of White domination that sustain it. Such a focus on the state of White
privilege, Leonardo explained, “comes with the unfortunate consequence of . . .
obfuscating agents of domination, and removing the actions that make it clear who is
doing what to whom” (p. 76).

In the following excerpt from the class discussion, Galen diverted attention from
his and the White group’s responsibility for White advantage by telling a story that
focused on the state of White advantage and neglected to mention processes that sustain
it. In his story, he said he had been educated about his White advantage in the counseling
program, yet he didn’t indicate that he was aware of or had ever contemplated the
processes that secure that advantage or his own complicity with the system of White
privilege. His story sparked a debate with June who also focused only on the condition of
White advantage; in particular, June countered Galen’s claim that the state of White
advantage exists.

Galen: I hadn’t heard about White privilege until I took a multicultural course here last
year. . . . I’m White and so doors were open to me. I didn’t have to kick
them in.

June: What doors did you get to walk through?

Galen: Well, education, jobs, pick em

June: What education did you walk through that other people didn’t get to walk
through?

Galen: When I first went to college in the early 70s, we didn’t have any African
Americans in my class. We didn’t have any Hispanics. We didn’t have any Native
Americans. They were all White classes. And . . . I didn’t really think anything of
it. But looking back, it’s like I got there, because I was able to get a job and
support myself through that. And . . . I worked, in inner-cities. The African
American poor community, they don’t have jobs there. They have to get on a bus
and ride hours to get to some job at Wendy’s, not jobs in their neighborhoods. So
I had those pathways that typically minorities, for lack of a better word, didn’t
have. And I’m not sure they still don’t have those pathways because the inner-
cities are still that way. So, the same way with getting a job.
June: I don’t know because when I was a pharmaceutical rep I called on doctors in this whole state and a lot of them were your age, Hispanic, and Black. They must have gotten open doors and gone to school and become doctors.

Galen: Some get to pop up. But for the most part, that is an extraordinary act of will many times, or luck, is what I’m saying. And I didn’t need extraordinary will or luck. I just took the opportunities that were available to me. I think I had more opportunities because of my skin color working my way through school. I got a job and it was in Dallas; it was at a hotel. And all the African Americans worked in the kitchen, and all the White folks were waiters and waitresses and room service waiters and so there was that. And at the time, this is the way it was. And we didn’t question it. But looking back, I got to make a lot more money than those folks did. And so . . . that’s what I am talking about.

June denied Galen’s account of White privilege and discrimination against people of color by presenting examples of individuals who are exceptions as opposed to the rule for what outcomes were typical for African Americans and Hispanic Americans at the time Galen was in school. Recognizing this tactic, Galen pointed out that June is talking about exceptions—those individuals that occasionally “pop up” due to extraordinary acts of will or luck (lines 385-386). Although subtle, in this comment he expressed the belief that racial minorities do succeed in society when they work extra hard and those who fail are not putting forth the required effort.

An additional strategy to excuse powerful Whites from blame for racism is claiming that Whites are ignorant of race. According to Leonardo (2009), arguing that Whites are ignorant of race promotes “the ‘innocence’ of whites when it comes to the
structures of race and racism” (p. 107). Leonardo claimed that people portray Whites as lacking knowledge of daily and structural features of race when they say “that whites do not grow up with a race discourse, do not think of their life choices in racial ways, and do not consider themselves as belonging to a racial group” (p. 107).

As evidenced in the following excerpt from the class discussion, Candy excused herself and the White group for the racial injustice described by Dr. Sue by explaining that life in a White-normalizing society has made Whites oblivious to race and, by extension, innocent in racial matters.

Candy: I took multicultural a year ago or so and . . . during the course . . . we did a section on European Americans and we read some of Sue’s stuff. And reading it . . . my hackles went up. It sounded kind of anti-White which kind of concerned me at the time. Later on in that semester, though, two of my peers and I ended up doing a presentation on European Americans. . . . We kind of delved . . . into . . . the dominant culture being invisible; that people think that they have no culture when they are White but in fact they do. They are just oblivious to it because it is not different from what is dominant. So I haven’t read any of Sue’s stuff or seen any of the videos again until now. And so now looking at it . . . it makes much better sense to me. And I don’t find it offensive or anti-White or anything.

From the perspective of cognitive appraisal theory, when Candy first read Dr. Sue’s work, she interpreted it as an accusation of blame directed toward her and other Whites and as a result, her “hackles went up” (line 396). After convincing herself that Whites cannot be responsible for something they cannot possibly know about, she no longer considers Dr. Sue’s accounts of racism as something that implicates Whites and
therefore no longer gets triggered. From the perspective of social dominance theory, the ideology of White innocence acts to rationalize racial injustice and Whites’ complicity with it.

McIntyre (1997) explained that when White people “talk themselves out of being responsible for racism. . . . [it] serves to insulate white people from examining their/our individual and collective role(s) in the perpetuation of racism” (p. 45). Jensen (2005) claimed that we should feel guilty about racist acts we have committed, and our failure to resist White supremacy and contribute to changing our racist system. He described feeling guilty as “a necessary part of the process of coming to terms with ourselves and changing our behavior” (p.47). Johnson (2006) also connects avoiding responsibility for racism to perpetuating it. He said that when people find a way to get themselves off the hook for racism, “they leave it to someone else to take care of the problem, which, of course, doesn’t happen, and for pretty much the same reason” (p. 108).

**Summary**

Through a classroom video presentation, students were presented with information about the persistence of racism and racial inequality that dominant Whites perpetrate on people of color at both individual and systemic levels of United States society. Many students resisted the information with behavior that whiteness scholars have identified as practices to maintain the status quo of White control and advantage at all levels of society. Some examples of these behavioral practices are: (1) appraising information about racism as a threat and thwarting, avoiding, or shutting down discussions of it; (2) appraising the information as offensive and discrediting it by denigrating the messenger; (3) appraising the information as something to be sad about
and resigned to; and (4) appraising the information as accusations, denying and minimizing the information, and diverting attention from White people’s individual and group culpability. (See Table 2 for a summary of these behaviors.) Beliefs in the myth of White superiority, the myth of inferiority of people of color, and traditional American myths of meritocracy, equal treatment, and equal opportunity appeared to underlie many of these behaviors.

How can counselor educators help students move beyond harm-related appraisals, negative emotions, and defensive actions to understandings of racism and its impact? Pedagogical strategies to facilitate these understandings are addressed in Chapter 5.
Table 2. Coping Actions that Reinforce Whiteness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Avoid Discussions of Racism and White Privilege</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thwart the discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td>— Intellectualize</td>
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<tr>
<td>— Dispense with racial terms</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fail to participate</td>
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<tr>
<td>— Stay silent</td>
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<tr>
<td>— Leave</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shut the discussion down</td>
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<tr>
<td>— Express your fears so others feel obligated to protect you</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attack the Messenger to Invalidate the Message</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denigrate Dr. Sue</td>
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<tr>
<td>— Question his integrity</td>
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<tr>
<td>— Disparage his character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deny Dr. Sue’s legitimacy as a researcher, professor, and PhD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Denigrate people of color in general and their cultures.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Do Nothing</th>
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<tr>
<td>Be resigned to racial injustice</td>
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<tr>
<td>— Decide it is too big of a problem to tackle</td>
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<tr>
<td>Take no initiative to learn about racial injustice or what you can do about it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Decide that you cannot change White people and do not try</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Escape Responsibility for Racism and White Privilege</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deny the existence of racism and White privilege</td>
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<tr>
<td>— Insist that people of color are better off than Whites</td>
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<tr>
<td>— Claim reverse racism</td>
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<tr>
<td>— Call racism something else (i.e., a matter of differences, good business practice, economics, or loyalty to employees)</td>
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<tr>
<td>— Accuse those who point out racism of being whiners, complainers, uptight, or anti-White</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blame people of color for racism and White privilege</td>
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<tr>
<td>Declare that racism is not a problem unless people talk about it</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus on the condition of White privilege rather than processes that sustain it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Claim that White people are ignorant of race and therefore innocent in racial matter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Avert attention from the way power organizes and deploys race and racism</td>
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<tr>
<td>— Think of racism as an individual belief rather than a collective act</td>
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<tr>
<td>— Blame racism on flawed individuals</td>
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<tr>
<td>— Conceive of racism as a problem of not tolerating differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— Explain racism as natural human behavior; point out that everyone is racist</td>
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CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The Incident with the Native American Man

Some years ago, my son’s high school basketball team played a Native American high school team in a much anticipated play-off game for the district title. My son’s school, a private Catholic school attended by mostly middle class White and Hispanic students, hosted the game. I arrived early, sat on the home team side and watched the families of the Native American team as they arrived and took their seats in the visitor’s section on the other side of the gymnasium. I noticed the many large extended families that came to the game together. I was reminded of how I have missed shared experiences with my extended family in California since I moved to the Southwest many years ago. I thought to myself how Native Americans had the right idea living in close contact with their families.

It was a close game that either team could have won, but when the final buzzer sounded, my son’s school was ahead and was announced the winner. After the game, both teams’ families exited the gym to their cars. I noticed that no one was talking as we exited. Usually, as we leave games, parents from each team are congratulating each other on a game well played, but on this night there was silence as the families of each team left in separate groups.

I know how disappointing it is to lose a close game and I wanted to console the parents and kids that had just lost the game. I caught the eye of one of the Native
American fathers and I said, “Your team played a very nice game.” He looked disgusted and said angrily, “Yeah, and they would have won if the referees (who were Hispanic) hadn’t been against us.” I said, “Yes, the referees made some bad calls both ways. But it was such a good game, it’s sad that one of the teams had to lose.” He said angrily, “Now you are calling Indians sad. Poor, sad Indians!”

I began to get nervous. This was not turning out how I had thought it would. I noticed only Native people around me giving me nasty looks. I looked around for my husband and son but they were way ahead of me. I was just trying to be friendly and it seems this man misunderstood my intentions. I said, “What? Why would I say Indians are sad?” He said, “You think Indians are so sad because they live on reservations and are poor.” Wow, this had taken a nasty turn! I began to think, how can I get out of this? I admire the Native American culture and envy the closeness of their families but apparently this man assumes I am one of those Whites who judges people according to how much money they have.

I wondered if I should shut up or say something else. I decided that I wanted him to understand my intentions. I said, “I was talking to you as a parent who knows how sad my son gets when his team loses. I did not say Indians are sad.” He gave me a dirty look but said nothing more. I looked at the Native Americans standing around him; they all looked disgusted with me. I had hoped one of them would understand what I was trying to say and maybe set him straight. I became angry with him and the others with him for treating my attempts to be friendly with such animosity. He had no right to assume the worst about me! I said huffily, “I’m sorry I said anything to you. Next time I will say nothing.” I walked hurriedly to my car.
Telling the Story to White People

I remained upset about the incident and felt justified in doing so. In the two years after it happened I had described the incident to many White friends and family members. They all agreed that I had a right to be angry and frustrated with the man. They validated my assessment of being a friendly person who was wronged. They affirmed that the man had no right to react the way he did. My friends and family and I lamented, “How can we remain hopeful that people in the world will ever get along when people, like that man, who react to kind gestures with animosity are around?”

Telling the Story to People of Color

When I started in the counselor education doctoral program, I participated in group work that was incorporated into a class called Multicultural Issues in Counseling. The group was racially diverse consisting of one African American student, a few Asian American and Native American students and several Hispanic and White students. The Vietnamese-American professor who was experienced in interracial relations acted as the group’s facilitator. During group-time, students shared stories of their experiences of race and racism and the group members grew close through these shared stories.

I decided to share my story of the basketball game incident with the Native American man with the group. As I told the story, many of the racial minority students in the group seemed uncomfortable at first and then angry. One Native American student accused me of being judgmental when I said that the man didn’t have a right to act the way he did. Other students of color in the group nodded their heads in agreement with her. I was stunned by this reaction. I repeated, “But I was trying to be friendly and he misunderstood my intentions.” I thought that the Native American student and the other
students of color had not heard the story correctly. But they had heard the story and insisted that it didn’t matter that the man misunderstood my intentions. They reiterated their view that I was being judgmental. They challenged me to try to hear what the man had said without judging it. But I didn’t know how I could do it or if it was even possible. How could I remember the Native man’s words and actions without feeling resentful? My desire to connect again with the group members of color motivated me to try.

The Transformation

At the end of the group meeting I went alone to an isolated place on campus. I wanted to try and hear what the man had said without judging it. But how could I do it? I decided that I would need to strip myself of a lifetime of accumulated values and life experiences that were the basis of my judgments. I envisioned taking off years of different experiences and values as if I were taking off layers of sweaters and coats. I ended up imagining I removed my whole body as it seemed to be holding my experiences, values and perspectives. I envisioned only a small, free-floating, pure “core of existence” remaining.

Removed from my basis of understanding and judgment, I began to feel ungrounded and vulnerable. I quickly turned my attention to the man at the basketball game, and I listened to what he said. I realized that the story he was telling belonged to him; it wasn’t mine to judge or contaminate. As I listened, I felt no indignation, no urgency to “explain” to him, to correct him, or to believe he had it all wrong. I just listened to him and knew he had a right to his view of things, to his reality, to his story. I felt peaceful, and calm.
When I first spoke to the man after the game, I was motivated by a desire to connect with him, but on my terms. I wanted him to see it my way (the right way), and I hadn’t been willing or able to see it from his perspective. It was in the act of humbling myself, suspending my judgment, and simply listening to his story that I finally felt the connection with him. The connection was not about the similarity of our experiences. The connection came from realizing that we both experience life and have our own legitimate stories of the experiences.

Continuing to Learn

I devoted much time and effort to gaining greater understanding of race-related issues and interracial interactions since I participated in the group over six years ago. I read numerous books and academic articles about racial diversity, watched a great number of videos and films, and attended and conducted workshops, lectures, and conference presentations. I also conducted research on student reactions to racially themed scenarios and participated in nine semester-long graduate classes addressing racial issues related to the helping professions. I started in these classes as a student, became the teaching assistant, and finally advanced to lead instructor for the masters-level counselor education multicultural class.

From my present perspective, I can connect several beliefs I held that shaped my encounter with the Native American man after the basketball game to dominant (White) cultural perspectives and White supremacist ideology. I believed, for example, that my intentions determined the outcome of the encounter. In other words, because my intention was to be friendly, I was being friendly and the Native man was being unpleasant to a friendly person. According to Johnson (2006):
Because U.S. culture encourages us to use an individual-guilt model to explain just about everything that goes wrong, it’s easy to confuse intentions with consequences. In other words, if something bad happens, someone’s conscious bad intentions must be behind it. A corollary is that if your intentions are good, they cannot result in something bad. (p. 114)

My belief that intentions determine outcomes was an excuse for my offensive behavior. One way I acted offensively was by disaffirming his opinion that the referees were unfair to his team. I was insensitive to the historical and present day practices of unfair treatment of Native Americans that gave the man good reason to suspect that his team was treated unfairly and to be suspicious of my intention for talking to him. It is possible he thought that I started the conversation merely to gloat over the win.

I can now identify other beliefs and perceptions underlying my reactions to the encounter: I perceived the man as a member of a racial group while perceiving myself as an individual; I considered my interpretation of the game as superior to his; I felt entitled to tell the man that he was wrong and to view my behavior as appropriate and his not. Locked in a system of beliefs and perceptions based on White supremacy and White cultural norms, I interpreted the interaction with the Native man as an offense against me. This interpretation, in turn, provoked my negative emotional reaction and my defensive comment: “I’m sorry I said anything to you!”

Students of color in the group asked me to consider what the man said without judging it, but I was unable to do this within the system of beliefs I used to explain the interaction. Unable or unwilling to move outside my ideology episteme, I could only
conclude that the man had been offensive. Coming from similar mindsets, my White friends and family members affirmed my appraisal of the event.

In the present study, the incidents of student resistance that were evoked by the classroom video presentation reflect similar beliefs, perceptions, emotions, and actions that emerged in my experience of the encounter with the Native American man. Drawing from memories of being a new counseling student who was struggling to understand race-related issues and the knowledge and experience I have gained since then, I discuss the findings, conclusions and implications of the present study in this concluding chapter.

The chapter is organized by topic as follows: (1) research questions; (2) summary of the study; (3) review of the findings; (4) significance of the findings; (5) future research; (6) strategies to address student resistance; and (7) conclusions.

**Research Questions**

The fundamental question that guided this study is: In what ways does student resistance evoked by a racially themed classroom video presentation qualify as a sociopolitical phenomenon? Six auxiliary questions are: 1) How do students describe what it was like watching the videos? (2) How do students describe the feelings they experienced during the video presentation? (3) How do students describe the thoughts they had during the video presentation? (4) How do students describe the beliefs underlying those thoughts? (5) How do students describe their opinions of the videos as a tool to teach counseling students about ethnicity and race? (6) How does student resistance define behavior that reinforces White hegemony and control in counselor education classrooms?
Summary of the Study

The Problem and Purpose

New understandings of the psychological effects of living in oppressive conditions and experiencing oppression have made learning about issues of race and racism an important goal for counselors-in-training. Students need to learn, for example, that systems of racism have corrosive effects on the mental and physical health of many people of color in this country (Carter & Reynolds, 2011). They also must acknowledge and address their own complicity in the very system of racial oppression that often thwarts the life chances of their future clients of color (Johnson, 2006).

Counselor educators reported that when they incorporate lessons designed to educate students about important race-related issues, they commonly encounter resistance from students that interrupts the learning intended with these lessons (Fouad & Arredondo, 2007). Recognizing student resistance as a significant impediment to learning, scholars began to develop strategies to address it. Most of these strategies, however, have been based on a limited conceptualization of student resistance as psychological shortcomings of individual students and typically involve methods to deal with closed-minded, prejudiced, or ultra-resistant students (Mio, 2005; Mio & Awakuni, 2000).

Several scholars, however, have called for a more expansive view of student resistance as more than simply aberrant individual behavior. A more accurate assessment, they contend, must take into account that the behavior may be influenced by the social and political contexts of peoples’ lives (APA, 2003). Sidanius and Pratto (1999), for
example, stated, “though psychological predispositions are important, they are always
enacted within a specific sociopolitical context” (p. 302).

The purpose of this study is to move beyond strictly individualistic explanations
to critically interpret student resistance as sociopolitical behavior that reinforces the
societal structure of White racial hegemony and dominance. By exploring student
resistance as sociopolitical phenomena, this study may increase understanding of the
behavior and begin to formulate pedagogical strategies to constructively expose and
address its possible sociopolitical determinants. Pedagogical strategies to assist students
in making the same discoveries can thus provide potentially valuable complements to
strategies targeting the psychology of individual students.

Defining Student Resistance

I began the task of interpreting student resistance as a sociopolitical phenomenon
by establishing an operational definition of student resistance. In this study I defined
student resistance as it is commonly conceptualized in the counseling and psychology
literature: an emotional issue triggered by a classroom focus on race (APA, 2003).

I framed the emotional process of student resistance in terms of a cognitive
appraisal emotional process model discussed by Lazarus (1991). According to this
theoretical model, the emotional process of student resistance involves a student
appraising a provoking event (i.e., a racially themed classroom video presentation) as
personally harmful or harmful to her or his affiliated group. This harm-related appraisal
leads to a negative emotion, which, in turn, motivates action to defend against unpleasant
feelings. During this process, the student’s attention is diverted from learning intended
with the video presentation to the perceived harm and what to do about it.
The defining principle in a cognitive explanation of student resistance is that a person is not disturbed by an event such as the video presentation but by her or his view of the event (Lazarus, 1991). This means that students who appraise the same racially themed classroom lesson differently can have different emotional responses. Differing appraisals and emotional responses are commonly explained in counselor education in terms of the psychology of individual students. According to cognitive theory, for example, everyone has a personal philosophy or unique set of beliefs that determines a person’s interpretation of life’s events and resulting emotions and coping actions (Ellis, 2002). In this study, I moved beyond individualistic explanations to connect beliefs that mediate students’ appraisals of a racially themed video presentation and resulting emotions and coping actions to the sociopolitical context of students’ lives. The fundamental question that guided this study is: In what ways does student resistance, evoked by a racially themed classroom video presentation, qualify as a sociopolitical phenomenon?

In the following section, I describe the method of research I used to investigate student resistance with regard to its sociopolitical context.

Method of Research

The method of research I chose allowed me to explore student resistance in the context of counselor education classrooms and interpret it as sociopolitical behavior that reinforces White hegemony and control. I began by going into each of five regularly scheduled master’s level counselor education classes to show portions of two videos. I chose the videos because they address two issues that most often evoke student
resistance: White racial group advantage (Ridley & Thompson, 1999) and oppression of racial minority groups (Tatum, 1992).

The first video I presented is designed to educate students about everyday acts of racism that plague people of color in this country. The second video is used to teach students about the different racial realities and perspectives of White people who are advantaged in society and people of color who are disadvantaged. Each of the 37 student-participants described her or his experience of each of the videos on a Description of Experience questionnaire (see Appendix D). Because I was interested in exploring students’ experiences that reflect student resistance, I had students describe their experiences in terms of the component parts of student resistance as they are represented in the cognitive appraisal emotional process model. On the questionnaires, for example, students were asked to describe their experiences in terms of the emotions they experienced, the thoughts that went through their minds, the beliefs that motivated their thoughts, and their opinions of the video presentation as a teaching tool. The following week I returned to each of the five classrooms to facilitate a discussion of the students’ experiences of the video presentation.

Review of the Findings

The questionnaires, transcripts of the class discussions, and my personal observations provided the primary data sources for the study. Using a predetermined coding scheme informed by cognitive appraisal theory, I identified components of students’ experiences that reflected student resistance (i.e., harm-related appraisals, negative emotions, and defensive coping actions). In reporting this data, I highlighted representative examples of student resistance that were most salient.
The data revealed that students most commonly described anger, fear, sadness, and guilt when reporting their emotional experiences. Scholars who wrote about student resistance also associated these core negative emotions with the phenomenon (Fouad & Arredondo, 2007; Jackson, 1999; Jensen, 2005; Johnson, 2006; Tatum, 1997). Some expressions of emotions that students used were “tense”, “uncomfortable”, “anxious”, “like stepping on egg shells”, “angry”, “pissed off”, “sucky”, “sad”, “hopeless”, “White guilt”, “frustrated”, “jealous”, “need to chill”, and “bitter”.

Also evidenced in the data were students’ harm-related appraisals of the video as a teaching tool. Students described the video as threatening (i.e., “it could be very threatening to people”), offensive (“it’s a touchy subject”), reprehensible (“it perpetuates White guilt”), and despairing (“negative, negative, negative!”).

Some of the thinking and beliefs that students expressed reflected White supremacist ideology. I categorized these beliefs as: (1) belief in White superiority; (2) belief in nonwhite inferiority; and (3) belief in American myths that are used to justify White hegemony and dominance. Some students expressed, for example, the belief that a White style of communication (controlled emotion) is superior and described success as transitioning from Hispanic culture to White culture. Students also expressed beliefs in myths of meritocracy, a post-racial society, and fair treatment is equal treatment (i.e., “Go try and find an Anglo scholarship! They just don’t exist!”)

Students’ Positions in the Program

In this section, I discuss students’ descriptions of their experiences in relation to students’ positions in the counselor education program. According to the classroom they were in, I designated students as being at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of the
program. I highlighted this information because students in the study were in a counselor education program that is licensed by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (2009) and one condition of licensure is that all aspects of the curriculum include considerations of multiculturalism including issues of race. I assumed, therefore, that the students’ experiences of the video would reflect their level of exposure to racial issues which would relate to their position in the program.

However, because of differences in the amount of race-related education they received prior to coming into the program, I could not assume that those who were farther along in the program were more educated about racial issues. According to information students provided on the Student Demographic Sheet, for example, one of the students in the beginning class had taken seven courses that significantly addressed issues of race in her undergraduate program, while many in the advanced class reported taking only one or two classes.

Although I could not determine the effect a student’s level in the program had on their described experiences, one finding related to a student’s progress in the program is important. That is, several students in the advanced class resisted information in the video and exhibited behavior that reinforces White racial hegemony. One student, for instance, denied racism, argued that people of color are too quick to assume that race is the reason they are mistreated, and even suggested that people who say all Whites are racist are pathological. Another advanced student did not acknowledge the role power plays in interracial interactions. She said, “The question ‘What does it mean to be White?’ brings the question to mind, ‘Are we talking about my skin color?’ Because that is all it is.” Still another advanced student revealed her belief in the inaccurate stereotype of people of
color as dangerous and aggressive. In the classroom discussion she said, “What’s the fear around the strong emotion? Why can’t we just feel the emotion and express it? You know? Is it partly because of some of the physical aggression and that, that minorities have? Is that the fear?”

The fact that these counselor students were at the end of their education and training presents a concern that these behaviors will manifest in clinical encounters with racially diverse clients and possibly interfere with the therapeutic effectiveness of these encounters. These students, in other words, may contribute to what Sue and Sue (2013) reported as a widespread problem of inadequate counseling services to racial minority clients: “The services offered are frequently antagonistic or inappropriate to the life experiences of the culturally different client; they lack sensitivity and understanding, and they are oppressive and discriminating toward minority clients” (p. 92).

Interpreting Student Resistance as Sociopolitical Behavior

Interweaving the reported data with whiteness studies literature and social dominance theory, I analyzed examples of student resistance to address the question of: How does student resistance define behavior that reinforces White hegemony and control in counselor education classrooms?

Using a predetermined coding scheme informed by whiteness studies scholarship (Cohen, 2011; Dei, 2007; DiTomaso et al., 2003; Jensen, 2005; Johnson, 2006; Kivel, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Leonardo, 2004, 2009; McIntyre, 1997; Parker & Chambers, 2005; Rattansi, 2007; Sleeter, 2002; Sue, 2003, 2004a, 2007; Sue et al., 2009, 2010; Tatum, 1997; Wise, 2009) and social dominance theory (Pratto et al., 2006; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999, 2012), I connected student resistance to what scholars have
identified as political behavior to sustain whiteness (i.e., White dominance and control) in all levels of society.

One component of student resistance that I could most readily connect to sociopolitical behavior to maintain the racial status quo is coping actions students took to defend against the uncomfortable feelings that resulted from their harm-related appraisals of the videos. Similarly, several researchers and counselor educators have described student resistance as behavioral strategies students use to manage uncomfortable emotions evoked by racially themed classroom content (Fouad & Arredondo, 2007; Utsey & Gernat, 2002; Jackson, 1999).

From the data, I identified the following four categories of defensive coping actions that define what scholars have identified as behavior that reinforces whiteness: (1) avoid race-related discussions; (2) attack the person talking about racism and White privilege; (3) become resigned to racism and White privilege and do nothing about them; and (4) escape responsibility for racial injustice. I discuss each category in the following sections.

Reinforce Whiteness: Avoid Discussing Race

One way that White dominance and control are reinforced is by avoiding discussions about race and racism. As Johnson (2006) explained, without critical discussions that demystify the system of racial inequity and processes that sustain it, strategies to dismantle the system remain elusive and the system continues unabated. In analyzing the data in the present study, I found that students avoided critical discussions of race-related issues in several ways. One student participant, for example, said she avoids the emotional aspects of racial discussions by moving “up into my head”. Another
student avoided discussing race by using the word culture instead of race. She then talked about “not being accepting of cultures” rather than being racist against people of color. Another student said, “being called racist is probably the worst thing you can deem anybody in society anymore”. According to Parkinson (1996), this puts classmates and the instructor on notice to curb discussions on race so that this student doesn’t feel implicated in racism or, better yet, to shut the conversation down altogether. Still other students avoided race-related discussions by staying silent or by leaving the room.

Reinforce Whiteness: Attack the Messenger

Attacking the person or persons who speak out about racial inequity and processes that sustain it is another means of maintaining the existing racial stratification in society. Sue (2003) explained that: “by discrediting the communicator, the information and assertions made by . . . [the communicator] are invalidated” (p. 29). By denigrating Dr. Sue, students in this study cast doubt on his messages in the videos about the reality of racism and the toll it takes on people of color. Invalidating information Dr. Sue presented defends the dominant narrative that tells us there is equality and justice for all in this country and preserves the system of White hegemony it rationalizes.

Students in the study attacked Dr. Sue by accusing him of distorting the truth, and jumping to unwarranted conclusions. One student said that Dr. Sue “makes a lot of assumptions that I think aren’t necessarily true.” Students also called into question Dr. Sue’s legitimacy as a scholar and researcher. According to one participant, Dr. Sue “came across extremely biased and that hurts my personal opinion of his relevance and validity.” Other students criticized people of color in general as being insensitive, aggressive, and against White people. One student commented about how people of color talk about “how
horrible and unaware White people are”. Finally, one student accused people of color of bringing the issue of race into the debate when it isn’t warranted. In his description of the video presentation, this student said he thinks that “when people are a minority, they jump to conclusions that race is the reason for being mistreated”.

Reinforce Whiteness: Do Nothing

The system of White hegemony and control is also reinforced when racism is viewed as a hopeless or insoluble and efforts to overcome it as futile. Tatum (1997) claimed that when her students despair about racism and become resigned to it, it is a way of excusing themselves for doing nothing about it. Their inaction, according to Tatum, makes them complicit in the very system they are despairing about.

Students in the present study despaired about the racial injustice showcased in the videos and in some cases justified their lack of initiative to act against it. One student, for example, said that learning about racism is futile. Another said she felt hopeless to address racial injustice because there are no “examples or tools to change it”. Still another student gave White people’s refusal to acknowledge their privilege as justification for her inaction.

Reinforce Whiteness: Escape Responsibility

The status quo of racial inequity is also maintained when people refuse to accept responsibility for it. According to Johnson (2006), when people find a way to get themselves off the hook for racism against people of color, “they leave it to someone else to take care of the problem, which, of course, doesn’t happen, and for pretty much the same reason” (p. 108).
Students in the present study demonstrated many tactics to escape responsibility for the racism evidenced in the videos. For example, they denied that racism exists by listing the ways that people of color are better off than Whites, calling racism something else (i.e., matters of economics and good business practices), and claiming reverse racism. As one student put it, “I see there’s more tools to help minorities today than there ever will be to help White people. . . . If you go try and find an Anglo scholarship, if you’re lucky you might find one. And they just don’t exist.”

Some students avoided responsibility by acknowledging the existence of racism but trivializing its significance. Others shifted the blame for racism to flawed individuals (i.e., boneheads; people who “need to chill”; ignorant Whites). Still others dodged blame for the racial injustice highlighted in the video by discussing racism in terms of natural human tendencies to differentiate and categorize. On student, for example, contended, “we stereotype by nature. It’s just how we function as human beings. We can’t be this blank white board for every person we meet”. Finally one student exonerated White people for perpetuating a state of racial injustice by explaining that “they are just oblivious to it [their whiteness] . . . because it is not different from what is dominant” and they cannot be responsible for something they can’t possibly know about.

Having connected avoiding race-related discussions, attacking the messenger, doing nothing, and escaping responsibility to both student resistance and sociopolitical behavior that reinforces White hegemony, it is now possible to address the question: In what ways does student resistance evoked by a racially themed classroom video presentation qualify as a sociopolitical phenomenon? I argue that the connection this
study makes between student resistance and sociopolitical behavior that reinforces White
dominance and control qualifies student resistance as a sociopolitical phenomenon.

White hegemony and dominance are also reinforced through the use of hierarchy
enhancing myths. These myths are the subject of the next section.

Reinforce Whiteness: Employ Hierarchy Enhancing Myths

The biggest part of White hegemony is the predominance of a narrative that
supports it (Wise, 2008). In social dominance theory, narratives of support for the
established racial order are described as hierarchy enhancing legitimizing myths. These
myths are consensually held social ideologies that shape the behavior of individuals
(Sidanius & Pratto, 2012). White supremacy (a belief in the superiority of the White race)
is the conceptual basis for hierarchy enhancing myths that rationalize and reinforce White
racial dominance and control in United States society and beyond (Dei, 2008;
MacMullan, 2009; Wise). Student participants’ expressed beliefs in the superiority of
White people and White culture, nonwhite inferiority, and traditional American narratives
that obscure social inequities operated in the classroom as narratives of support for the
established racial order.

Having described the nuances of student resistance and connected student
resistance to behavior that reinforces whiteness, I now discuss the significance of the
findings.

Significance of Findings

As these findings suggest, student resistance is problematic in several significant
ways. First, student resistance interferes with important learning students must
accomplish to work competently and ethically with racial minority clients. Second,
student resistance reinforces White hegemony and dominance in the classroom. In other words, it creates the same oppressive environmental conditions (i.e., White advantage and disadvantage for people of color) that cause increased stress for people of color in larger society. Carter and Reynolds (2011) discussed some of the deleterious physical and psychological effects on people of color resulting from stress that oppressive racist environments breed:

The heightened stress from the chronic, comprehensive, and cumulative effects of racism and perceived discrimination has been associated with decreased quality of life, negative self-esteem, intrusive thoughts, hypertension, and increased risk for mental and physical illness such as depression, anxiety, or headaches in Black Americans. (p. 156)

Student resistance can also be a form of violence perpetrated on students of color in the classroom. As evidenced in the study findings, some students’ descriptions of their video experiences included stories of White superiority, the inferiority of people of color, and American myths used to justify White racial dominance. In other words, they imposed stories based in an ideology episteme of White supremacy. According to Vera et al. (1995), the imposition of systems of meaning (i.e., White supremacist ideology) that serve the political purpose of maintaining group-based inequality (i.e., keeping low-status groups in their place) is a form of violence against subjugated groups.

Finally, student resistance is a concern because counseling students who cannot deal constructively and forthrightly with issues of race in the classroom are unlikely to do better as counselors. In other words, if left unchecked, defensive behavior that serves to maintain the racial status quo may very well manifest in counseling sessions when
students’ future clients raise issues of race and racism. This behavior would surely preclude developing therapeutic relationships with clients. It could also make counseling and psychotherapy, as stated by Sue and Sue (2008), “handmaidens of the status quo, instruments of oppression, and transmitters of society’s values” (p. 85) rather than therapeutic endeavors.

These problems show the need for developing strategies to effectively address student resistance in counselor education classrooms. Before addressing these strategies, however, I will discuss ideas for future research.

**Future Research**

In this dissertation study, I approached the subject of student resistance by illuminating nuances of student resistance evoked by a classroom video presentation and connecting student resistance to the dynamics of whiteness. To identify student resistance, I employed a cognitive appraisal theoretical process model of negative emotion. This model explained students’ emotional experience of the video presentation in terms of the primary emotions of anger, sadness, fear, and guilt. In future studies, the use of other theoretical models to describe student resistance might further understanding of students’ emotional experiences. Some theories, for example, would explain the anger students experienced as a secondary emotion or symptom of a more basic emotion such as shame or fear (Stosny, 2009).

A compelling question related to this study but not directly addressed by it is: Why did students resist information and events in the videos? In other words, why did they appraise the video as harmful, experience strong negative emotions, and become occupied with defensive actions that have been identified as behavior to reinforce
whiteness? And why did they engage White supremacist ideology to explain events in the videos? Answering these questions of why student resistance occurs could inform strategies to address its causes.

Determining the reasons for student resistance can be addressed in future studies by means of a cause and effect experimental design. Gleitman (1991) described a cause and effect experimental design as a type of experiment in which an experimenter explores the influence of an independent variable or variables on a dependent variable. He went on to say, “Speaking loosely, independent variables are sometimes regarded as causes, dependent variables as effects” (p. A5). In future research to address the question of why students resisted information in the video, the experimenter would explore the influence of various factors (independent variables) on student resistance (the dependent variable). More simply, the experimenter would explore causes of student resistance.

Studies connecting student resistance to various group, individual, and intragroup factors provide some direction for choosing independent variables to test in these studies. This study, for instance, showed the connection between student resistance and behavior maintaining White group dominance. This finding suggests that using “desire to maintain the racial status quo” as an independent variable would be productive. In other words, an experiment to identify a determinant of student resistance would involve exploring the influence of desire to maintain the racial status quo (the independent variable) on student resistance (the dependent variable). A cause and effect relationship could be predicted if the experimenter is able to vary a student’s level of desire to maintain the racial status quo and observe the effect of this variation on student resistance.
Members of the dominant White racial group who benefit most from the racial status quo are likely to be the ones invested in maintaining the racial status quo. If this is the case, the desire to maintain the racial status quo is an example of a group-based independent variable. Another group-based factor that could be investigated for its effect on student resistance is the relative importance of social relationships to women as compared to men. Johnson and Marini (1998) found more positive racial attitudes among women when compared to their male counterparts and explained it in terms of differential gender socialization. They argued that “females' greater concern for others and their focus on relationships foster more favorable racial attitudes” (p. 247).

Cose (2011) connected the collective mindsets of different generations to individuals’ appraisals of racial issues. According to Cose, “Gen 1s (those born prior to 1945), Gen 2s (born between 1945 and 1969), and Gen 3s (born between 1970 and 1995) all have their distinct ways of looking at race” (p. 66). People of color in Gen 1, for example, are less likely to resist accounts of racism than are their counterparts in Gen 3. A future study exploring the determining effect of age on student resistance as it relates to students’ experiences of a particular era of United States racial history may be informative.

Other correlation studies that connect attitudes about racial issues to individual-based factors may be useful in identifying independent variables to test in studies identifying possible mechanisms underlying student resistance. For example, Crowson, Debacker, and Thomas (2006) reported on correlation studies connecting subjects’ negative attitudes toward racial issues to personality orientations favoring: (1) obedience
or subjection to authority; (2) conventionalism; (3) hierarchical over equal relations between social groups; and (4) cognitive closure and structure.

Data from the present study showed intragroup differences in students’ descriptions of their experiences of the videos which should be explored in further studies. For instance, in describing their experiences of the videos, some students of color denied that racism exists while others confirmed Dr. Sue’s accounts of racism. Scholars have speculated about these different types of responses. Delgado and Stefancic (2001), for example, contended that people of color as a group, are more competent to speak about racial issues when compared to their White counterparts and more likely to acknowledge racism. According to Delgado and Stefancic, “Most people of color believe that the world contains much more racism than white folks do” (p. 13). That would explain the different interpretations of my White friends and family and the students of color in the group when I told the story of my encounter with the Native American man after the basketball game. The White people saw nothing wrong with my behavior and sympathized with my reactions while the students of color commented on what amounted to my racist behavior toward the man. Delgado and Stefancic assumed that greater understandings of racial matters and increased willingness to acknowledge accounts of racism by people of color resulted from their own histories and experience with oppression. The explanation often given by scholars when people of color deny racism is that they have internalized White supremacist ideology (Meyers, 2005). In my experience, it could also be that people of color deny racism because they have found out that to say otherwise may upset Whites who have power over them.
A superior understanding of race-related issues, internalized White thinking, and a desire for dominant group approval all fail to adequately explain the experience described by Fran, a student of color in the study. In one of the classroom discussions, Fran said: “I have never felt discriminated against or been treated unequal, but I have seen it. And I know a lot of people that have been discriminated against because they are minorities.” Cose (2011) explained some cases in which racial minority individuals acknowledge racism as a barrier for others but not themselves as “a self-survival kind of bias” (p. 14). Rather than be discouraged by racism, these individuals find reasons other than racism to explain situations in their own lives where racism might be implicated. In this way, according to Cose, racial minority individuals empower themselves with the thought that all options are open to them rather than let racism place psychological limits on their ambitions.

By refusing to acknowledge racism in her own life, Fran might have been employing a strategy of psychological self-survival; or perhaps some other factor or combination of factors better explain the experience she described. We must depend on future research to sort out the complexity of experiences that Fran and the other participants shared.

Although providing definitive explanations for student resistance was beyond the scope of this study, I see this dissertation project as contributing to the groundwork for future research in this area. I look forward to continuing my involvement in descriptive and explanatory research as a means to broaden understandings of student resistance and develop effective means for addressing it.
Even though the complex of causes for student resistance is not definitive, some strategies for addressing student resistance based on speculative causes generated from existing research can be made. In the next section, I discuss strategies to address student resistance based on possible causes for student resistance suggested by the findings in the present study as well as my own experience with the issue.

**Strategies to Mediate Student Resistance**

In this section, I propose strategies that instructors can incorporate into the curriculum to mediate student resistance based on three possible causes for student resistance suggested in this investigation. First, it is possible that students do not recognize their behavior as student resistance and also do not realize they are wittingly or unwittingly engaging in sociopolitical action that reinforces the racial status quo. Strategies to address student resistance in this case would help name, reflect on, and mediate student resistance and thereby interrupt patterns of racial inequality in counselor education classrooms.

The second possibility is that student resistance to the video presentation occurred because students consciously or subconsciously desired to maintain the status quo of White hegemony and dominance. In other words, students, especially those privileged by White hegemony, were simply not motivated to engage classroom materials and activities that undermine support for a system that benefits them. In such cases, addressing student resistance means motivating students to change their desire to maintain the present system of racial injustice.

Third, it is possible that student resistance stemmed from thinking and beliefs that were constrained by an ideology episteme. Every counseling student comes to class
having internalized a system of understanding or a body of ideas that helps them organize their world and make sense of events such as classroom lessons on race. For students who internalize ideologies tied to structures of power, racially themed lessons often contradict students’ beliefs and evoke student resistance. In these cases, addressing student resistance involves implementing strategies to help students get outside the constraint of their system of beliefs.

In the subsections that follow, I describe strategies to help students name, reflect on, and overcome student resistance; increase their desire for social justice; and break free from constraints on their thinking. The strategies, which are meant to be considered separately rather than sequentially, consist of the following: (1) provide theoretical frames of understanding; (2) identify sociopolitical influences on beliefs; (3) facilitate communication; (4) increase desire for social justice; and (5) introduce the Hero’s Journey.

**Strategy 1: Provide Theoretical Frameworks of Understanding**

When racially themed classroom content provokes student resistance, counselor educators can provide theoretical frameworks to help students identify what is happening and learn to manage thoughts, feelings, and actions that distract from learning. I describe three helpful theoretical frameworks in the subsections below: the tripartite framework of personal identity, social dominance theory, and cognitive appraisal theory.

*Tripartite Framework of Personal Identity*

To explore sociopolitical determinants of student resistance, students must accept the premise that racial group identity is a powerful variable that influences people’s beliefs, appraisals of events, feelings, and actions. When making conclusions about
human behavior, students tend to focus on individual and universal explanations and
often fail to acknowledge the importance of group influences. In this dissertation study,
for example, students explained racism as acts carried out by a few flawed individuals or
something that everyone does. This reflects what Sue and Sue (2008) called an all too
common tendency in counseling and psychology “to ignore the group dimension of
human existence” (p. 36).

Sue and Sue (2008) developed a tripartite framework to encourage consideration
of group, individual and universal dimensions of personal identity that influence
behavior. To describe the framework, Sue and Sue started with an “old Asian saying that
goes something like this: ‘All individuals, in many respects, are (a) like no other
individuals, (b) like some individuals, and (c) like all other individuals’ ” (p. 37). This
saying describes the individual, group, and universal dimensions of personal identity
described in the tripartite framework. The individual level of personal identity is made up
of an individual’s genetic endowment, unshared experience, and other characteristics or
combination of characteristics that make the person unique (like no others). The universal
level of personal identity (ways in which we are like all other individuals) is made up of
common features of being human. Some examples of commonalities that all humans
share include biological and physical similarities, and, universal life experiences such as
birth, death, love, and sadness. The group level of personal identity (ways in which we are
like some individuals) includes factors of race, age, socioeconomic status, geographic
location and other group markers that may result in shared experiences and characteristics
(Sue & Sue).
Using the tripartite framework, counselors-in-training can be challenged to move beyond considering only individual and universal level explanations to consider how group dimensions (i.e., racial group affiliation) help explain classroom behaviors.

**Social Dominance Theory**

Counselor educators and students can use concepts from social dominance theory to explore and address student resistance in several ways. For example, by describing the hierarchy of relations between racial groups in society, social dominance theory provides a framework for understanding the sociopolitical context in which student resistance occurs. In addition, the concept that racial groups compete for status provides a causal linkage between racial group location, individual classroom behavior, as well as an alternative analytical lens to explore determinants of student resistance. In other words, students who resist racially themed classroom content may be knowingly or unknowingly acting as status group agents who are invested in their position of dominance over others. Finally, social dominance theory provides a framework for investigating sociopolitical underpinnings of student resistance by explaining that behaviors of individuals are shaped by consensually held social ideologies that rationalize and reinforce the status quo of racial group relations.

The book, *Social Dominance*, by Sidanius and Pratto (1999) explains social dominance theory in detail and excellent summaries of the theory can be found in a book chapter by Sidanius and Pratto (2012) and an article by Pratto et al. (2006). I will present a brief explanation of concepts from the theory that can be useful to students.

Social dominance theory begins with the observation that human societies over history tended to be structured as group-based hierarchies with one group at the top of the
social system and one or a number of other groups in relatively subordinate positions. In such hierarchical arrangements, dominant groups secure a disproportionate share of power, social status and other material and symbolic things of positive social value. At the same time, members of subordinate groups receive a disproportionate share of society’s miseries (i.e., relative powerlessness, low status, poor healthcare, poverty) (Sidanius & Pratto, 2012).

According to social dominance theory, there are three qualitatively distinct systems of group hierarchy found in societies. The first is an age system in which middle-aged adults secure a disproportionate share of power and status compared to children and older adults. The second is a gender or patriarchal system in which men have more power, status, and other privileges compared to women. The third is an arbitrary-set system in which arbitrarily defined, socially constructed group categories are hierarchically arranged and determine a group’s location in the hierarchical system along with corresponding advantages and disadvantages. Socially constructed group distinctions include those based on race, clan, religion, caste, and nearly any other arbitrary difference one can imagine (Sidanius & Pratto, 2012).

A major focus of social dominance theory is explaining mechanisms that produce and maintain social group based hierarchies. Johnson (2006) explained the process of creating an arbitrarily-set system of group hierarchy based on race that ensured economic and social advantage to those racialized as White:

Differences that would otherwise have little if any inherent connection to social inequality are nonetheless seized on and turned into a basis for privilege and oppression. Race is perhaps the most obvious example of this. Biologists have
long agreed that what are identified as racial differences—skin color being the most prominent—do not define actual biological groups but instead are socially defined categories. More important is that for most of human history, such “differences” have been regarded as socially irrelevant. When white Europeans began to exploit people of color for territorial conquest and economic gain, however, they developed the idea of race as a way to justify their behavior on the grounds of supposed racial superiority. In other words, by itself, something like skin color has no importance at all in social life but was turned into something significant in order to create, justify and enforce privilege” (p. x).

A primary means by which group-based hierarchies are maintained by the dominant group is through terror and acts of violence directed against subordinate groups. In societies with democratic and egalitarian pretension, violence and terror against subordinate groups can manifest not only as brutal physical acts, but as normal components of intergroup discourse that are designed to maintain group-based inequality and dominance over other systems (Sidanius & Pratto, 2012). Vera et al. (1995) explained symbolic violence as “the imposition of systems of meaning on subordinated groups in an attempt to make the dominant group’s actions appear legitimate” (p. 297). In social dominance theory, violence against subordinate groups in the form of discourse that serves the political purpose of maintaining group-based inequality (i.e., keeping low-status groups in their place) is discussed in terms of hierarchy enhancing “legitimizing myths” (Sidanius & Pratto).

Central to social dominance theory, according to Sidanius and Pratto (2012), is the proposition that behaviors of individuals are shaped by legitimizing myths. Legitimizing
myths are consensually held social ideologies that function to either legitimize the dominant position of the powerful over the powerless or to attenuate it. Beliefs that delegitimize inequality and counter dominance include humanist doctrines such as the universal rights of man and woman and noblesse oblige. Examples of myths that legitimize and enhance the present-day racial order of White dominance and control are assertions of White superiority and inferiority of people of color. Traditional American values also function as hierarchy enhancing legitimizing myths when they are used to rationalize the existing racial hierarchy. The myth of meritocracy, which claims that wealth and other social values are already appropriately distributed based on the deservingness of their recipients, is an example of how present-day social inequity is rationalized.

Once counselors-in-training have looked at the organization of society and how it is maintained, they are ready to critically evaluate their own experiences of student resistance in this social context. Cognitive appraisal theory provides students with a framework to consider how their socialization into a White dominated society may produce beliefs that evoke harm-related appraisals, negative emotions, and defensive actions when racially themed materials and activities are introduced in the classroom.

**Cognitive Appraisal Theory**

In the same way that cognitive appraisal theory is used in counseling sessions to help clients understand and manage their emotions, it can be used to help counselors-in-training understand and manage their emotional reactions to provocative classroom events. Cognitive appraisal theory is explained in detail in the books “Emotion and Adaptation” (Lazarus, 1991) and “Passion and Reason: Making Sense of our Emotions”
I summarize some relevant concepts from cognitive appraisal theory in which the concepts serve as useful guides for naming, reflecting on, and overcoming student resistance in counselor education classrooms.

Student resistance, defined as an emotional process evoked by racially themed classroom content (APA, 2003), can be readily explained with a process model of emotion. From the perspective of cognitive appraisal theory, the emotional process of student resistance involves a student consciously or unconsciously appraising an evoking event (i.e., racially themed classroom content) as harmful to her or his own well-being or the well-being of a group the student affiliates with. The harm-related appraisal leads to a negative emotion such as anger, guilt, fear, or sadness and the negative emotion in turn motivates a particular coping activity to deal with the difficult feelings. During the process, students disengage from the learning intended from racially themed materials and activities to focus on the appraised harm and what to do about it.

Lazarus (1991) identified core relational themes that connect particular appraisals to the emotions they elicit. For example, appraising the video presentation as a threat, leads to the emotional experience of fear. In addition, appraisals of loss lead to sadness, self-blame leads to guilt, and blaming others leads to anger. Lazarus also identified the biologically based coping action motivated by each emotion. The emotion of fear, for example, motivates avoidance or escape, anger motivates attack, sadness motivates inactivity, and guilt motivates reparation. Lazarus is quick to point out, however, that biologically based coping actions are often undercut by conditioned coping mechanisms. For example, when a person appraises an event as something for which she or he is to
blame, it is not unusual for the person to act to exonerate herself or himself rather than to make amends.

Cognitive theory assumes that a person’s appraisal of an event and resultant emotions and actions are mediated by the beliefs that person holds. Once counselors-in-training understand that cognitions direct emotional experiences, they can be challenged to examine the thinking and beliefs that drive the various emotions they experience when the class focus turns to issues of race. Ellis (2002) contended that the beliefs a person holds that lead to emotions and corresponding coping actions are largely just below the conscious level and can be brought rather quickly to the conscious level. Once students have consciously identified beliefs they hold, they are ready to examine how these beliefs may be influenced by the sociopolitical context in which they occur.

Strategy 2: Identify Sociopolitical Influences on Beliefs

Exposing beliefs that drive student resistance can be facilitated by knowledge of how beliefs may be “perpetuated and reinforced by the dynamics of social systems in which . . . [they] exist” (Ridley & Thompson, 1999, p. 4). Students, for example, can be challenged to compare the beliefs they hold that drive student resistance to predominant myths and narratives that operate to reinforce White hegemony in counselor education classrooms as well as the larger society.

Counselor educators can help students relate their individual beliefs to sociopolitical ideology through a four-step process. First, counselor educators familiarize students with predominant hierarchy enhancing narratives and myths identified in the Whiteness studies literature. The “post-racial narrative” is an example of a hierarchy enhancing narrative that can be presented to students. According to Wise (2009), this predominant national
narrative tells us there is no longer racism against people of color in this country or, if racism does exist, it is of no significant consequence.

Second, educators can discuss how these narratives work to reinforce the racial status quo of White dominance and control. For example, the post-racial narrative supports the racial status quo by relieving us of the responsibility to remedy racist conditions that thwart the life chances of people of color in this country; after all, if racism no longer exists or doesn’t amount to much, there is no reason to address it. Tatum (1997) explained the consequence of failing to recognize the existence of systemic inequality: “It is important to understand that the system of advantage is perpetuated when we do not acknowledge its existence” (p. 9). Wise (2009) pointed out how the rhetoric of racial transcendence also supports racial injustice by removing the context we need to understand the race-specific causes of racial disparities we see. Accordingly, people who cling to the belief that our country is post-racial are often closed to accounts of racism by people of color and look for reasons other than racism to interpret these accounts. A student in a class I was involved in, for example, expressed her belief that racism was no longer a significant problem in the United States and explained Dr. Sue’s accounts of experiencing racism as lies that he tells for the sole purpose of getting White people upset.

After introducing hierarchy enhancing narratives and considering how they function, counselor educators can then introduce materials and activities that challenge hierarchy enhancing narratives to the class. The two videos by Sue (2004b; 2007) used in the present dissertation study are examples of classroom materials that counselor educators can introduce. In the videos, Dr. Sue challenges the post-racial narrative by
presenting both study findings and personal accounts to show the pervasiveness of present-day racism in the United States and its devastating effects on people of color.

In the third step of the process, students describe their beliefs about the materials; or the counselor educator may present beliefs that other students have described. For instance, if the two videos by Sue (2004b; 2007) are used, instructors can report on some of the beliefs expressed by students in this study.

Finally, both instructors and students can critically analyze identified beliefs in relation to hierarchy enhancing narratives and myths, and then discuss associated consequences of holding beliefs that reflect these narratives and myths. For example, holding strongly to beliefs (i.e., racism is no longer a problem) that reflect ideology designed to reinforce the present system of White dominance and control not only leads students to resist classroom content that challenges this ideology but also makes students complicit in racial injustice.

Strategy 3: Facilitate Communication

Strategies counselor educators employ to name, reflect on, and mediate student resistance depend on clear and direct communication with and among counselors-in-training. In the following subsections, I address strategies to improve communication by establishing complementary definitions, defusing the term racist, and creating a safe learning environment (Singleton & Linton, 2006).

Establish Complementary Definitions

When discussing issues of race, it is important to precisely define terms and to correctly use them in application (Jensen, 2005). Traditionally, students and educators have relied on the dictionary for accurate definitions. As Tatum (1997) observed,
however, definitions found in dictionaries and other authorized publications can limit understandings of racial terms and concepts in ways that serve the interests of the dominant White group.

Beliefs that drive student resistance can sometimes be traced to mainstream definitions of race-related terms that dominate student thinking. In these cases, counselor educators and students can work together to address student resistance by developing working definitions of racial terms and concepts that complement racially themed classroom lessons. In the following subsections I discuss the process of developing working definitions for the following common race-related terms: racism, White, and whiteness.

Racism

When some counselors-in-training hear the word racism, many often think of it as it is commonly defined in the dictionary. The Merriam-Webster online dictionary, for example, defines racism as prejudice, discrimination, and beliefs people hold about racial superiority (racism, 2012). This strictly individualistic definition of racism works to delegitimize claims of racism at the system level by failing to acknowledge its existence. In the classroom, students who embrace individualistic definitions of racism often resist materials and lessons explaining racism as a system of advantage and disadvantage based on race. For example, in one of the classroom discussions in the present study, the topic of historic racist real estate practices was raised as an example of how powerful Whites ensured advantage for themselves and their descendants through racism built into the system. In response, one of the student participants in the investigation resisted the idea of systemic racism with the following description of racism as individual acts:
I can’t even begin to deny the fact that . . . there have been and still are inequalities. But . . . it’s tapering off to a certain extent to where . . . the charge of racism and stuff like that, I just think it is way overused. And . . . it’s assumed, I think too much that the average person on the street is more racist than they are. I ... don’t even know if it’s the average person that . . . even thinks that. Again, I think it is a lot of extremes. I think it’s just like anything else; it’s what you see on the media. It’s what you hear about. Yeah, you always hear about the person that had a problem; you never hear about the 500,000 people before that that had normal conversations and went about their day. You hear about the one that had a racist problem with race or got told something.

When defining racism, it may be helpful to distinguish between the forms it may take and emphasize that they all work together to maintain a system of oppression. For example, there is individual racism, systemic and institutional racism, and cultural racism. Individual racism involves behavior of individuals that reflects prejudicial attitudes and beliefs. Systemic and institutional racism are reflected in policies and practices at the structural level that advantage the White group and disadvantage people of color. Examples are racial profiling by police and course reading lists that only include books written by White authors. In the case of cultural racism, people who possess or adhere to characteristics of White culture are privileged in society and therefore have an easier path to society’s rewards.

White and Whiteness

Coming into class, many students think of “White” as being synonymous with “Caucasian” or as a term to describe someone who originated in Western Europe with
light skin and Western European physical feature. A student participant in the present study, for example, expressed a limited understanding of White as a description of skin color: “What does it mean to be White brings the question to mind, ‘Are we talking about my skin color?’ Because that is all it is.” Similarly, many believe that whiteness merely describes cultural practices of this group that are reflective of their Western European roots.

Students who define White and Whiteness in these descriptive terms tend to resist classroom lessons exposing political aspects of the terms. They may, for example, discredit and disengage from materials describing White as a concept that was created to serve the social and economic interests of those with power or whiteness as practices that enable those racialized as White to maintain power and control in society (Johnson, 2006).

To address student resistance stemming from limited definitions of White and whiteness, counselor educators can work with students to create working definitions that include several layers of meaning of the terms. For example, White as a description of physical characteristics and geographic origin of a group is one layer of meaning; the experience of being White and privileged in a White supremacist society represents another layer of meaning. Similarly, on one level, whiteness can mean group level behavior that reflects Western European cultural traditions; on another level, whiteness means ideologies, processes, and practices that are imposed by the powerful White group to recreate systematic privilege for those racialized as White (Singleton & Linton, 2006).

One belief that drives student resistance in some of my classes is: “criticism of whiteness is criticism of White people”. Providing students with definitions that
differentiate between White people (i.e., Caucasians) and whiteness (i.e., practices that systemically advantage White people with or without their consent) helps allay some of the deflectiveness that discussions of whiteness evoke among White students and those who empathize with them.

Including issues of power relations between racial groups when defining racial terms can help students avoid limited conceptions of race-related problems (Johnson, 2006). In the classroom discussion, for example, one student participant described problems among racial groups as simply a matter of skin tone preferences:

Couldn’t it be as simple as that the people that came to this country and found it, named it first, their skin was white. And when they ran into the Native Americans their skin was not. So they were shallow enough to say, so, you’re less, we win, we own it, we have bigger guns, let’s go! And then this country just has followed in this development of “skin color matters”. It’s what we see first. You know, we see you, Hispanic, you can be German and it’s really as simple as it turns into divisiveness.

Failing to acknowledge the power differential afforded to Whites in this country leads many to believe that problems between racial groups are simply matters of racial difference and tolerating, appreciating, or celebrating differences is the solution (Johnson, 2006).

**Defuse the Term Racist**

One source of student resistance that counselor educators must address is the imagined threat the term “racist” poses. As one student in the study put it, “being called racist is probably the worst thing you can deem anybody in society anymore”. Many
students either disengage or overreact when classroom materials designed to raise students’ awareness of racial realities identify White people as racists. For example, some commonly used materials claim that racism resides in every White person as a result of being socialized into a White supremacist society (Johnson, 2006) and White people are racists because they knowingly or unknowingly systemically benefit from racism (Tatum, 1997).

To address student resistance stemming from the imagined threat of being labeled a racist, counselor educators can encourage students to come up with a definition of racist as a term of self-reference that they can live with. When I ask students in my classes to come up with such a definition, I ask them to honestly confront the likelihood that their socialization into a White supremacist society has influenced at least some modicum of racist behavior (i.e., thoughts, feelings, actions) on their part. I also say I want them to recognize the efforts they make to address racism in the definition. Acknowledging anti-racist as well as racist aspects of themselves enables most students to define the term racist as it applies to them honestly but in a way that is empowering rather than threatening.

With these guidelines, most students are able to come up with a self-defining term for racist that encourages engagement with materials rather than resistance to them. Examples of these definitions are: (1) “I am an antiracist racist”; (2) “I am an aspiring anti-racist who is open to the likelihood that I have inherited and unwittingly exhibit racist behavior”; and (3) “I am a well intentioned person who does not want to offend or oppress people of different races, and therefore I am committed to recognizing, understanding, and reconstructing my racist habits of behavior”.

Create a Safe Classroom Environment

Many articles about facilitating critical discussions of race suggest how counselor educators can create a classroom environment where students feel free to participate without fear of suffering consequences for speaking their minds. For example, counselor educators can create a safe classroom by: taking care in arranging the room; letting students know that their grades will not be based on their perspectives and beliefs; creating classroom norms; intervening if students become disrespectful; and disclosing their own personal struggles with racial education (Creating, n.d.).

While I find these suggestions helpful, I don’t believe creating a safe environment where students can share their racial truths is entirely within the control of the classroom instructor. The instructor, after all, cannot protect students from negative reactions others may have outside the classroom or punitive actions other faculty members or administrators may take if they learned about a student’s opinion on racial matters that they deemed to be unacceptable. In one class I was involved in, for example, a Mexican American student said he agreed with an assigned article that pointed out how all White people are racists because of the benefits they automatically receive in our White dominated society. A high-ranking faculty member in the department who happened to be “observing” the class, said, “I’m White and I resent that.” I wondered how that faculty member’s resentment might manifest in future dealings with this student.

These types of experiences led me to believe that counselor educators who are interested in creating classroom environments where students are safe to speak their racial truths must create some opportunities for students to participate anonymously. One method is to employ technology such as classroom clickers, which have an input device
that lets students express their views during class in complete anonymity. Having students write statements anonymously that can be shared with the class is another possibility. I have also asked students if they are willing to let me present something they wrote in a paper to the class without revealing them as the source.

One would hope that higher education classrooms could be safe havens for expressing subjective truths and critiquing dominant narratives. When those with power in universities and colleges are invested in these same narratives, however, the sanctity of the classroom is jeopardized and learning is suppressed.

Strategy 4: Increase Desire for Racial Equality

Even when students recognize that the beliefs they hold reflect hierarchy enhancing ideology, drive student resistance, and make them complicit with a system of racial injustice, they aren’t necessarily willing to change their beliefs. According to Rebollo-Gil and Moras (2006), many times students, especially those privileged by White hegemony, are not motivated to embrace beliefs that lead to engagement with classroom materials and activities that challenge a system that benefits them. In such cases, addressing student resistance requires counselor educators to discuss oppression in ways that incite students’ desire for racial equality.

To help students overcome beliefs that drive student resistance, an argument from justice and all people’s right to mental health and happiness can be made. It can be argued, for example, that counselors-in-training need to change beliefs that prevent them from gaining necessary knowledge about racial issues to work competently and ethically with racially diverse clientele. Educators can also argue that beliefs that support a society that privileges Whites while decreasing the quality of life and chances for good mental
and physical health for people of color is not fair or just to people of color. Educators can also point out how complicity with racial injustice is contrary to students’ future obligations as counseling professionals to advocate for their clients by mediating oppressive environmental conditions that contribute to clients’ problems. When we hold beliefs that preclude engagement with materials that explain the subjective experiences of people of color, it can also be argued that we are repeating the historical pattern of refusing to affirm the humanity and dignity of people of color.

Although these arguments may seem compelling, Jensen (2005) observed the limited effectiveness of ethical or moral arguments for changing people’s behavioral supports for systems of racial injustice, especially those who are privileged by the systems. Jensen contended, “We can observe that privileged people’s commitment to social change tends to be stronger and more reliable when it is grounded in an acknowledgment of their own interests” (p. xix). Therefore, in addition to moral and ethical arguments, counselor educators may want to motivate students to change beliefs driving student resistance by stressing how engaging with racially themed classroom lessons benefits them and their professional development. Educators may want to remind students that knowledge of racial issues from the perspectives of people of color is part of the knowledge base of the counselor licensure exam. One can imagine that students who believe that what Dr. Sue has to say in the videos is relevant to securing a professional counselor license will make more of an effort to engage with the video and gain understanding of Dr. Sue’s subjective experience.

Another strategy to address student resistance based on students’ self interests is for counselor educators to explain that holding beliefs to support systems of racial
inequality and injustice robs students of their humanity. When professional counselors hold and act on beliefs that support a system of racial inequality, they become the oppressor by effectively committing acts of violence against their oppressed and disadvantaged clients. As Allen and Rossatto (2009) explained, “the violence of the oppressors makes them dehumanized” (p. 167).

Jensen (2005) addressed the loss of humanity that accompanies the support of racial injustice:

Somewhere down in our guts we understand that in an oppressive system such as white supremacy, the unearned privileges with which we live are based on the suffering of others. We know that we have things because others don’t. We may not want to give voice to that feeling, but it is impossible to ignore completely. And it doesn’t feel good, in part because to be fully human is to seek communion with others, not separation from them, and one cannot find that connection under conditions in which unjust power brings unearned privilege. To be fully human is to reject a system that conditions your pleasure on someone else’s pain. (p. xx)

As Jensen suggested, to gain back our humanity means changing beliefs that undermine challenges to hierarchy enhancing narratives. It also means showing concern for the rights of others to have their voices heard and their experiences affirmed and committing to creating a classroom and larger society that is healthy and validating for all groups.

Strategy #5: Introduce the Hero’s Journey

Even when students understand the importance of learning about racial issues and are committed to creating conditions of social justice, they may resist information in racially themed lessons because they have internalized an ideology episteme that is
incompatible with the information. When I told my story of the encounter with a Native American man after my son’s basketball game, students of color challenged me to consider what the man said and did without judging him. Locked within an internalized system of understanding that reflected an individualistic perspective, a sense of White superiority and entitlement, and the belief that intentions determine outcomes, I was incapable of considering the incident without a negative judgment of the man. I concluded that the internalized ideology episteme of White supremacy and White cultural perspectives that I used to make sense of the encounter did not allow me to understand the encounter without negatively judging the man.

To consider the encounter objectively, I needed to break free of my ideology episteme and the constraint of my White supremacist system of beliefs. I was ingrained with the ideology of White supremacy, and it inhabited me in ways I could not see. That is why transforming White consciousness is no easy task. The visualization exercise through which I attempted to transform my White consciousness was a monumental endeavor that took me far outside my zone of comfort. After this experience, I realized the importance of preparing students for the difficult challenge of breaking free from the limitations of their belief systems. Presenting the hero’s journey as a metaphor for the difficult process of transforming their mindsets is one strategy that faculty can used to prepare students for the challenge.

Joseph Campbell (1988) identified a typical hero sequence of actions which can be detected in stories from all over the world, from many different periods of history, and from the present day. In this section I identify themes from the hero adventure that can be used metaphorically to prepare students for the challenge of transforming their limiting
mindsets. Although I emphasize the transformation of White consciousness, the hero’s journey has application for preparing students to transform any ideology episteme that limits their understandings.

Campbell (1988) described the basic motif of the hero journey. The usual hero adventure begins with someone who feels there is something lacking in the normal experiences available or permitted to the members of her or his society. Having a moral objective of saving a person or a group of people or supporting an idea, that person departs on a journey. The journey involves a person venturing out of the known, conventional safety of one’s life to take a hero’s journey that involves dangers, trials, and tribulations. On this journey the hero discovers what was missing in her or his consciousness in the world she or he inhabited prior to embarking on the journey.

The hero’s journey is about leaving one condition, engaging in finding the source of life to bring you forth in a richer or more mature condition. All hero myths involve transformation of consciousness in some way. Experiencing forces that change one’s beliefs is a simple example (Campbell, 1988). For students influenced by dominant narratives and locked in a White mindset, forces that challenge their beliefs are often the alternative narratives offered by people of color (Allen, 2004). In my case, the Native American student in the group and the Native man I encountered after the basketball game offered narratives that challenged my beliefs.

The crux of the journey of transformation has been described by Campbell (1988) as the development of one’s humanity. Overcoming one’s White supremacist mindset and arresting behaviors that reinforce White racial hegemony and dehumanize others also describes the development of one’s humanity.
Another connection between the hero’s journey and breaking free of the ideology episteme of White supremacy involves the difficulty the hero faces in holding on to her or his gains when returning from the journey and moving back into her or his social world. When the hero returns and presents what she or he has found to those in the former world, very often what the hero has accomplished is shattered by the inability of those in the former world to see it. A well-known fairy tale motif involves coming out of the forest with gold and having it turn to ashes (Campbell, 1988). When I told my White family and friends the new story of the encounter with the Native man that included a lack of judgment of him and my journey to transformed thinking, they couldn’t or wouldn’t embrace it. It is hard to hold on to what you have accomplished without some affirmation from your social group.

The importance of continually supporting and encouraging counseling students in thoughts, feelings, and actions that contribute to a healthy and validating classroom for all students and a therapeutic counseling environment for all future clients cannot be overstated. Such support must not be limited to the 16 weeks that most counselors-in-training spend in their mandatory multicultural class. It should be an essential component of every counselor education class.

One caveat for faculty to keep in mind when presenting the hero’s journey is that there is a possibility that students will interpret the hero’s journey as a White savior narrative or will make some other unhelpful connection. Therefore, faculty must be sure to clarify the metaphorical connections between the hero’s journey and the student’s personal journey to overcome the limitations of their mindsets. Faculty members, for example, need to make it clear that the person the student is saving through a
transformation of consciousness is not other people but the student herself or himself. In other words, the metaphorical journey is one of personal transformation for the student’s own sake. Also, the story to be shared at the end of the journey is not so much about the student’s external journey as it is about what the student has made of her or his internal journey. Finally, the road of trials in the hero’s journey can be readily connected to challenges the student must face in the process of personal transformation.

**Conclusion**

This dissertation began with the premise that counselor students cannot begin to achieve the understanding and learn the professional skills necessary to counsel racial minority clients until they successfully overcome their resistance to racially themed course content. As counseling educators, we are obligated to provide students with tools to achieve this goal. This dissertation project is intended to continue and broaden the investigation of factors contributing to student resistance and thereby assist in developing and improving tools to overcome it.

Previous investigations of student resistance and responsive strategies have been largely constrained by a strictly individual psychological understanding of the phenomenon. This study applied a more expansive view of student resistance as a phenomenon that reflects not only individual behavior but also the social and political context in which resistance occurs. In particular, this study connected student resistance in counselor education classrooms to sociopolitical behavior that reinforces White hegemony and control.

The study and resulting findings contribute to counselor education literature by exposing student resistance as more than previously identified individual behaviors that
obstruct individual learning. To the extent that students help create the classroom learning environment, student resistance introduces the same oppressive conditions of White racial hegemony that are found in larger society, constrains participation by students of color, and suppresses group interaction and meaningful learning.

The focus of this dissertation has been on understanding resistance as student behavior. Understanding resistance, however, is only a first step. Creating and maintaining a classroom atmosphere of civil discourse in which all students feel free to express their opinions and know that their opinions are valued and respected is the next important step. We have seen how resistant behavior damages the classroom learning atmosphere and suppresses open and frank discussion of racially themed course material. No purpose is served, however, if resistant thoughts and behaviors are simply driven underground to fester beneath the surface. Here, counselor educators’ responsibilities are crucial and could indeed be the focus of another dissertation. Addressing discriminatory comments without suppressing discussion is no simple task. Counselor educators must be good role models in the words they speak, the examples they use in class, and the materials and activities they present. Preparing counselor educators who can competently assume these roles and responsibilities must be a priority in graduate programs.

The increased understanding of student resistance as sociopolitical behavior that reinforces White hegemony can help inform the development of strategies to address student resistance and thereby help create a classroom environment that is healthy and validating for all students. Indeed, helping students gain this perspective of their own difficulties dealing with racially themed course content may itself be a valuable tool in overcoming these difficulties.
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Consent to Participate in Research

Sociopolitical Influences Underlying counseling Student Resistance to Ethnically and Racially Themed Course Content

Introduction

You are being asked to participate in a dissertation research study that is being conducted by Evonne Olson who is the Principal Investigator and Dr. David Olguin who is supervising the study. This research is studying masters level students’ experiences of a video presentation designed to educate students about issues of race and ethnicity that relate to multicultural counseling. Approximately 40 people will take part in this study at this University.

This form will explain the research study, and will also explain the possible risks as well as the possible benefits to you. If you have any questions, please ask either Evonne Olson or Dr. Olguin.

How can I contact the research team?

- Evonne Olson... Email: eolson@unm.edu | Phone: 555-690-2828
- Dr. David Olguin... Email: dolguin1@unm.edu | Phone: 555-277-5324

What will happen if I decide to participate?

If you agree to participate, the following will happen:

You will be assigned to either the participation group or the non-participation group. (Some students who agree to participate will be randomized into the non-participant group).

If you are assigned to the participation group you will be asked to:
- fill out a demographic sheet
- watch clips from video lectures
- complete a questionnaire asking about your experience of watching the video presentation and your opinion of the video presentation as a teaching tool
- participate in a group of approximately 8-10 participants who will discuss their experiences and opinions of the video presentation

On the demographic sheet, you are asked (1) to provide your preferred method of contact; and (2) if Evonne Olson may contact you to ask if you would be willing to meet with her individually. If you say you are willing to be contacted, there is a possibility that Evonne
Olson will use the method provided to contact you to ask if you are willing to participate in a 30 minute follow-up meeting for the purpose of either having you further describe your experience of watching the video or having you assess the accuracy of interpretations made about your experience.

To help ensure the accuracy of collected information, all components of the study will be either audio or video recorded.

**How long will I be in this study?**

Participation in this study will take approximately 50 minutes (during one class period) to watch the video clips and fill out the forms, and 75 minutes (during a subsequent class period) for the group meeting.

**What are the risks of being in this study?**

- There are risks of stress, emotional distress, inconvenience and possible loss of privacy and confidentiality associated with participating in a research study.
- There are no known additional risks associated with participation in this particular research study.

For more information about risks, ask either Evonne Olson or Dr. Olguin.

**What are the benefits to being in this study?**

There will be no benefit to you from participating in this study. However, it is hoped that information gained from this study will help improve the education and training of future counseling students.

**What other choices do I have if I do not want to be in this study?**

If you choose not to participate in the study, you will be involved in activities that parallel those of study participants except that you will not fill out the demographic sheet and your activities will not be recorded. Non-participants’ activities will be led by a doctoral student or a retired professor in a separate room.

**How will my information be kept confidential?**

We will take measures to protect your privacy and the security of all your personal information, but we cannot guarantee confidentiality of all study data.

Measures to ensure confidentiality will include the following:

- Access to recordings and other data that reveal participants’ identity will only be available to the principal investigator (Evonne Olson) who will store these items in a locked file cabinet in her home.
• Evonne Olson will personally transcribe all recordings without using the names of participants.
• At the end of the study, Evonne Olson will personally erase all recordings and cut off and shred any identifying information on study documents.
• Participants’ names will not be used in any discussions, presentations, or published reports about this study.

NOTE: Information from your participation in this study may be reviewed by the Institutional Review Board. There may also be a time when we are required by law to share your information.

What are the costs of taking part in this study?
There are no costs involved in taking part in this study.

Will I be paid for taking part in this study?
You will not be paid for taking part in the study. If you decide to volunteer for a follow-up meeting with the principal investigator, you will be paid $4.00 to cover parking costs.

Can I stop being in the study once I begin?
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to choose not to participate or to withdraw your participation at any point in this study without penalty. If you decide to stop participating while the study is in progress, you may walk quietly out of the room. At other times, you can contact Evonne Olson to say that you have decided to leave the study.

Whom can I contact with questions or complaints about this study?
If you have any questions, concerns or complaints at any time about the research study, Evonne Olson or Dr. David Olguin will be glad to answer them. If you would like to speak with someone other than the research team in regards to any complaints you have about the study, you may call the IRB at (555) 272-1129.

Whom can I call with questions about my rights as a research subject?
If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may call the URB at (555) 272-1129. The IRB is a group of people from the University and the community who provide independent oversight of safety and ethical issues related to research involving human subjects. For more information, you may also access the IRB website at http://hsc.edu/som/research/HRRC/maincampusirbhome.shtml.
Consent

You are making a decision whether to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that you read the information provided. By signing this consent form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights as a research subject.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and all questions have been answered to my satisfaction. By signing this consent form, I agree to participate in this study. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you.

_______________________
Name of Adult Subject (print)

_______________________  ________________
Signature of Adult Subject  Date

INVESTIGATOR SIGNATURE

I have explained the research to the subject and answered all of her/his questions. I believe that she/he understands the information described in this consent form and freely consents to participate.

Evonne D. Olson

_______________________
Name of Principal Investigator

_______________________  ________________
(Signature of Principal Investigator)  Date
APPENDIX B

Student Demographic Sheet

(Continue answers on the back)

1. Name ___________________________________________________________

2. □ Non-Degree □ Master’s Level Counseling Student □ Other __________

3. □ Male □ Female 4. Age ________

5. In regards to financial resources, where are you in relation to other people your age? (✓ Box)
   □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ Not as well off.....................................About the same........................................... Better off

6. Describe your Ethnic Identity:

7. Describe your Racial Identity:

8. How do others describe your Ethnic and Racial Identities?

9. Describe your background:

10. In what ways did ethnicity and race impact your upbringing?
11. How many courses have you taken that significantly addressed issues of race and ethnicity? __________

12. What do counseling students need to know about ethnicity and race?

   a. Describe a time when a class was successful in teaching you these things:

   b. Describe a time when a class was not effective in teaching you these things:

13. May Evonne Olson contact you to see if you might be willing to participate in a follow-up meeting?

   □ Yes   □ No

   If you answered yes, what is the best way to contact you?

   □ Email:

   □ Phone:

   □ Other:
Dear Dr. ________________________________,

I have received approval by the University Institutional Review Board to conduct my dissertation study entitled Sociopolitical Influences underlying Counseling Students Resistance to Ethnically and Racially Themed Course Content. My dissertation chair is Dr. David Olguin. I am writing to ask if you would allow me to conduct the study in your ___________________________ class this semester.

The study takes approximately 3 to 4 hours spread over two class periods. Basically the study involves students watching a video that addresses ethnicity and race and describing their experience of watching it. Students then share their experiences in groups of 6 to 8 students. To assure accuracy of information, I will be audio-recording or video-recording my time in the class. I will fully explain the details of the study to students and will get their informed consent prior to conducting the study.

I would like to arrange to meet with you to explain the study in more depth and answer any questions you may have. Please let me know a date and time that is convenient to meet.

Thank you,

Evonne Olson
Doctoral Candidate, Counselor Education
eolson@mmm.edu             Cell: (555) 690-2828
1. What was it like watching the video?

2. How did you feel during the video?

3. What thoughts went through your mind during the video?

   3a. What personal beliefs underlie these thoughts?

4. What is your opinion of the video as a tool to teach counseling students about ethnicity and race? Explain.