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CRITICAL INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE:
DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF CONTEXT,
INTERSECTIONALITY, AND REFLEXIVITY
IN UNDERGRADUATE CONVERSATIONS

Erin Watley

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**CRITICAL INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE: DISCOURSE
ANALYSIS OF CONTEXT, INTERSECTIONALITY, AND
REFLEXIVITY IN UNDERGRADUATE CONVERSATIONS**

by

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B.A., American Studies & Sociology, University of Maryland, 2007
M.A., Communication, University of Illinois, 2012

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy
Communication**

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Albuquerque, New Mexico

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DEDICATION

In memory of my grandmother, Jean Hall. I finished! You poured nothing but love into me, and I pray that I can do a fraction of the same for those who come into my life.

In memory of my uncle, Dennis Watley. You did things your own way, and you have inspired me to keep hustling and innovating as I go forward.

I believe in divine purpose and direction, and I know that I could not have completed this PhD journey by my will and strength alone. Thank you God, for having brought me this far and putting the right people in my life at the right time to raise my spirits or pull me through.

Thank you to my grandparents, Dorothy Watley, Richard Hall, and Jean Hall, who laid the foundation for pursuing higher education. I might be one of the first with a PhD, but as a Black American, it is rare to be able to state that you are a third generation college student. Thank you for the values of perseverance, ambition, resourcefulness, and pride that you demonstrated and instilled in me. Because of your example, I never doubted that I belonged here, or that I was capable of succeeding at this educational level.

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There is a village of extended family, friends, teachers, and mentors that I have met at every stage along the way who have nurtured me personally, spiritually, and academically. It can be difficult for me to emote outwards, but it is not at all lost on me that anything that I could brand as personal success is due in large part to the wide range of people who have cared about me and invested purposefully in me. There are so many individuals that this dedication would turn into another dissertation chapter if I attempted to name them all here. I am blessed beyond measure, and thanks to all of you for seeing in me, and nurturing, that which I was often unable to see in myself.

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ABSTRACT

Intercultural conflicts continue to persist for numerous reasons. The groups involved remain polarized, individuals tend to primarily concentrate on defending their own point of view, or solutions concentrate on individual actions instead of the consequences perpetuated by complex social systems. The communicative behaviors that often accompany intercultural conflicts also frequently work to sustain them, helping those who are involved to perpetuate dominant narratives and marginalizing social systems in ways in which they are both active and complicit. In this study Critical Discourse Analysis was used to examine the ways that undergraduate students discussed and conceptualized intercultural conflicts during their involvement in an Intercultural Communication course. The pedagogical goal was to encourage critical approaches from the students. Key critical concepts of context, intersectionality, and critical reflexivity were incorporated as part of intercultural dialogue into the course activities and assignments.

Analysis was conducted on written reflections that the students completed for class, and an audio recorded conversation that the students had with a partner who was not a part of the class about cultural identities and conflicts. Discursive tools such as equivocation, disclaimers, positive-self versus negative-other, and making broad generalizations based on individual experiences were used to both constitute and challenge broader ideologies such as individualism, whiteness, classism, and nationalism.

Across all of the writings and exchanges there was a strong tendency to position the intercultural conflicts as the result of individual choices or deficiencies. Overall, the frequency of dominant ideologies that were reinforced demonstrates the strength of these ideologies throughout US American social practice. That the dominant ideologies were reproduced by individuals who have marginalized racial, gender, and sexual identities as well as those who had more privileged identities, is evidence of the strength of dominant ideologies. The prominence of color-blind, post-racial discourse showed the persistence of ideologies of individual meritocracy and the continuing need for critical pedagogies and discourse.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION & PROBLEM STATEMENT

Intercultural conflicts are persistent forces that surround us and range in scope, location, parties involved, and time frames. An intercultural conflict can take the form of a disagreement between two friends about the prominence of Caitlyn Jenner and the visibility of the transgender community. We can also see intercultural conflict within the longstanding violence and discrepancies over land rights in Palestine and Israel. It surfaces through protests that have been held in US American cities in response to the increasing visibility of incidents of police brutality, or can be seen as a key component comprising challenges to the use of Native American imagery for sports mascots and Halloween costumes.

When it comes to facilitating how to address these intercultural conflicts, either to attempt to find some “resolution” or to ease the tensions, different types of discursive moves are often suggested and used. For example, US President Barack Obama called for “public discussions” about mental health in the wake of school shootings (Somashkhar, 2013) or former US Attorney General Eric Holder insisted that US Americans need to engage more “frank conversations” about race as divisive issues with racial implications persist (Frieden, 2009). Communication scholars argue that better ways of talking, like the use of dialogue, can potentially lead us to treat others more holistically (Anderson, Baxter & Cissna, 2004) or create new levels of understanding across cultural groups that are often positioned in opposition (Zuniga, 2003). Even colloquial wisdom suggests that to “talk things out” or to “speak your mind” can be useful dealing with a conflict situation. Despite much attention and faith in the merits of constructive talk and discourse, I have noticed that the assessment frequently stops with the suggestions to try

out or practice different types of talk. There has not been as much attention given to how that talk about intercultural conflict creates its own discourse and reproduces broader discourses and narratives about social systems, values, tensions, power, inequality, and practices.

A disagreement between two friends about the prominence of Caitlyn Jenner and her visibility as a member of the transgender community can function as discourse that reveals assumptions about gender norms and the ways that people are socialized into assumptions about sex, gender roles and behaviors. The war over land rights in Palestine and Israel that has persisted throughout many generations can evoke discussions about religious and national cultural identities, and the consequences of those oppositions include physical displacement, economic disenfranchisement and loss of life, with the weight of the disparities falling upon the marginalized Palestinian community. Talking about protests being held in US American cities as a response to the increasing visibility of incidents of police brutality, is also a form of discursive communication that is indicative of contested responses to the use of state sanctioned violence, the treatment and perception of people of color, and socioeconomic class positioning of marginalized communities. These conversations reproduce a long history in the United States of people losing their lives for being quickly perceived as a threat or out of place in spaces that are primarily White and/or upper class. As Jorgensen & Phillips (2002) argue “ways of talking do not neutrally reflect our world, identities, and social relations, but rather, play an active role in creating and changing them” (p. 1).

In considering the prevalence of intercultural conflict and the potential of discourse to reproduce racism, classism, inequity, and suggestions for discursive

alternatives, I designed this research study to employ critical discursive techniques to analyze the discourse created by students as they discussed intercultural conflict. It is important to evaluate if/how those discussions about intercultural conflicts reinforce broader social inequities between groups. It is important to acknowledge that discussions of intercultural conflicts create tensions over belonging, identity, ownership, and resource distribution “While issues at a particular moment and in a particular place may trigger intercultural conflicts, the source of the conflict is often connected to broader historical, cultural, political and economic inequities” (Sorrells & Sekimoto, 2016, p. 248).

Intercultural conflicts continue to persist for numerous reasons. The groups involved remain polarized, individuals tend to primarily concentrate on defending their own point of view, or solutions concentrate on individual actions instead of the consequences perpetuated by complex social systems. The communicative behaviors and characteristics that often accompany intercultural conflicts also frequently work to sustain them, helping those who are involved to perpetuate dominant narratives and marginalizing social systems in ways in which they are both active and complicit. Therefore, how discourse in social interactions activates public and institutional discourses about cultural groups, social hierarchies, ideologies, and intercultural conflicts merits study.

Pedagogical Context

The Importance of Intercultural Communication

I have long ascribed significant merit to intercultural communication due in large part to my own personal experiences and academic positioning. My primary spaces of

upbringing in the suburbs of Washington DC, attending a small private school, and regular attendance at a non-denominational church were all racially and ethnically mixed sites. Yes, I was a part of a Black American family, but my friends, teachers, and pastors represented a range of backgrounds and I have valued the experiences and exposures that diversity facilitated. My scholarship has not only expanded my past valuing only diverse racial and ethnic interactions, and grown more critical of how those interactions take place, but also it is still grounded in the belief that interactions across intercultural boundaries are beneficial, particularly when it comes to addressing conflicts that are also related to those cultural divisions. When I teach Intercultural Communication I use a critical pedagogy perspective and approach it as an opportunity for students to engage a range of diverse cultural opinions and issues. Scholars of critical pedagogy also focus on teaching through experiences and awareness of cultural difference (Trifornas, 2003), and intercultural communication (Phipps & Guilherme, 2004). So for the purpose of this study I selected an Intercultural Communication class to be the ideal site to generate and evaluate the discussions that were related to intercultural conflicts and analyze the types of discourse that they produced. Therefore, my dissertation focused on instructional activities and student conversations about intercultural conflicts.

Experiential Learning & Practice

A pedagogical question for scholars who are focused on examining and teaching strategies that increase knowledge about multiple perspectives, and discourses around conflict, has been on what types of strategies can be used. Talking, listening, negotiation, debate, interventions, diplomacy, sharing, and silence are some of the actions and tools that are promoted to deal with all matter of social and cultural conflicts. Through the

intercultural communication course content and activities, I intended to create a space that facilitated a type of experiential learning, which educational researchers have asserted as influential in connecting learning to action. I used this critical pedagogical frame because it positioned this study as one that connects what the students create discursively to the world outside of the classroom. Roberts & Steiner (2010) specified that critical pedagogy assumes intentionality in the performative nature of teaching practice that is a source of social, cultural, political critique, and connect the private sphere to the institutional world. Schultz, Baricovich & McSurley (2010) used social action curriculum projects (SACP) for pre-service educators to specifically demonstrate how the practice of democratic skills can push schooling beyond the walls of the classroom. The participants were taught foundational theory and skills about engagement and democratic participation and were then required to partake in “meaningful endeavors” in public spaces outside of the classroom. Examples of these are instances of culture jamming and guerilla communication that take place within the participants’ communities.

For my research approach the experiential learning came from critical class discussions, activities, and discussions that the students held on their own with a partner outside of class. The authors noted that through the use of the SACP framework the participants “not only identify relevant and pressing issues, they work through possible solutions, which, in turn, provides chances for engagement in contingent action planning to solve their identified issue (p. 370).” This type of experiential learning becomes “learning in the making through the engagement of real world problem solving” (Ellsworth, 2005). It also supports the notion that in order to affect change, educators

must also insist on skills within the context of critical and creative thinking (Delpit, 2006). This experiential learning takes compartmentalized subject areas and converts them into a toolkit for social action. This social imperative creates contextual relevance and purpose for the participants. The experiential learning tools I used were to help make critical intercultural dialogue relevant by bringing in the complexities of identity intersectionality that influence the ways that we create discourse about different intercultural conflicts.

Critical Intercultural Dialogue

My driving approach in facilitating this type of learning, and generating discourse, in connection to intercultural conflict, revolved around intercultural dialogue. Dialogue, in general, has a variety of definitions and applications. The dialogic theory frequently referenced by communication scholars is that of Buber (1970). He described that inherent tensions tied to human communication need evaluation and that can be done through dialogic interactions where people are able to meet authentically and see one another holistically. The emphasis in a dialogic interaction is on attitudes and orientations that will allow for a genuine exchange to take place where the participants are present, included, confirmed and authentic. Buber's approach here does present a number of assumptions about being able to determine what discursive behavior is "genuine" and that individuals who are present in an exchange can all experience inclusion or confirmation, which is often not the case when groups of differing positions of power are involved (LaFever, 2011; McPhail, 2004). However, the driving assumptions related to the usefulness of dialogue when dealing with conflicts prevail, that when these are present

individuals are contributing to a mutual space and able to deal with different types of conflict as a result (Johannesson, 2000; Pearce & Pearce, 2004).

This type of dialogue is optimal for some interactions and relationships, but also often misses critical appreciation of the broader context within which the conflicts occur, and rarely are participants asked to account for their own positions within that broader context. When this type of an interpersonal approach to dialogue is used in classrooms I have observed that context is underemphasized, cultural differences are minimized and individual agency is presumed equal for all participants. Despite being more idealized, and researchers who argue that one, or even multiple, feel-good moments of understanding do not typically last (Jones, 1999), and call for more attention on the systemic forces that support inequities like racism, classism, or heteronormativity (Watt, 2007), this conception of dialogue is frequently used as a tool for educators, religious leaders, or civic organizations as a way to address, or even try to “solve,” intercultural conflicts.

Some approaches to intergroup dialogue, have been used in international conflict management (Collier, 2009), town hall forums about social issues (Pearce & Pearce, 2004), and as an educational dialogue tool specifically tailored to address discussion of intercultural conflicts in university classrooms (Gurin, Nagda & Zuniga, 2013, p. 43). These approaches can be critiqued on a few different premises. One critique is that they treat intercultural conflict as a binary where opposing sides are static and encompassing for everyone with the identity marker in conflict, which overlooks multiple and intersecting identity positions (Yep, 2010). Further, some of these applications of intergroup dialogue neglect context (Pearce & Pearce, 2004), ignoring structural

influences on status and access to resources. Many would also benefit from participants being more reflexive about their own and others' positioning in the conflict (Watt, 2007). Finally, while some of the uses of intergroup dialogue include discussions of action outside of the site where the dialogue is taking place, there is very little attention given to what the practice of those actions would be like (Maxwell, Nagda, & Thompson, 2012). While this group of educators has designed approaches to dialogue that include critical aspects to address intercultural conflicts, this is still an area that is under researched.

Because of the shortcoming in these dialogic approaches, a more critical intercultural application is considered necessary by critical scholars. James (1999) examined discussions that were riddled with misunderstandings, mistrust, and inaction between Native Americans and non-Native representatives and argued that because of differing power positions and cultural practices, critical intercultural dialogue was the better approach. The strategy that James framed suggested that the participants take action in response by prioritizing understanding other's values, having fair discussion conditions, and fostering mutual openness. Gorski (2008) pushes his assessment of need for critical intercultural dialogue even further by noting in his review of intercultural education that awareness and discussions about similarities are not enough, and he calls for discourse that acknowledges systemic power, disparities, and individual positionality.

Key Concepts of Critical Intercultural Dialogue

I align with this critical approach to dialogue for my pedagogical implementation and discursive analysis of student practices, and it became the purpose of this dissertation, to analyze students' practice of critical intercultural dialogue techniques. I

incorporated three key concepts/processes into my pedagogical approach. Each of these key concepts relates to both the ways that the discourse about intercultural conflict implicates broader systems, and the underutilized discursive tools that I asked the students to practice. The first key concept is an appreciation of contextual factors in connection to intercultural conflicts where the conflicts are always produced by broader structural systems that create and maintain the conflict. The second key concept is the recognition of intersectionality, which accounts for the constant influence of structures while exploring how identities such as gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, class and nationality interact and connect back to the social world (Yep, 2015). The final key concept is critical reflexivity, where the participants use continuous reflection and critique of their own identity positions when considering different intercultural conflicts.

Context

While contextual factors play a strong role in influencing how people talk about conflict, explicit discussion of context is often absent in dialogue about intercultural conflicts (Collier, 2014). Therefore, it was included in my framework for critical intercultural dialogue. In my teaching I have noticed that when students discuss the source of an intercultural issue they frequently direct the blame to the individuals involved or fault one corrupt group or organization, instead of calling attention to the pervasive, often invisible, systems of control that are at work. The incorporation of context into critical intercultural dialogue and the evaluation of discourse was a result of the application of the critical theoretical assumption that cultural meanings, identifications, and representations are socially and structurally produced (Halualani & Nakayama, 2010). This foundation made it necessary to illuminate the many different

structural factors and competing interests that are involved in order to begin the pursuit of better managing the conflicts. Broome & Collier (2012) also call for context to be examined from a critical/interpretive perspective in studying intercultural peacebuilding. They note that context refers to material and environmental conditions as well as history and collective memory; safety; technologies; legal, religious, political, educational and other institutions; and general resources. They argue that context in intercultural conflict is more than places, or past and present spaces. Contexts are “both temporal and spatial, incorporating past, present, and future” (p. 253.) Considering the many facets of context is the primary step to getting beneath the surface of what can be clearly seen and heard, or what has been represented.

Talk shows, trainings, mediation, news programs, and dialogue groups are some of the sites of dialogue; and these also downplay the role of context. From the perspective of this study, popular approaches to dealing with intercultural conflicts lack a combination of necessary factors: critical engagement of context and structural forces, a lack of critical reflexivity and neglecting continuing application elements that have been connected to social change. For example, outrage about police brutality in urban and minority communities is not only about individual instances of violence. There is a history of tenuous relationships between law enforcement institutions and these communities, from legislated mistreatment to numerous individual grievances. Applying an analysis of context to conflict situations is one way to get a fuller picture of how intercultural conflicts emerge and are experienced. Analyzing how students talk about context enabled me to examine which structures were being pointed out or ignored, and how contextual factors were linked with conflict.

Critical communication researcher Kathryn Sorrells highlights context as a component in her intercultural praxis framework. In addition, Sorrells (2010) describes different levels of context through which intercultural communication, and conflict, can be framed. She outlines how the examination of a conflict from a micro, meso, and macro frame can illuminate different interests and perspectives at play within the same conflict situation. Each frame allows for different levels of evaluation; for example, broad structural institutions like economies and national processes (macro), the interpersonal or face-to-face interactions (micro), and the group based interactions that take place (meso). Collectively, these frames that Sorrells (2013) highlights provide a research structure for revealing contextual factors that are related to intercultural conflict. They also show that there are multiple levels of interaction that need to be seriously considered.

The ontological assumption here is that the frames that we use to address an issue influence the ways that we position our reactions in response to it, and also the types of solutions that are posed. Epistemologically, one example of the value in considering multiple levels of context can be seen in Flores' (2003) research dealing with discourses about migration in the United States. Though she did not use the terminology of Sorrells' (2013) frames, Flores looks at media narratives about US immigration and found that while the public rhetoric is concentrated around economics, need for labor, and national security (macro-level evaluation), bringing in meso- and micro-frames of consideration also shows that the media discourses about immigrants related to race, nationality, and class changed group risks (meso level) at different points in history, and different groups were being positioned as assets or threats to communities. The immigration narratives have varied meanings and consequences based on all three

frames. Students in my study, therefore, were asked to consider how messages, policies, and community actions are contextually framed related to how cultural group members and their roles in a conflict are viewed.

When macro to micro levels of context are not emphasized the individuals discussing conflict situations may attempt to solve their intercultural conflicts without any discussion of root issues and structures. For example, Town hall forums and intergroup dialogues are tools often used to engage the public in deliberating social issues. Pearce & Pearce (2004) describe one form of dialogue connected to the theory of Coordinated Meaning Management (Littlejohn & Pearce, 2010) using small group dialogues in a town hall meeting to address the racial tensions in a rapidly diversifying community. Participants created and explored stories so that the people in the community could move forward together. However, the background and context were left out, or left up to the participants to contribute. Issues of identity positioning and historical systems of domination (like racism or classism) in a more historic sense were not brought up nor addressed. This type of shortcoming could also happen in daily attempts to explain or resolve conflict when the assumption is made that all of the influencing factors are only there in the moment or are what has been already articulated by those involved. When a critical sense of context is not present then hidden and pervasive structures that produce inequitable conditions cannot be called out and addressed. For this research study, consequently, context is a key component and students were asked to talk about it and the way that context affected and is affected by other key factors in intercultural conflict.

Intersectionality of Identifications and Representations

The second key concept, cultural identifications and representations, are evident in conversations about intercultural conflict and discourse about them reproduces broader social hierarchies as well as influences what resources, jobs and services are made available. Race, for example, is a cultural identity that is socially constructed. The definitions of who is Black, White, Latino/a, Asian etc. have evolved over time through social and political moves that primarily operate to protect and define Whiteness (Wander, Martin & Nakayama, 1999), and those distinctions have very real material consequences. Social and economic positions of racial groups in the United States show that people of color continue to be disadvantaged (Lui, 2009). Also the representations of raced identities are produced in broader cultural systems. Hall (1997) explains that representations of different cultural identities reveal the dominant ideologies and systemic power. Groups that are represented in narrow, stereotypical ways in media or political discourse are also being marginalized in other social systems and institutional practices. Hall (1997) also points out that the quality of the representations of a cultural group indicates how that group is treated by society. Identifications and representations were my primary way into analyzing the socially constructed and structurally produced cultural group affiliations in students' discourses. Analyzing those identifications and representations as multiple and complex, and as intersectional, increases the relevance of my study.

Van Dijk (2000) studied discourse related to race and nationality conflicts and found the parties involved often used a form of contrasting discourse through talk about "us" versus "them." The comparisons often include binary positive self and negative

other views. This discourse and characterization of parties involved in conflict neglects multiple and intersecting cultural identities. Often, cultural identities are juxtaposed against one another in a binary fashion that defines the actions or beliefs of conflicting parties as static entities. I noticed that my students tended to characterize intercultural conflicts as bi-polar, “black versus White” issues or a disagreement between two distinct groups. This is why I introduced intersectionality, the second key concept in my approach to critical intercultural dialogue.

In an example of research that shows the common pattern for individuals to oversimplify cultural identities through their discursive practices, LaFever (2011) evaluated the use of dialogue and interaction in town hall meetings to determine the use of land by American Indian residents, developers, and politicians. Her analysis focused on single racial, professional, and community identities without the acknowledgment that there are likely other identities like class position, land grant holder, and spiritual protector influencing the interactions. DeTurk (2006) introduced intercultural dialogue about conflict in her college classroom to open up discussion and understanding across different identity groups. However, the examples cited also show an approach to singular cultural identities. For example, she asked students to share thoughts or understandings about Muslims, African-Americans, women, and Mexican-Americans. Her application shows students were asked to recognize varied cultural group perspectives but less attention was given to how those identities affect each other, how they shift and change within each identity category, and the varying experiences of members of each group, and how the groups were positioned by societal systems and institutions. These incidents

of dialogue related to intercultural conflict were missing significant attention to cultural intersectionality.

Intersectionality is a key component in this study because while analyzing the use of context in discourse invites the examination of an intercultural conflict to multiple layers of histories, structures, and frames for experience, intersectionality invites the recognition that these multiple layers, or cultural factors, also become frames for identities. Even though my students often displayed a tendency to discuss conflicts as only involving two opposing cultural groups at a time, Donald Hall (2004) notes that in interactions “real human consciousness and self-identities do not fall into neat, polarized categories used commonly for the analysis of oppression” (p. 114.) Intersectionality became an important way to talk about multiple identity positionalities, and the connection that those varied identities can have to systems of power and exclusion. For instance, a critical ethnography about Filipino gay men in New York City highlights the multiple intersecting communities tied to gender performance, sexual expression, race, and body type instead of examining the community as a monolith (Manalansan, 2003). Intersectionality also addresses how experiences vary depending on the setting and how different identities move into and out of prominence (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012). Individuals involved in intercultural conflicts not only socially construct their own complex identifications but also are positioned by institutional policies, historical events, political discourses, and others’ everyday talk into particular status positions. During class my students were encouraged to move away from only talking about a singular cultural category relevant to the conflict, such as race, immigration status, religion, social

class, or a combination of two categories such as ‘welfare queen’ (Hancock, 2003; Kopacz & Lawton, 2011; Popp, 2010).

Some of the best examples of how intersectionality is utilized within my study are found in work that addresses the simultaneous disruption and navigations of gender, race, and sexual orientation. For example, Eguchi (2015) centers conceptions of race, masculinity, sexual orientation, and class in his auto-ethnographic descriptions of cis-gender male, gay, Asian and Black relationships. He discussed how his embodied performance and experiences varied in different places such as a New York City club or a professional work environment. The salience of his identities and how he was treated by others varied, and those shifts were also driven by different structural norms of racism, sexism, and classism. His descriptions of those shifts and orientations to dominant norms favoring Whiteness or higher social class complicate identities for the reader and thus feature intersectionality on multiple levels of evaluation. This Eguchi (2015) article was assigned reading for my class, along with other articles (Kopacz & Lawton, 2011; Croucher, 2008) that emphasized the ways that intersecting identity positions are experienced.

Additionally, Gloria Anzaldua’s work on borderlands (2012) shows the value of using intersectionality in a way that creates space for individuals in intercultural borderland spaces. For Anzaldua, borderlands are not only geographic locations, they also represent a political space of multiple cultural systems which are contested and contradictory. She explains how her identity as Chicana clashed with the Whiteness imposed through her schooling and evidenced by the patrolling of the physical borders with Mexico in south Texas. Anzaldua proclaimed to be proudly Mexican, Chicana, and

American (p. 5). Anzaldua argues that she is like many women of color who are positioned as multiple minorities and must navigate this space of cultural difference. She demonstrates that it is possible to “both understand and reject, to love and detest, to be loyal and question” the elements of social identity and existence (p. 5). She also takes on the role of bridge builder, encouraging intercultural allies to meet in this space and work for structural change. The intersectionality in her approach gives researchers a broader vocabulary and a different way to conceptualize how people connect to their different identities by allowing room for the contradictions that individuals embody.

While Eguchi (2015) examines intersectional identity disruptions and re-conceptualizations, Patricia Hill Collins uses intersectionality to directly respond to, and critique cultural layered and embedded structures of power. Collins (2008) calls out the Whiteness and class privilege that is connected to feminism in her approach to Black Feminist Theory. She brings attention to researchers who are not a part of the culture of women of color, and Black women who promote a color-blind feminist narrative, and speak for all Black women without recognizing that racism and classism cannot be separated from their experiences as women. After hooks (1984), the multiple identities make it impossible to speak about womanhood alone; researchers have to account for the complexity of lived experiences.

Johnson’s assertions about the need for quare theory (2005) hit on similar concerns as those of Collins as applied to queer Black people. He argues that queer theory scholars do not acknowledge that there are unique cultural factors that influence the experiences of queer Black men differently from queer Whites. Because of identity intersections, commitments to groups involved in intercultural conflict and related

experiences vary. Scholars using a queer perspective show that narratives and representations can contain layers that reinforce dominant ideologies (Eguchi, Calafell, & Files-Thompson, 2014). A movie that features gay Black men might be progressive in that queer men of color are given visibility, but that does not mean that heteronormative, classist, and Whiteness ideologies are not pervasive within the text as well. While dealing with those specific identities is an embodied reality for many, those experiences that might not otherwise be recognized by those who do not have similar identities unless a sense of intersectionality is applied to the research. It was important to be able to identify the power structures and dominant ideologies that are in play around intersectionalities, like heteronormativity, class privilege, and Whiteness.

Finally, the integration of intersectionality is important for this research because it invites students to talk about the complexity that individuals experience on a daily basis and in conflict. The incorporation of intersecting cultural identities by students requires discussion of social systems and structures, and encourages them to move beyond assumptions of individual autonomy and freedom. For instance, representations can become triple jeopardy for Black women who are poor (hooks, 2012). Asking students to talk about intersectionality calls for students to consider how being positioned as racialized, sexualized, and class positioned group members is central to understanding intercultural conflicts. Talking about multiple cultural identifications and intersectional similarities invites students to identify areas of convergence instead of relying on identity binaries such as Black vs. White, straight vs. queer, or able-bodied vs. disabled and to discuss instead how gay Black middle-class males might be positioned in similarly marginalized spaces, to devout Muslim middle-class males, for example. In the students

practice of critical intercultural dialogue, I examined how the students' discourse positioned intersectional cultural identities and relationships.

Critical Reflexivity

The third major concept in my application of critical intercultural dialogue is critical reflexivity. I define critical reflexivity as a continuous questioning, individually and dialogically, about one's own cultural identifications, representations, levels of privilege, and ideologies that are active in framing the research design, data collection, analysis, and outcomes of the study, or also frame discussions of intercultural conflicts. I encouraged my students to acknowledge their own positionalities in their dialogues. This meant reflecting together critically about cultural identities and status locations in relations to others' locations. I noticed that the students in my previous classes frequently addressed intercultural conflicts as incidents that "just happened" typically outside of their realm of experience. Critical reflexivity invites the students to discursively engage the conflicts through recasting themselves as active and complicit contributors to the systems that reproduce the conflict.

Reflexivity is a key component of Collier's (2015) critical reflexive dialogue praxis in her research interviews with various staff and participants in an anti-poverty program. The researcher was not separated from the study and there was open acknowledgement that multiple levels of context and action had to be critically uncovered in order to understand the different relationships being constructed within the broader community, such as "relationships between academics and practitioners, academics and community participants, academics and funders..." (Collier, 2015). Here, the researcher,

subjects, community members, and associated institutions were all active in constructing and producing knowledge about poverty.

As the researcher and instructor of the class used for this study it is important that I bring critical reflexivity into my research design, procedures, analysis, and outcomes. My position in the classroom and my own cultural identities often influenced the topics I selected and my perspective. As a Black woman instructing an undergraduate class I was already an underrepresented and politicized body being a person of color working in higher education (Calafell, 2012; Griffin & Redick, 2011). My positionalities further influenced my rationale for the study, perspective on the goals for the class, and how I chose to administer content. I do believe that the roots of intercultural conflicts are embedded in societal systems of control and marginalization like classism, racism, or heteronormativity, and that my work should pursue the dismantling of those systems. This study is a contribution to that political position, under the assumption that discourse about intercultural conflicts can reveal those systems and the discourses associated with them, and that more critical applications of discourse could invite discussion of alternatives that contest those structural systems.

Personally, my experiences as a Black woman are heavily influenced by the geographic and social class position in which I grew up. I was raised in the suburbs of Washington DC in a middle/upper-middle class household. While my Blackness has always been one of the most salient elements of my identity, my racial identity has always been situated within spaces that are racially mixed, but majority White. During class I frequently incorporated examples that revolved around the experiences of racially marginalized groups because it is a salient topic for me and I can speak from experience.

Also, my students affirmed that they did not have much experience talking about conflicts related to race within a racially mixed group. However, my class positioning also made me acutely aware of the boundaries attributed particularly to race and resources in situations where I have been identified as “too Black” or “not Black enough” which always made discourse about race about more than Black and White. The salience of my racial identity and the values that I attribute to interactions within a diverse cultural space helped to frame how I contextualized issues related to race and asked the students to dialogue about it.

I knew that more intersecting identities (e.g. my middle-class economic position, progressive politics, female gender, Christian religion, heterosexual orientation, US American nationality, and even plus-size body type) contributed to the ways that I facilitate my teaching. I often speak from a middle-class US American perspective when it comes to intercultural conflicts. To privilege talking about conflict can represent a position of comfort in that the lived experiences of intercultural conflict of others from marginalized class positions may be focused primarily on memories of physical harm, fighting for survival, or embodied struggle. To just talk about the conflicts is a luxury. I also experience many of my identities with tension in comparison to the norms that are typically attributed to them. My having to grapple with being a woman who does not identify with many “girly” things, a Christian with predominantly liberal/progressive political leanings, a plus-size body that excels at physical activity, or a heterosexual woman with limited dating experience, highlights narratives about identity positions that have helped me to contribute perspectives on intercultural conflicts that expose and complicate master narratives.

As I have continued my education into graduate school and have been teaching about intercultural difference and interaction, I have seen that diverse interactions and discourse require a critical component in order to encourage students to understand their own positions related to intercultural conflicts. Critical reflexivity about my own identities and representations became a part of the class at multiple junctures. My US American citizenship and middle-class economic position came up in course discussions about the intersections of immigration status and economic class. I occupy a position of privilege. I had to be cautious about foregrounding my own experiences too strongly. In this situation I noted that my privilege points to an economic hierarchy that works against those with limited resources who want to be US citizens

For the students, critical reflexivity was used to bring attention to their own place within social structures contributing to conflict and to recognize who occupies more spaces of privilege and marginalization due to historic racism or classism for example. Critical reflexivity was designed to help them to account for the ways that identities are viewed by others in multiple ways. Similar moves and connections are also made in Collier & Ringera's (2015) description of their alliance within the International Peace Initiatives project in Kenya. This was another required reading for the class. With this example the article itself is also dialogic in style, allowing both of the authors to speak from their own perspectives to problematize their assumptions about peacebuilding and reflect on their relationship in connection to the intercultural conflicts in Kenya.

When using intergroup dialogue, Nagda & Zuniga (2003) asked students to make connections across differences and encouraging participants to recognize their own privileges and disadvantages that accompany their different identities, thus, engaging

critical reflexivity (Zuniga, Nagda & Sevig, 2002). In their research, the students participated in discussions and exercises that pushed consideration of individual identities and their connection to different intercultural conflicts. While participants noted that the process can be uncomfortable, they also expressed revelations about their relationships to conflicts that were not previously considered before the dialogue by making statements such as “For the first time I grasped the disadvantages I faced as a woman,” “Now I question everything. Why did I speak out more in class than the woman beside me?” and “White people will avoid and ignore race and pretend like it doesn’t exist” (Gurin, Nagda, Zuniga, 2013, p. 66-69). These examples show that reflexive acknowledgement of positionalities uncovers previously invisible levels of privilege.

However, even with these examples of reflexivity within dialogue there was a tendency of students in the research study above to ignore elements of intersectionality. Particularly with the intercultural dialogues many of the interactions in classrooms were positioned around binary identities, like Whites vs. people of color, US Americans vs. international students, or heterosexuals vs. queers. One of the goals with my approach was to facilitate students’ understandings of others and self in intercultural conflict; therefore, intersecting elements had to be recognized. Another goal was unveiling how structural mechanisms operate, and another was encouraging those involved to understand their own positionalities in relation to those structures and associated conflict. My assumption is that critical reflexivity needs to be actively combined with context and intersectionality to push for a fuller perspective of intercultural conflict and to consider future actions and discussions after the class is finished.

The practice of first engaging in dialogue, and then reflecting on that dialogue about intercultural conflict, was used to create space to encourage students to consider agency: where agency refers to individuals' capacities as contextually contingent, linked to the ability to intervene in and change social forms (Giroux, 2000, p. 353). Sorrells & Sekimoto (2015) also argue for the merits of instructional spaces in which students see the "possibility of becoming more conscious, aware, and socially responsible individuals. It also means that we develop self-reflexivity and agency within unequal relations of power that shape intercultural interactions" (p. 4).

As a course project, I designed an opportunity for groups of students to discuss intercultural conflicts and propose individual actions to further engage local conflicts. The emphasis was on developing the potential to understand how agency is enabled and constrained, and to potentially exert agency by talking about intercultural conflicts differently in the future or developing alliances or information campaigns. I looked to see whether or not the students were able to create, as George Nakagawa (2015) discusses, group discussions of actions developed through informed choices and knowledge that they can make an impact, but also with awareness that they act in conditions that structurally created.

In summary, the emphasis of this research study was on analyzing students' discourse that emerged in the context of critical intercultural dialogue practice in my Intercultural Communication class. The students were required to use critical intercultural dialogue techniques as they discussed intercultural conflicts inside and outside of the classroom. Additionally, the students learned about the social structures that impact intercultural conflicts. James (1999) argues that the university classroom is the optimal

setting for intercultural dialogue because in that space students are already being encouraged to think critically, and the students and the institution are likely to be more receptive to intercultural issues and approaches. Since the three key concepts are so central in the structural production and social construction of discourse, I included these not only as pedagogical goals, but also analyzed how these concepts emerged and how they functioned in students' discourse. This study evaluates how those critical concepts were put to practice discursively, and also what broader societal discourses and ideologies were being reinforced and produced.

My goals for this study were to have students use intercultural dialogue in the classroom in a way that was critically contextualized, intersectional, and reflexive. Students recorded conversations and also reflected upon their dialogues. These became the discourses I analyzed. My pedagogical goal was that the information, practice, and planning for the class would help to facilitate demonstrations of a critical understanding of intercultural conflicts where they could engage in discourse about intercultural conflict topics and feel equipped to critically respond to the intercultural conflicts that they would encounter after the class concluded.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL & THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Culture

Since the content being addressed in this study is critical dialogue practice about intercultural conflicts, it is important to conceptualize culture and intercultural conflicts. I align with a critical cultural studies approach to culture which holds that culture is a primary way of organizing human experiences and worldviews through shared and contested meanings. For example, Black women are often stereotyped as being sassy or having an attitude in mass media representations (Yarbrough & Bennett, 1999), which can contribute to real life struggles for Black women to claim and affirm identities that challenge this socially established norm. Culture is comprised of identifications and representations that index how people position themselves and how they become positioned within hierarchies and institutionalized systems. Scholars speaking from a critical perspective often orient to cultures as lower case and plural, rather than those aligning with positivist approaches to ‘The Culture.’ Culture is not a universal form of categorization, it is dynamic and it travels (Shome & Hedge, 2002). From this point of view culture can be centered around identities like race, ethnicity, language, gender, religion, socioeconomic class, or geographic location, but the emphasis of consideration is on the social systems that they implicate. Cultural identities are positioned discursively in relations according to status and access to resources, and these relations inform institutional policies and practices. Because of the connection to systems, these cultural categories also exemplify the ways that alignment with certain identities, and distance from others, are constructed through power relations and social hierarchies. Cultural identities are often discussed as if they are concrete, when they are actually unstable,

contextually contingent, and typically organized by structures like sexism, heteronormativity, and racism.

Collier (2014) highlights the ways that culture is considered a mechanism for organizing “complex, complicated, contradictory, multiple and multileveled locations of speaking/acting/producing/distributing and consuming (p. 8).” She also argues that cultural subjectivities are positioned into relations of difference and that the differential positioning establishes various political itineraries. Ono (2010) also explains that culture is not solitary or confined within well-defined boundaries of geographical location, such as nation or shared ancestry. This orientation to culture recognizes its use as a way of organizing along with the work that it does for defining and creating additional meanings and consequences. Culture and communication naturally influence one another; because there are consequences produced by cultural difference (Hall, 1976). This perspective on culture was a foundational concept for this study because it forefronts cultures as structurally produced and socially constructed. This conceptualization also contributes the assertion that cultural difference is central to conflicts between groups. Culture is embedded in contextual structures as well as daily interactions, discourses, and the ways we position ourselves in relation to others, the ways we make sense of ourselves and the world around us, and how dialogue can be used.

Intercultural Conflicts

Structures and social systems position cultural groups into status hierarchies and conflict is driven by moves to change or reinforce those locations. Discussions involving intercultural conflict can range from wars between countries to small arguments amongst

coworkers, or legislation related to reproductive rights to the casting choices in the latest Hollywood film involve culture. Debates about these types of topics relate back to the systemic foundations of cultural norms, shifts, and differences. I chose to have participants engage intercultural conflicts because those conflicts expose a range of influencing structures and cultural difference. Intercultural conflicts are defined by Sorrells & Sekimoto (2015) as “intercultural tensions over belonging, identity, ownership, and resource distribution” (p. 248). Intercultural conflicts take a variety of forms. These include debates spurred by rapper Iggy Azalea’s appropriation of Blackness as she made a name for herself in the world of hip-hop music, the experiences of harassment and discrimination that people who identify as transgender often face when others realize that their gender identity does not match the sex assigned to them at birth, or disagreements about the representations of Muslims in U.S. American films where they are likely to be shown as villains and terrorists. Intercultural conflicts can take the form of the ‘controversial issues’ or ‘hot topics’ employed by Gurin, Nagda & Zuniga (2013), and their inclusion highlighted the structures and systems at the root of those conflicts.

My own orientation to intercultural conflict is that these occurrences are representative of more than discrepancies between different cultural groups; they are indicators of broader structures that are tied to historic, political, and economic inequities (Sorrells & Sekimoto, 2015). I used adapted tools from critical intercultural dialogue to critique and complicate students’ understanding of these types of conflict and help them to practice critical responsiveness to those conflicts outside of the classroom. Dempsey, Dutta, Frey, Goodall, Madison, Mercies & Miller (2011) argue that cultural difference is

both medium and product of relations of power. Dempsey et.al. (2011) contextualize that those differences arise through the ability of one interest group to privilege one system of difference over another. The influence and effects of oppression and privilege might otherwise go unrecognized by researchers without attention to how difference works (Collier & Eguchi, 2015). By using points of intercultural conflict I designate my access point to these perpetuating systems that are often unrecognized by individuals who are not a part of marginalized identity groups. However, cultural difference is not a binary relationship between two groups since every conflict activates multiple cultural identities and representations, and intersectional locations vary through the visibility of different systems. For example, I could not discuss gender differences without discussing other cultural identities that are inextricably connected, such as race and class. In this study I used conflict around those points of difference, like narratives about the LGBTQ community and Christianity, or the invisibility of White poverty in the United States, to interrogate the sexism, homophobia, racism, classism, etc. that contribute to these conflicts.

Intercultural conflict has also been shown to operate on multiple levels that impact individuals, groups, and communities. Those levels of conflict demonstrate the various facets at which those power structures operate, and despite measures of progress in some areas, these types of conflicts persist. So those points of intercultural conflict are recognizable and relatable for students to discuss, while also presenting a passage into examining the breadth, depth, and strength of systems of power. Sorrells (2013) frames ways to pursue action and solutions to intercultural conflict even when the conflict is intractable, and it is unlikely that conflict will ever go away completely. She notes that

even if conflict is an inevitable part of the human condition, it does not mean that people should not seek out means for improvement. This study used these types of intercultural conflicts to engage students in relevant dialogue and to practice dialogues within and outside of the classroom. My intention was for the students to practice critically evaluating and dialoguing about intercultural conflicts, and to experience group discussions planning actions that address the structures impacting the world around them.

Critical and Interpretive Theoretical Foundations

Critical Foundations

My approach to this study is grounded in a critical approach, and formed by theories about the use of critical intercultural communication to generate discourse about intercultural conflicts. The critical tradition supports my driving commitments to analyze discourse about intercultural conflicts by highlighting how social structures are considered within them. The critical tradition also justifies my use of intercultural dialogue as a teaching tool and the key concepts that I implemented for students to use during the discussions.

The basis of critical approach that I used is focused on the engagement of intercultural dialogue to examine the frequently veiled institutional forces that impact the world that we live in. My approach moves past the surface of intercultural conflicts in order to address to the expansive and engrained systems of hegemonic power and control (Martin & Nakayama, 1999). The critical perspective provides a framework for unveiling the structural and socially constructed causes and influences of intercultural conflicts that

are encountered on a daily basis. While institutional forces such as racism, colonialism, heteronormativity, sexism, and neoliberalism, might be hidden to those who benefit from them because they represent the status quo, it is essential to reveal and examine the many ways that these institutionalized forces impact subject positions, relationships between groups, and societal norms (Hall, 1976; Halualani & Nakayama, 2010). Hegemonic systems are a constant presence and are reproduced in environments that are broad and small. Halualani & Nakayama (2010) examine cultural identities including race and nationality while emphasizing that those labels represent more than biological traits and highlighting that those cultural identifications also reveal histories of struggle and positioning that impact material realities. Similarly, Dutta (2011) critiques neoliberal ideology which advocates for an economic perspective that valorizes profit, capitalism, and local control and explains how this ideology has also become a mechanism for regulating social problems and denying resources to marginalized groups. By bringing attention to the ingrained nature of these systems and ideologies, and the differential impact they have, from a critical perspective, students can more accurately target the root of the intercultural conflict with their responses.

Ono (2009) presents some of the ways that media representations in television and film reinforce particular rhetoric and claims about race. The messages that continue to be sent are often replicating historic racism even in media programming that might seem to be progressive. He challenges any notion that popular culture texts are benign and demonstrates how entertainment media are embedded with meanings that contribute to intercultural conflict. The movie *Avatar* could be viewed as a progressive sci-fi epic about environmentalism, but it still plays into tropes where the savage people of color

have to be rescued by a White savior. Therefore, my critical approach features an examination of systemic forces in a range of locations. It is an imperative for this research study because the overarching goal is to help participants use dialogue to become more aware and able to critically examine these systems that are operating within the intercultural conflicts that they encountered.

One example of intercultural conflicts in the United States that could surely benefit from more evaluation through a critical lens is the recent incidents that have focused on police violence against unarmed Black men and women. These incidents are partly a product of the criminal justice institution and attention needs to be brought to the long history of racialized violence from organizations of the state, the economic policies that have facilitated the creation of concentrated impoverishment in urban areas, and the media representations that disproportionately portray Black men as criminals that should be feared. Also, the lessened media coverage of the violence that Black women have experienced is revealing of the invisibility and public erasure that women of color often experience. Attention to these structural factors gives a distinctly critical framing of the conflict that is essential to understand how the conflicts develop.

I also argue that a fraternity's usage of chants that have racial slurs, rules in the workplace that restrict Black hairstyles, or pushback against programs that prioritize discussions about power relations in higher education, are all examples of systemic racism and White privilege, and are part of the current context in the U.S. in which intercultural conflict occurs. I have observed that when students engaged in discussion about these intercultural conflicts it seemed to be easier to avoid mentioning those structural factors. Therefore, throughout the semester in the class in which this research

was conducted, I tried to stress the application of a contextual critical perspective to intercultural conflicts, which required the students to consider these types of incidents as symptomatic of issues that are deeply ingrained in US American society. My critical theoretical position also allowed me to emphasize that the students consider their own positionalities and privileges in relation to those systems and how they could respond to those systems that perpetuate the conflicts.

It was important to extend the critical perspective to encourage students to make connections between theory and practice and the potential for applying further critical dialogue after the conclusion of the course. This was in order to facilitate moves towards praxis and possible future collaborations to change institutional policies, practices, and local norms. Tuhiwai Smith's (2007) book about indigenous research in general describes indigenous perspectives to research methods as acts that push back against institutionalized policies and norms that marginalize and reinforce racism and colonialism. Her perspective to research exemplifies the fusion of theory and action. Working to reveal the systems that drive intercultural conflict was another primary goal of my work, as well as linking theory and future action to explore the possibility for social change through the use of critical intercultural dialogue.

Critical practice in response to intercultural conflicts can also be extended to the communication that takes place surrounding it. I looked at the students' discourses about social change. The evaluation of how those exchanges took place contributed to the ways that various topics and discursive practices were explained. Critical intercultural communication scholars note that intercultural interactions themselves reproduce as well as inform broader narratives about culture. In their discussion of intercultural partnerships

in nonprofit organizations Chen, Lawless & Gonzalez (2015) assert that “The field of inter/cultural communication is particularly poised to contribute to understandings of *how* individuals, groups, and stakeholders relate, engage, or work across difference toward social change” (p. 188). Power relations, intercultural partnerships and identity negotiations are rarely explicit in interactions but when they are, they display the strength and depth of dominant power mechanisms.

Collier’s (2014) work also informs my study. She describes critical praxis, which is interrogating structures that produce exclusion, inequity, injustice, and collaborating with community groups and organizations on actions that can lead to varied levels of social change. While positioning her research in the realm of community engagement, she argues that foregrounding contextual factors means examining “historical, political, and economic background, including institutional discourses and media and technological capability, which constitute and structure the scene of community engagement” (p. 8). The merging of theory and practice into praxis is achieved by having researchers/practitioners acknowledge influencing structural factors, attending to intersectional identities and representations, power relations, consequences and outcomes, and using critical reflexivity to contribute to social change.

Critical Intercultural Dialogue Praxis

The interactions that the students had in class were framed by my introduction of critical intercultural dialogue. My approach was modified from previous intergroup dialogue approaches described earlier, and from those developed by conflict resolution practices and community facilitators in such programs as the Public Conversations

Project. Some approaches to intergroup dialogue have been tailored for college classrooms and used by critically oriented educators to help students to address intercultural conflicts. Participants of intergroup dialogue can be asked to hold discussions in a manner that is critical of structural systems and broadens their views and understanding of intercultural differences.

My own framework to critical intercultural dialogue incorporated concepts to fill gaps not addressed in previous approaches and consequently included a stronger emphasis on context, intersectionality and critical reflexivity. In my study, critical intergroup dialogue was designed to facilitate a communication space where differences could be uncovered. This specific form of critical dialogue lends itself to college and university settings, because the higher education structure and participants have been found to be more receptive to the process (James, 1999). James studied dialogues that took place over several class meetings held over the course of a semester. There were face-to-face meetings with groups comprised of 10-20 students with diverse identities, and two co-facilitators having different cultural identities. The facilitators were not assumed to be neutral and, along with moderating the dialogues and maintaining an open environment, it was often their role to bring up hidden systemic or power issues so that students could discuss these issues. Zuniga (2003) describes dialogue groups being formed according to contrasting social identities in order to create new levels of understanding, relating and action.

Interpretive Foundations

Scholars using interpretive orientations often pay attention to the subjectivity of participant accounts, narratives, performances, and public texts (Collier, 2010), which means that the texts being examined in the research, such as performance of dialogues and reflections about them, contain realities that “exist in the form of multiple constructions, socially and experientially based” (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). As a result, giving acknowledgement and validity to participant perspectives becomes useful in understanding how both intercultural conflict and dialogue function from varied positionalities. Collier (2014) demonstrated that individuals with diverse cultural identities participating in an intercommunity dialogue program in Northern Ireland expressed political orientations that both diverged and converged at different points. Both my pedagogical orientation and my research orientation do privilege critique, however in that my goals are for students to better understand what their discourses “do” and reproduce, and their abilities and agency to use alternative discourses that critique racism, Whiteness, and heteronormativity in the future, interpretive uncovering of their situated narratives and accounts is also useful.

I constructed my course around the four key learning stages of intergroup dialogue as outlined by Zungia, Nagda & Sevig (2002): 1) relationship building, 2) exploration of commonalities and differences, 3) discussion of “hot topics” related to identity conflicts, and 4) action planning and alliance building. Each of these learning stages is supported through moves that the facilitators, or instructor, make in the classroom. These moves include setting ground rules for discussion in order to encourage a space that is safe to share, encouraging students to openly give their perspectives and

experiences in discussion, asking students to keep a journal where they reflect on their experiences in the class, including discussions oriented around issues of power (heterosexism, racism, classism, sexism), and implementing activities (like privilege walks or “fishbowl” style discussions) used to demonstrate power dynamics. By engaging in this kind of dialogue process the students in my study were positioned to demonstrate their critical understanding and responses in reaction to intercultural conflicts (Zuniga, Nagda, & Sevig, 2002; Zuniga, 2003).

The framework Zungia, Nagda & Sevig (2002) laid out aligned well with my own critical and interpretive commitments. The design of the interactions revolved around contentious issues that involved culture and difference and required that the participants attend to context and reflexivity. However, this intergroup dialogue approach needed further development in the areas of intersectionality and continuing application. Most orientations for intergroup dialogue deal strictly with interactions between two cultural groups that are in conflict. For example, Blumenfeld (2000) used critical intergroup dialogue to help deal with campus tensions that existed between African American and Jewish students and the dialogue was conducted through the vantage points of those two identity groups, eliminating or downplaying the possibility that other identity markers could also be an influence. This type of intergroup or intercommunity dialogue is also common in conflict resolution work such as bringing Palestinians and Israelis together. It presents the conflict as one group pitted against another group, i.e. Black vs. White, Christian vs. non-Christian, queer vs. straight, men vs. women. This is a useful approach perhaps when introducing content, especially when interrogating the power structures that are attached to social hierarchies and public discourse, but it also limits the scope of

interaction and perspectives because the operating assumption is that a group has one identity alone, and that identity group is positioned against a clearly opposing group that also has one identity. So intersectionality within structural contexts was stressed in the framework for creating discourse about intercultural conflicts. I added the key concepts so that I could analyze how the discourse created messages through a lens that accounted for more critical elements.

Since the focus of my study was on the ways that these key concepts were used in interaction and reflection texts, my analysis and interpretation centered on how the texts constituted representations and identifications of groups, intercultural relations, and ideologies and narratives. A critically interpretive perspective meets these goals. Another way that critical and interpretive perspectives are integrated into my study is that I argue that it matters who is speaking and who is being spoken for in dialogues about intercultural conflicts. As students engaged in intercultural dialogue, how subjectivities were being constructed from positions of privilege and/or marginalized racial, ethnic, gendered and classed identifications; how these locations activated broader discourses positioning others into subject locations as Others or part of “us;” and how these relations reinforce particular ideologies (such as Hispanic males positioning immigrants from Mexico having access to the “American dream”) are important to address. This analysis enabled me to better understand what the students’ discourse was accomplishing.

Integrating critical and interpretive theoretical perspectives ontologically, I assume that individuals learn worldviews and ways of being based on social systems and discourses and that their descriptions of the multiple realities experienced by others could exemplify how different histories, experiences, and representations impact perspectives

and lived experiences. For example, in a conversation in class, one student discussed how her family's reliance on some sort of public assistance (welfare, food stamps, Medicaid) impacted her view on poverty. Another student noted she had always lived with a high socioeconomic status, and this gave her access that others did not have. Related to poverty, the student conversations were designed to be used to illuminate varied perspectives and how different structures like classism or neoliberalism create narratives about poverty being the result of individuals' own inefficiencies. A critical and interpretive approach allowed for the students' discourse to be expressed and used for critique.

My integrated critically interpretive perspective also aligned with dialogic praxis that is critical and reflexive. Using critical reflexivity is beneficial for recognizing contextual structures and different subject positions and status hierarchies; these are relevant to understanding dialogues about intercultural conflict. My study specifically included the use of critical dialogic reflexivity for students, but also for me as the researcher, throughout the research process (Collier & Lawless, in press; Collier & Muneri, in press). I named my positionalities and political assumptions called upon my students to do the same. Collier (2015) explains that when researchers enter into a research space, here the classroom, the research subjects and researcher are all affected in different ways over time.

The application of continuous critical praxis was necessary to have students talk about how their discourses stabilized and destabilized dominant ideologies related to the intercultural conflicts being engaged. Collier's (2015) critical reflexive dialogic praxis also encourages researchers to make use of cognitive and aesthetic elements, as they are

invited to connect to their own feelings and intuition as well as building knowledge together accounting for individual positionalities and privilege, and their own participation in relation to those systems. I encouraged students to make similar moves, and collected data from their written responses and a recorded conversation outside of class. Focusing specifically on these reflexive elements helped me to study discursive performances, and reflections about those experiences. I asked the students to focus their attention on cultural identifications and representations, explain difference, identify causes of intercultural conflict, situate themselves within those conflicts, and to offer potential responses to the conflicts that they discussed. Consequently, critical interpretive, and critical reflexive dialogue praxis approaches built upon one another to form the blended theoretical foundation for this research study. This theoretical foundation and the key concepts resulted in two main research questions.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do context, intersectionality, and critical reflexivity emerge in the students' written reflections about intercultural conflicts?

RQ2: How are ideologies produced within the students' audio recorded conversations about intercultural conflicts that they have observed?

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY & METHOD

Intercultural conflicts frequently play out in hierarchical patterns where those with marginalized identities are positioned at a disadvantage. The everyday conversations that people have often contain messages and implicate broader social ideologies and power structures, but these tend to be unmarked by speakers (Strauss & Feiz, 2014). The goal of this study is to build knowledge about discourses that were created about intercultural conflicts that were framed by prompts to talk about three key concepts: context, intersectionality, and critical reflexivity in the discussions. Wodak and Meyer (2016) as well as Fairclough (1995) approach discourse as social practice that contributes to establishing and maintaining relations of power. Social structures are continually being reproduced and resisted in discourse, including student conversations (Fairclough, 1989; Fassett & Warren, 2004). Therefore, there is a need to evaluate my own pedagogical moves to address how discourse, resistance and reproduction of social relations, and the way that social practices are constituted through written reflections and conversations intended to critically incorporate my key concepts.

Overview of Pedagogical Methods

Intercultural dialogue is one specific pedagogical tool that has been tailored to help students identify and explore the causes and influences of intercultural conflict. However, applications of dialogue in the classroom are often missing important elements. This research attempted to fill in some of those gaps present in the applications of intergroup dialogue with my own implementation of critical intercultural dialogue throughout an undergraduate intercultural communication class. To review, three key

concepts/processes were incorporated to align with my pedagogical applications. The first key concept was context, where I asked students to account for systemic structures during their discourse about intercultural conflicts. The second key concept was cultural intersectionality, and the students were asked to account for the constant influence of social structures while they also discussed how gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, class and nationality identifications interact and connect back to their social world (Yep, 2015). The final key concept was critical reflexivity, having the students acknowledge their own positionalities (Collier, 2014) and their influence in dialogues about intercultural conflicts.

The students were asked to use critical intercultural dialogue with other students in the classroom, learning about the social structures that impact intercultural conflicts and practicing how to contextualize and discuss those issues. James (1999) argues that the university classroom is the optimal setting for intercultural dialogue because in that space students are already being encouraged to think critically, and the students and the institution are likely to be more receptive to intercultural issues and approaches. The students also had to create discourse outside of the classroom by engaging in a series of conversations about intercultural conflict with someone they already know in order to get more familiar with critically engaging intercultural conflicts in daily interactions. Students were asked to audiotape their final conversation and this produced discourse for analysis.

Through the implementation of this type of dialogue, students had the opportunity to: enact critical praxis in a variety of formats, learn about intercultural conflicts through a critical lens, engage the concepts through dialogue outside of the classroom, practice

inside and outside the classroom, and collaborate to develop action plans in response to intercultural conflicts that are present around them. This combination of information, practice, and planning was designed to help the students create discourse about understanding how intercultural conflicts operate and how they could respond to those types of intercultural conflict with a critical sense of agency (Nakagawa, 2015, p. 21).

Critical Pedagogy

There were a number of philosophical assumptions that comprised my pedagogical approach to this study. These guided my perspective to teaching, reasoning for class related activities, and the analysis of the data that was collected. In addition to my theoretical assumptions described earlier, additional guiding assumptions were grounded in critical communication pedagogy (Fassett & Warren, 2006).

The foundation of this specific methodological approach to the study was in critical pedagogy, which historically has focused on capitalist relations and cultural hegemony in the classroom (Allen, Rossatto & Pruyn, 2006). However, there have been a range of expansions and applications of critical pedagogy that continue to focus on different ways of applying and theorizing teaching as a means of critique and action. For example, Giroux (1988; 2002) focuses on critical public pedagogy and emphasizes works that facilitate radical democracy where there is inclusive participation, the creation of institutions that preserve and perpetuate democratic values, and is not repressive or discriminatory. These general principles set the foundation and tone for my teaching as I planned to encourage and facilitate an inclusive and critical classroom environment. Researchers of critical public pedagogy also recognize that while locating a precise

source of democratic authority is difficult, critical social agency is developed through cultural spaces that connect the private sphere to the institutional world (Roberts & Steiner, 2010), a connection that I also worked to integrate throughout my course and research study.

Different applications of critical pedagogy by scholars direct the key principles such as critique and democratic participation into varying curricular themes and subjects. For example, pedagogies of difference turn the focus of study specifically to the creation of curricular contexts for teaching and learning that are “responsive to individuals and groups regardless of race, gender, class, or sexuality” (Trifonas, 2003, p. 1) because focusing on equality and similarities alone is not equitable from a social justice perspective. Phipps & Guilherme (2004) applied critical pedagogies to foreign language and intercultural communication courses by examining teacher experiences and assumptions in order to observe the concerns and abuses of power that take place specifically in intercultural contexts. Critical pedagogies have also been incorporated into working with popular culture texts to decenter traditional pedagogy and work with traditional (Western, White, elite) texts and acknowledge other critical pedagogy texts (Weaver & Dasgupta, 1999), or in math classes as a way to address instructor assessments of students and the textbook content (Lesser & Blake, 2006) further demonstrating the breadth of application for their key principles.

Through the lens of critical pedagogy, and specifically critical intercultural communication pedagogy, I assumed that daily discourses with friends, other students, and coworkers have a significant role in knowledge construction and interaction. Discourses are tied to social structures, and analysis of the discourse in use by students is

well suited to illuminate broader discourses and master narratives, mechanisms of power, and social change. My underlying goal was to use this type of analysis as an educational tool for the current students and future courses and workshops. I was also focused on critically oriented perspectives to be used as teaching tools so that the students could increase awareness about, and abilities to raise critical issues in intercultural conflicts and also gain practice in actively engaging dialogue about those topics outside of the classroom.

These goals reveal my own ideological struggle as an instructor that assumed that there could even be “best” critical teaching practices that could lead to results in the types of discourses that the students produced. Fassett & Warren (2006) employ critical communication pedagogy and envision that the critical emphasis of communication discourse will also illuminate mechanisms of hope for change within teaching environments, “a hope made from the moment of articulate contact between (educational) subjects” (p. 6). My research followed this trajectory and the assumption of the utility of interaction with the course material, each other and individuals outside of the class.

Fassett & Warren (2006) also describe ten commitments that are hallmarks of critical communication educators. In my own alignment with this pedagogical perspective, many of those core commitments were reflected directly in my teaching approach and methods for this research study. My first two critical communication pedagogy commitments in my teaching were related to identity and power in that, “identity is constituted in communication” (p. 39) and “power is fluid and complex” (p. 41). In my classroom these commitments manifest themselves especially in the framing of identity characteristics in connection with intercultural conflicts. I emphasized that

labels and group positions that are associated with cultural identities are not static categories, and historically they have been, and are, systematically produced in cultural and ideological contexts. I taught how common discourse about race within conflicts reproduces race as a construct that is connected to categorized phenotypes; how hierarchical positions between race groups are also replicated, adjusted, and resisted; and how self-worth is affected. Discourses from dialogues about intercultural conflicts are significant because they contain identifications and representations that are often contested, and indicate the complexities of power relations between race groups.

In addition to approaching identities as complex and relational, and power as fluid, I centralized culture in the classroom as my third commitment. This study was embedded in an intercultural communication class, so culture is already an important focus. To combine the previous commitments with culture at the core of the content meant that I chose conflicts that featured cultural groups in relations of difference, marginalization, and privilege. Analyzing conflicts around gender, for instance the experience of someone who was transgender would not be used as an example of an anomaly to the normalized culture of the male/female gender binary; it was presented as a challenge to the constructed way of organizing gender. This approach stressed that those who might be considered as ‘others’ have different experiences with how institutional systems operate, and show that cultures are contested, and sites of struggle (Wander, Martin & Nakayama, 1999). “Recognizing and interrogating culture as central to any classroom or curriculum is to complicate the tendency of positivist scholars to define that space as neutral and objective” (Fassett & Warren, 2006, p. 43).

Fourth, Fassett & Warren (2006) argue that critical communication educators should also focus on “mundane communication practices as constitutive of larger structural systems” (p.43). The daily interactions that people have are valuable from the critical communication perspective because those seemingly simple interactions, like casual conversations or an off-hand comment, are what support structural systems on a consistent basis. Throughout the class I contextualized intercultural conflicts within everyday experiences, discourses, and behaviors that are constitutive of structural systems. This position appeared in lessons and assignments where the students critically considered the ways that their daily experiences are produced by structural systems such as heteronormativity, neoliberalism, patriarchy, or Christian privilege.

My fifth commitment is acknowledging the value of critical intercultural dialogue as a tool for talking together and discussing action for the conflicts even after the class has concluded. Daily interactions are important and there is a lack of attention in college classrooms on how to discuss intercultural conflicts. Therefore, I offered the students applicable critical dialogue tools. In my class, critical intercultural dialogue was a tool for the students to engage for greater understanding each other and the content on a more relevant level. I also used dialogue as a way to practice engaging the content critically within and outside of the classroom. Throughout the class the students practiced navigating discourses that revolve around intercultural conflicts, and also in an informal fashion, dyadic discussions about the stereotypical representations of American Indians in mainstream media, or having a conversation about the same topic with a friend outside of class. The significance of emphasizing everyday discourse was that it gave relatable

points to critique structures and relatable tools to use when critically reacting to the presence of those structures.

Critical reflexivity is another commitment outlined by Fassett & Warren (2006). In my class, it was considered a key concept, an element of discourse production that the students were asked to practice, and my own participation was a part of the critical process of teaching and analyzing what was being produced throughout the study. Critical reflexivity provided a frame for me to account for my own positionalities and the impact that they were having on the course and my analysis of it. My own cultural identities had to be negotiated during the class as well. For example, as a Black woman with a middle-class upbringing, issues at the intersection of gender and race emerged somewhat often during in-class examples and discussions, while I had to be more intentional about bringing in issues of class disadvantage and marginalization. My own critical perspective and progressive political leanings meant that I am concerned with helping the students to identify the presence and role of systemic systems and oppressions in their own lives. I had to open spaces for conservative orientations also, so students with diverse views could contribute. I acknowledged to the class that I taught from these biased perspectives and encouraged the students to identify their own biases and positions in relation to cultural identities.

When I made decisions about what examples to use to highlight different concepts, I prioritized narratives from people who were a part of marginalized cultural identity groups. This was an intentionally political move to counter privileged voices and to create discourse where we talked less about marginalized others and utilized their own articulations of their lived experiences. One example of cultural intersectionality that I

used was an online *Cosmopolitan* documentary (cosmopolitan.com, 2015) about an upper-class, Black woman raising a transgender child. This example enabled me to articulate and challenge broader values that are held about gender, race, sexual orientation, and class positioning. With this example I directed the discussion to the ways that transgender people and people of color have historically been economically disadvantaged and how a higher class position in this case could be seen to mediate some of those associated individual experiences, but systemic values are still simultaneously in place about gender identity, race, and class.

As already described, throughout the class the students were asked to consider their own positions in relation to a given intercultural conflict in their written reflections and during class discussions. Critical reflexivity encouraged the students to create discourse about how individuals, including themselves, are positioned as group members with privileged and/or marginalized locations within the context of broader intercultural issues. Critical reflexivity allowed for the analysis of those articulations to highlight how ideas about cultural groups contribute to the sociocultural practice of reinforcing ideologies and norms about intercultural conflicts. In summary, five of the ten commitments outlined by Fassett & Warren (2006) were specific guiding perspectives for this research. The following commitments were influential to the course content, the objectives and expectations that I had for myself and the class, and the types of interactions and applications that I encouraged. I revised and expanded several of the commitments.

1. In critical communication pedagogy, cultural identities are constructed in communication.

2. Power is fluid and complex.
3. Cultures are contested; cultural groups are positioned in relations that reproduce in/equity and in/exclusion.
4. Concrete, mundane communication practices constitute as well as reproduce larger social structural systems.
5. Critical reflexivity is an essential condition for critical communication pedagogy.

Given this pedagogical grounding and the associated moves that I used to guide my teaching of the class, there were several objectives that I had for the students in the class that are relevant to my research. The following were included as course objectives that were featured in the class syllabus:

Student Objectives (Relevant to Dissertation Research):

1. Students will be able to describe how context (macro, meso, and micro), intersectionality, and critical reflexivity are related to intercultural conflicts.
2. Students will be able to describe how context, intersectionality, and critical reflexivity are useful in critical intergroup dialogue about intercultural conflicts.
3. Students will develop their abilities to use critical intercultural dialogue through practice in class.
4. Students will develop their abilities to use critical intergroup dialogue in discussions outside of class

There were several specific classroom activities that were used to help the students specifically address the key concepts and answer my research questions. Written reflections were the first way to study the objectives. The reflections were written based on a prompt given by me. The prompts asked the students to write about how the key concept(s), such as context, or intersectionality and context, critical reflexivity and their

associated partner conversations related to an intercultural conflict. There were three reflection assignments for these objectives. The first reflection applied context, the second applied context and intersectionality, and the third applied context, intersectionality and critical reflexivity, in their critical intercultural dialogue praxis. All reflection papers were graded for the class. From practicing dialogue inside and outside of the classroom, and then writing about the key concepts, I assumed that the students would have a basic critical understanding of what those concepts mean and be able to express information about how they saw those elements influencing the intercultural dialogues in which they participated. I assumed that the students would become more familiar with being able to describe the key concepts and how they factor into dialogue as they were also becoming familiarized with the processes of critical intercultural dialogue through practice in class.

In order to have the students discuss current intercultural conflicts and “hot-button” issues related to intercultural conflicts, the students were instructed on some specific ways to have dialogue across intercultural differences. The students went through daily activities that emphasized a variety of experiences, listening at some times and sharing at others. There were points where the students were interacting with the entire class, and others involved a small group or one other person. All of the different types of in-class exchanges were used for the purpose of creating different discourses that could contribute to a greater sense of understanding one another and the structures that are intertwined with individual intercultural experiences (Gurin, Nagda & Zuniga, 2013). As the students participated in these critical dialogic moves during class my hope was that

they would become more familiar with these discursive practices and that it would become easier to continue those practices outside of the classroom.

In class the students' discursive practice was guided by a general structure and pedagogical process. For example, students were taught about dialogic interactions by my stressing of active listening, turn-taking, and ways to address intense emotional responses (Zuniga, Mildred, Varghese, DeJong & Keehn, 2012). They were taught the basic principles of dialogue such as listening for understanding, paraphrasing to check understanding, and clarifying meaning (Gurin, Nagda & Zuniga, 2013). The students were guided through ways to analyze intercultural conflicts such as how to identify the parties in the conflict, their cultural identities, the relevant issues, and needs and positions of various parties. Then, over the course of the semester the students practiced the addition of each key component of critical intercultural dialogue, incorporating context, intersectionality and critical reflexivity.

In addition to the in-class practice, there were required out-of-class applications of critical intercultural dialogue; this requirement related to the fourth student course objective. During three instances over the course of the semester students were required to have a dialogue about an intercultural conflict with a friend who they already knew, or a family member who was not a member of the class. These dialogues were modeled after the ones engaged in class, and demonstrated the addition of key concepts described above. These dialogues outside of class were guided by a structure similar to the in-class dialogues. The prompts were the same for everyone in the class.

The written reflections were used exclusively to answer the first research question. The written reflections were class assignments where the students were asked to write a 3-4-page response to a prompt given by the instructor. The written responses highlighted the students' accounts of how dialogue was being used and experienced in the classroom and outside of class. The second research question about the practice of intercultural dialogue was answered with the audio-recorded conversation that the students had outside of class. After recording the conversation, the students had to write a reflection about how they understood the content and used context, intersectionality and critical reflexivity within their conversation.

Pedagogical Design, Site and Research Participants

The site of my research study was one undergraduate intercultural communication course in the Department of Communication & Journalism at a US American university in a southwestern state. The class met for one hour and fifteen minutes two times a week and had 23 enrolled students who earned grades. As the instructor for the course I was the sole person in charge of creating lessons, leading discussions, and assigning grades. The class was offered for 3 university credits and operated in the same way for everyone enrolled; but data was only collected from the students who consented to participate in the research study.

I chose this site for my research because of the relevance of this upper-division course in intercultural communication to critical intercultural dialogue and the demographics of the university. I had taught intercultural communication twice before using Kathryn Sorrells' 2013 textbook *Intercultural Communication: Globalization and*

Social Justice. Her model for intercultural praxis is critically focused on understanding and navigating intercultural conflicts (Sorrells, 2013). I had also observed a high level of engagement from the students in a previous course because of the way many intercultural communication issues are connected to everyday current events, popular media, discussions, and experiences that the students encounter. Sorrells' textbook and the topics related to intercultural communication laid the groundwork for my approach to critical intercultural dialogue that interrogated the structures that contribute to intercultural conflict, foregrounded topics that are relatable to the students, and advocated for action in response to the information that is presented.

The potential of having a classroom comprised of students with diverse cultural identities was another reason that this research site was chosen. The university where this study was conducted is categorized by the US Department of Education as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), meaning that at least 25% of the full-time enrolled undergraduate population is Hispanic (www.ed.gov). The 2009-2010 Diversity Report Card issued by the university showed that undergraduate enrollment was 41% White, 33% Hispanic, 12% American Indian, 3% Asian, and 3% Black (diverse.unm.edu). In the past this composition contributed to classes having a strong representation of students of color. Along with diverse racial composition, my previous students represented a range of age groups, sexual orientations, economic class positions, religions, and nationalities. For my research, these varied cultural identities and representations of the students were considered to be an essential contribution to the intercultural dialogue process about current intercultural conflicts that were in the news.

Out of the 23 students who completed the class, there were 14 who chose to participate in my research study. They frequently spoke from and about their cultural identity positions. The demographics of my study participants were similar to the demographics of the university. From my class the gender breakdown was 6 men and 8 women. For the racial identifications there were 9 students who identified as White, 2 as Mexican, 2 as mixed race (1 Black/White and 1 Native/Latino), and 1 who identified as Black. Four of the men identified as White, 2 men identified as members of other races, 5 of the women identified as White, and 3 women identified as members of other races. Nine of the students avowed a religious affiliation, identifying as Christian/Catholic and one said that he was agnostic. All 14 students identified as heterosexual. For the conversation partners there were 10 women and 4 men, 7 identified as White and 2 as Hispanic, 1 as Latina, 1 as Native, and 1 as Black. Two identified as Hispanic/White. Six of the conversation partners discussed their religious affiliations; 5 people said that they were Christian/Catholic and 1 person said that she “took part in different religions in the way that she saw fit.” Of the conversation partners who mentioned their sexual orientations there were two who were not heterosexual, one conversation partner said that he was bisexual and another said that she was a lesbian.

Participant Consent

Students enrolled themselves in the class, and about one month prior to the start of the class received notification that there would be an option to participate in my research study during the class. This notification explained the intent of the study and what they would be consenting to if they choose to participate. If students did not want to be enrolled in a class that was collecting research data, then they had ample time to enroll

in another course. However, student enrollment in the class did not equate to consent in the research study. When the class started a colleague came to class and administered official consent forms. This person clarified the purpose of the research and the data that would be collected. The consent covered all components of the study (written reflections, outside recording, videotaped group presentation, and my class observations). The colleague collected the consent forms and kept them until the end of the semester after final grades were posted. The individuals who participated in the recorded outside-of-class conversations received their own consent form indicating that their discussions might be used for research. These forms were also collected by my colleague. After the initial administration of consent forms the students were given one additional deadline where they could contact the person who administered the consent forms and opt out of the study even after the class started. I was not told which students consented and who did not during the duration of the course. Once final grades were posted I received the consent forms and determined what collected data could be included in my research. All reflection papers and recordings from students who did not give consent were destroyed. If a student opted out after initially giving consent, all of their collected information was destroyed as well.

The final date to opt out of the study coincided with the creation of the final presentation groups. The colleague who administered the consent forms and received notification of any students who had opted out after the start of the class created the groups of four for the group assignment. My colleague assigned people who had not consented to participate in the study into groups with one another, and gave me the group assignments so that I was not aware of who had consented to participate in the research.

At the end of the semester after grades were posted I also discarded all of the data for groups whose members declined to participate.

I collected two copies of the reflection papers from each person, grading one for the class and returning it back to the student and then holding on to the other copy to be potentially used in my study. I also collected digital copies of the recorded outside conversation. For anyone who had not consented to be a part of the study, at the end of the semester I discarded all of their data.

Study Design: Procedures

The research questions guiding this study were:

RQ1: What are the textual themes, discursive practice forms, and implicated sociocultural practices in students' written reflection discourse about critical dialogues related to intercultural conflicts?

RQ2: What are the textual themes, discursive practice forms, and implicated sociocultural practices in discourse from students' conversations with a friend/family member applying critical dialogue to intercultural conflicts?

In order to evaluate the types of discourse produced by the students in a way that also encouraged their learning, the students wrote written reflection papers. The reflections were 3-4 pages long and each written student reflection was based on a prompt given by me. The prompts asked the students to write about how the key concepts (such as context, or intersectionality and context), experiential practice activity, and associated outside conversations were related to dialogue and intercultural conflict. There were three reflection assignments for these objectives; the first applying context, the second applying context and intersectionality, and the third applying context, intersectionality and critical reflexivity to their critical intercultural dialogue praxis. All

reflection papers were graded. From experiencing dialogues inside and outside of the classroom, and then writing about the key concepts, I expected that the students would engage a basic critical understanding of what those concepts mean and also express knowledge about how they saw those elements working within the intercultural dialogues that they participated in. I assumed that as students became more familiar with being able to describe the key concepts and how they factor in to dialogue they would also be familiarized with the processes of critical intercultural dialogue through practice in class.

In addition to the in-class practice, three times over the course of the semester the students were required to have a conversation about an intercultural conflict with a friend or family member who they already know, but who was not a member of the class. These conversations were modeled after the ones engaged in class, and demonstrate the progressive addition of the key concepts described above. These conversations outside of class were guided by a structure similar to the in-class dialogues. There were prompts that were the same for everyone in the class.

To review, the written reflections were used exclusively to answer the first research question. The written responses highlighted the students' accounts of how dialogue was being used and experienced in and out of the classroom. The second research question was answered with the third audio-recorded conversation that the students had with their conversation partner outside of class. For the research study these recorded conversations provided insight into how discourses about intercultural conflicts were practiced outside of the classroom.

In-Class Procedures

The following section explains how the activities, conversations, written reflections, and final project were incorporated into the class.

Activities - In class activities and discussions facilitated by the instructor began each series to introduce the intercultural dialogue concept and generate responses in-class. All students were expected to participate in the activities and contribute to discussions.

Outside Conversation - The in-class activity was followed by the assignment to have an outside conversation related to the selected dialogue concept/s and guided by a prompt from the instructor. The students had to identify a friend or family member who was able to have three 20-30 minute conversations with the student over the course of the semester about intercultural conflicts that they had observed or experienced. The content of these conversations informed students' written reflections and/or later in-class discussions. These conversations outside-of-class allowed the students to practice engaging discourse about intercultural conflicts outside of the classroom with someone of their own choice. The final conversation was audio-recorded, with the dialogue partner's consent. Students turned in a digital copy of their audio-recorded conversation. Only the audio-taped conversations from students and conversation partners who had both consented to participate in the research were used in the research study. Only after the semester was over did analysis of the consented audio-recordings take place

Written Reflections - The written reflections were composed by the students in response to their in-class and out-of-class experiences with intercultural dialogue and conflicts. The students framed their reflections based on prompts from the instructor.

The specific prompts and procedures for each concept were as follows.

Module 1: Context

The first module that the students worked through was focused on the key concept of context. The activity, outside conversation, and reflection was geared towards helping the students understand how structures, material and environmental conditions (Broome & Collier, 2012), informed intercultural conflicts. The in-class activity I used is called the “Web of Oppression” (Gurin, Nagda& Zuniga, 2013, p.65) and all the students participated. The students stood in a circle while holding a series of tangled strings. Different strings represented different institutional systems (cultural/historical) that showed different aspects of influence and production of inequity. The tangled strings visually represented how policies and practices are connected, moving with some, and in opposition to others. After practicing this context related activity during class, the students conducted their first conversation outside of class where they had an opportunity to see how others see or understand the influential factors of an intercultural conflict. The students were expected to address all of the elements of the prompts, but they were also encouraged to have a natural conversation. I encouraged students to incorporate outside information along with information that they learned about in class into their conversations.

Outside Conversation Prompt:

Ask your conversation partner his/her thoughts and/or feelings about one of the following conflicts (how to address high levels of homelessness in Albuquerque or disparities in resources for Albuquerque high schools). What does your partner think are the root causes for that conflict? What signs led him/her to see those as the causes? Do you agree or disagree that those are the causes? Why or why not? Are certain groups affected more than others? What do each of you think are some solutions?

After having the outside conversations, the students wrote a reflection paper where they considered how the concept of context was understood and incorporated in class and in their outside conversation.

Written Reflection Prompt:

Drawing from class activity/discussion and your outside conversation, explain how structures and social systems (e.g. classism, Whiteness, and heteronormativity) create and maintain intercultural conflicts. What conflicts did you discuss? What are the consequences of those systems' prominence? What kind of reasoning is used to explain why intercultural conflicts happen? Describe the conflict that you discussed during your conversation. Did you use anything that you learned about context in class during your conversation? What role did your cultural identities play within your discussion? How does that impact your understanding of the conflict?

Module 2: Intersectionality

The next module was on intersectionality, where multiple identities and intersections highlight how experiences of both oppression and privilege are produced (Yep, 2015). The students used the activity, outside conversation, and written reflection in this unit to explore and evoke intersectionality and context. The in-class activity was the Social Identity Box where students brought to class a container that was decorated on the outside with representations of how their cultural identities might be viewed by others in conflicts. Inside the container the students put representations of elements of their cultural identities that are hidden from others. Everyone presented their containers to the class. This activity was used to demonstrate how context and others present can influence social identities through differences shown between what was inside and outside individuals' containers. The activity also highlighted a variety of cultural identity

intersections that individuals experience. These ties continued into their next outside conversation.

Outside Conversation Prompt:

Talk to your conversation partner about their cultural identities. Ask her/him to tell you about an experience that they had where one or more of their identities caused conflict. What cultural identities were important to him/her in that conflict? Share with your partner a time when you experienced conflict around one or more of your own cultural identities. What are some other cultural identities that were at work in that situation, and what are benefits/disadvantages that go along with them?

Written Reflection Prompt:

Describe the conflict/s you discussed. How do multiple and intersecting cultural identities impact you/your partner's experiences? Give specific examples. How were intersectionality and context reflected in our identity box activity in class and in your outside conversation? How do they impact your understanding of the conflicts discussed? During your outside conversation did you include anything that you learned in class about intersectionality?

Module 3: Critical Reflexivity

In the next module on critical reflexivity the students began with critically considering broader structures that influence and support those conflicts. The students then articulated their own cultural positioning in relation to those intercultural conflicts. For this module the activity was a Conflict Gallery. The students were responsible for bringing to class an image/picture (personal, from a magazine, printed from online etc.)

that is representative to them of an intercultural conflict. The students posted their images around the classroom with a blank piece of paper beside the image. After all the images and blank papers were posted, everyone circled the room looking at the posted images. After everyone had circled the room once in silence, the students were asked to identify one image where the cultural identities involved were similar to their own, and another where the identities were assumed to be different from their own. I asked the students to briefly write on the blank paper how their own identities converged and diverged with the identities represented in the image, accounting for varied identities and the varied connections that are present on multiple levels. Once done, the papers in the gallery were reflected multiple individual and collective structural positions for a variety of conflicts. People with different positions on the same issue were asked about how they relate to one another on the conflict and how they recognized intersectionality and context in that conflict

Outside Conversation Prompt:

Ask your conversation partner about the last time that something in popular culture (movie, music, internet meme, popular figure etc.) bothered or upset her/him because of a connection to culture. What was it? What is her/his connection to that conflict? Share a popular culture incident that upset you and explain why it bothered you, the broader structural forces that are at work, and your connection to it.

For this module the outside conversation was recorded by the student and a digital copy of the audio-recorded conversation was turned in with the written reflection.

Written Reflection Prompt:

How does using critical reflexivity impact the ways that you consider intercultural conflicts? Describe the conflict/s that you discussed with your conversation partner. What did you learn about integrating critical reflexivity, intersectionality, and context into an everyday conversation? How do they impact your understanding of the conflicts you

discussed? Which identities came up in discussion and which did not? Do you think that you will use any of those concepts to discuss that conflict, or others like it, in the future? Why or why not?

Critical Discourse Analysis

The collected data from the written reflections and audio-recorded conversations, were analyzed through a version of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1989). First, the texts of the reflections and outside conversations were examined deductively for themes related to the major concepts of critical intercultural dialogue. Next I performed an inductive analysis of broader themes that emerged from the two types of texts. Third, I uncovered discursive forms in the discourses produced by students, such as disclaimers or positive self and negative other comparisons. Fourth I then identified implicated sociocultural practices in the forms of master narratives, ideologies, and relations between groups.

This form of analysis allowed me to focus specifically on the students' discourses that were occurring within and outside of the class as forms of social practice. Strauss & Feiz (2014) explain that:

CDA uses micro-level analysis of discourse (words, phrases, conceptual metaphors) to uncover the processes by which ideologies of power, abuse, control, hegemony, dominance, exclusion, injustice, and inequity are created, re-created, and perpetuated in social life – processes which are often “naturalized” and taken for granted as common sense notions (p. 312-313).

When using CDA I assumed that the micro discursive moves and practices that the students produced are bound up with macro influences. Through this analysis I observed how the students' discourse reinforced social structures and upheld and challenged broader discourses about marginalizing social systems.

Fairclough (1989) highlights three key levels of analysis in order to enable researchers to understand and critique how discourse reproduces power relations and ideologies. The three levels are analysis of text, discursive practice, and social practice. I adapted his framework for the analysis of data for my study. These levels were implemented in the following way. I grouped all the reflection papers into a set of individual written texts, and read over them to get a holistic picture of students' reflections. Next I listened to and edited the transcripts of the conversations between the students and their conversation partners for consistency and accuracy. This also enabled me to get a holistic picture of how the dyads conversed about the intercultural conflicts.

Applying a version of CDA, I first analyzed the first two types of texts separately and identified categories and themes of what were similar topics, who was speaking and being spoken about, where and how conflict was being talked about, etc. I also deductively looked for examples of the three major concepts for my study: context, intersectionality, and critical reflexivity. I focused on categories of discourse that stood out in frequency and intensity. I then inductively read for other emergent themes.

To address discursive practice, I was interested in students' production of discourse (Fairclough, 1989). Therefore, I looked for forms of discourse in evidence. I began deductively and looked for forms such as extreme case formations (Pomerantz,

1997), contrastive forms (van Dijk, 1993), positive self and negative other forms (van Dijk, 2000), and ambivalence (Billig, 1999), as well as other forms of discourse.

To analyze sociocultural practices (Fairclough, 1989) I analyzed discourse to identify implicated broader social practices such as valorizing individualism or neglecting history, master narratives, relations between groups, power and agency, and implicated ideologies (such as heteronormativity, Whiteness, patriarchy, or neoliberalism). This type of analysis enabled me to show, for example, the ways that students continued to replicate Whiteness through their discourses and resisted applying critical reflexivity under the guise of color-blind ideologies.

An important element of critical pedagogy also includes addressing and critiquing the role of the instructor, because teachers are also texts within the space being evaluated (Bordo, 1993). It is important to acknowledge that students read the instructor for a range of cues and information including weakness, deviance, race, gender, and sexuality (Bordo, 1993). My own identities and position of power within the classroom also has to be considered and addressed when it comes to the responses that the students had. Irving & Martin (1982) note that this level of influence and power from the instructor has to be explored as well because teachers can emphasize their own views through their instruction. I will incorporate reflexive analysis of my own moves and responses to the students, as well as their responses to instructional prompts and interactions in dialogues throughout the class.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' WRITTEN REFLECTIONS

In this chapter I analyze the written reflection responses from the students to answer the first research question, which is: How do context, intersectionality, and critical reflexivity emerge in the students' written reflections about intercultural conflicts? My analysis is based on conclusions reached by linking the texts, discursive practices and sociocultural practices outlined in Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, (1989) focusing on how the themes implicate subject positions, relations, and ideologies. The texts I analyzed came from different assignments in my Intercultural Communication class, described in Chapter 3. Since the texts being evaluated are a part of the broader classroom experience, I discuss each section of written reflections in connection with their assignment prompts, and my own pedagogical moves and reflections (from field notes), in order to contextualize the discourses that students produced. My analysis also attends to the connections that tie the students' discourse to sociocultural practices and ideologies, because my attention to critical intercultural dialogue and critical communication pedagogy (Fassett & Warren, 2004) throughout the course were intended to highlight how individual communication practices constitute and reproduce broader social systems.

To address my first research question I analyze how the students constructed discourse about context, intersectionality, and critical reflexivity in their written reflections about conversations and topics related to intercultural conflicts. Scholars have noted that writing allows students to become active and involved in their learning process (Emig, 1977) and that through writing students learn and practice discursive conventions about the subject matter that they engage (Herrington, 1981). I was interested in the

forms and accomplishments of their discourse as they emerged specifically from writing and conversational exchanges. The evaluation of the written form is unique in that it displayed the student's discursive practices through what they wrote and also through what they interpreted from their exchanges. Also, this method of data collection ties back into my pedagogical commitments and objectives in that encouraged students to include the role of context and social systems as they reflected upon their own and others' cultural identities and intercultural conflicts.

Over the course of the semester the students' reflections were written to address the key concepts in concert with one another as they were introduced throughout class. As an instructor, I wanted to build assignments and experiences in intercultural communication that had a critical sensibility (Phipps & Guilherme, 2004). However, the structure of the assignments still relied on the students to make the explicitly critical connections through their writing practice. The first reflection was designed to examine context, the next one incorporated intersectionality and context, and the third one addressed critical reflexivity, intersectionality, and context. I discuss each set of written reflections and use examples and direct quotations from each set of reflections to highlight trends in the ways that the students explained or utilized the concepts. I show how their written discourses reproduce ideologies and broader societal narratives about intercultural conflicts and relationships, and I also showcase themes that emerged in each of the three sets of reflections and offer representative examples from students' discourse.

The participants are referenced throughout my analysis by pseudonyms that each chose for him/herself in order to provide confidentiality. Who is speaking matters in the sense that students speak from subject positions of more/less privilege, and these subject

positions may relate to their positioning of others and to ideological preferences.

Therefore, I also describe each individual speaker's self-identified race, ethnicity, sex and, when named, class level and sexuality when they are incorporated or implicated in the discourse.

Context

The first set of reflections that I analyze are focused on the key concept of "context," which encouraged students to critically engage the material, historic, and environmental conditions that are embedded within intercultural conflicts (Broome & Collier, 2012). During class I introduced intercultural conflicts as created and sustained particularly by systems of dominance and oppression. For example, prominent social narratives recognize that poverty is generally an issue of concern but the focus is less frequently directed at the way that social class inequalities have been institutionalized and work with racism or globalization. For overall context, the students were asked to draw from a class activity and lessons that incorporated context in their written reflection. The in-class activity was a "web of oppression" about homelessness and was used to visually represent how multiple structural factors that can contribute to this intercultural conflict that can often be considered as simply being an individual problem. Before the "web" was constructed I discussed some examples of the connection between individual experiences with homelessness and social structures by highlighting homeless veterans, lack of affordable housing, impact of mental illness, and the high numbers of young LGBTQ people who become homeless. This was to illustrate that this social issue was a conflict between groups and therefore an intercultural conflict.

The students were asked to contribute other social institutions that could be related to the conflict and those options were listed on the board. Students highlighted institutions such as the economy, family, law enforcement, and health care. I was surprised that race did not come up prominently during the class discussion. During this particular activity I did try to fill in some of the gaps of identities and institutions that the students did not address, but I chose not to vocalize my surprise about the way that race seemed to be downplayed during the discussion. Initially, I reasoned that I made this move only to support participation and not jeopardize the students' comfort, especially so early in the semester. However, upon further reflection on this decision to not explicitly express critique, this action was also an enactment of civility that teachers of color often have to balance when addressing race in the classroom. Richie Hao (2016) describes this very tension when explaining the variation in his moves of intercultural praxis while teaching. Hao categorizes the times where he let his students "off the hook" about a racial critique as points where professional or "civil talk" allowed him to navigate away from being read as angry or having an agenda against White people, but his self-preservation also protects Whiteness by not problematizing that discourse. My own choices in many instances were identical to Hao's. I frequently called out structures and discourses but as a Black woman doing the instruction there were also occasions where deferring to a sense of civility preserved my own sense of how I would be read by the students and acted to protect the dominant structure in the process.

Once there was a list of different institutions related to homelessness, everyone in the class stood in a circle and were instructed to toss a spool of ribbon from one person to another while calling out different institutions and providing an example of the impact

that the institution could have on homelessness. After each student had a chance to speak and throw the spool there was a “web” created in the middle of all of the students that represented the tangle and connectedness of many different institutions in association with intercultural conflict of homelessness. I observed that as the students were explaining these different connections during the activity, they were able to give general examples on how social institutions could impact homelessness, but they did not elaborate on how specific cultural identities, besides socioeconomic class, could be impacted. Quite a few times they were not sure how to make connections. I contributed information about health systems, age, and LGBTQ communities but there was not much discussion during the activity of the role that social systems such as racism, classism, sexism, or homophobia played into the issue.

Another required class component that the students drew from when writing about context was the conversation that they were each required to have with someone that they knew outside of class. This was included in the reflections to encourage recognition of another type of communication practice which could display their construction of identities, subjectivities, and subject positions. I gave them a discussion prompt to guide that conversation; they were required to discuss an intercultural conflict specific to the city that the university is in. The students and their partners could choose to focus on homelessness or the disparities within the city’s high schools. I assumed that the students and their partners would be familiar enough to have opinions about the topic and be able to discuss their perspectives on how those conflicts work, who is impacted, and what solutions to that conflict might be. I wanted the conversation to feel relevant to the

participants while they were creating discourse about their perception of causes, impact, and solutions to intercultural conflicts.

Conversation Prompt:

Ask your conversation partner his/her thoughts and/or feelings about one of the following conflicts (how to address high levels of homelessness in Albuquerque or disparities in resources for Albuquerque high schools). What does your partner think are the root causes for that conflict? What signs led him/her to see those as the causes? Do you agree or disagree that those are the causes? Why or why not? Are certain groups affected more than others? What do each of you think are some solutions?

All of the written reflection prompts were developed to encourage the students to consider classroom instruction, group activity, and their outside conversation in connection with the key concepts that I incorporated. For the concept of context, they were asked to draw from all of those sources and explain how institutional structures create and maintain intercultural conflicts. I wanted to see how the students articulated their understanding of those connections in their writing and how themes, discursive practices, and sociocultural practices emerged through their written descriptions and explanations of an intercultural conflict.

Written Reflection Prompt:

Drawing from class activity/discussion and your outside conversation, explain how structures and social systems (e.g. classism, Whiteness, and heteronormativity) create and maintain intercultural conflicts. What conflicts did you discuss? What are the consequences of those systems' prominence? What kind of reasoning is used to explain why intercultural conflicts happen? Describe the conflict that you discussed during your conversation. Did you use anything that you learned about context in class during your conversation? What role did your cultural identities play within your discussion? How does that impact your understanding of the conflict?

Three themes emerged from their discourses: situating conflicts within systems of power according to race and socioeconomic class, connecting the conflicts to individual responsibility, and suggesting solutions to the conflicts that ignored context. From the discourse produced in the reflections I observed discursive forms that created a positive self and negative other or used a specific incident to generalize broader issues. I also noted how cultural positioning related to broader sociocultural practices.

The first and most predominant discursive theme incorporated the social structure of economic class in isolation, or class and race together, and emphasized the presence of those systems as problematic. For example, Randy, a White male, pointed to economic class hierarchy as the problem when he wrote,

The struggle of having institutions so prominent in our culture is that it creates a sort of class system where everyone who is living in a home and everyone who has a job is respectable and doesn't deserve criticism.

Thomas, who is also a White male, specifically pointed out in his writing that capitalism is a social system whose roots create the environment where homelessness occurs.

Perhaps the most important social system that leads to our cultural conflicts is capitalism. By its nature capitalism is centered on competition among the participants, which in itself is a conflict... Your worth as a producer basically determines your fate.

Other students noted in their reflections that the intercultural conflict that they discussed was caused by a combination of social systems. Aryn, who identified as a Mexican woman, wrote about how she and her conversation partner discussed disparities within the public high schools and noted that the issue evoked both socioeconomic class and racism as causes. Aryn wrote that her conversation partner Bob attended a small public high school comprised of mostly Hispanic students. Bob explained that his

school's equipment was outdated and not replaced, and they both determined that this was because of racist fears that new equipment would be destroyed or vandalized.

This problem stems from the social system of class... We figured that the public school system probably does not want to spend money at [Bob's high school] because of fear that the equipment will be destroyed by students. We could not see any logical or just reason for this. We felt that this is a race related issue because other high end high schools get better equipment.

These assertions from the students are noteworthy from a critically oriented perspective because they are highlighting some of the systemic forces that are at work within this conflict, an objective that critical approaches promote (Watt, 2007). Some of the students showed their ability to identify and articulate the broader structures at work within these conflicts. However, critical scholars also note that moments of critical understanding are typically brief and incomplete (Jones, 1999), an occurrence that I frequently encountered throughout the students' reflections for this prompt.

Thomas, who identified as a White male, also wrote about the impact that he believed race had in connection with socioeconomic class in relation to homelessness. After he told about how his conversation partner, Helen, mentioned that many of the homeless in their community were also racial minorities, Thomas explained that access to jobs, which are needed in order to maintain a steady living and prevent homelessness, can be negatively impacted by racial biases.

I have heard race-based assumptions made by people in [my state], which could also be self-fulfilling prophecies and a way to limit access to jobs when the one doing the hiring is not a member of the [racial] minority [group] in question.

While several of the previous examples included descriptions of social systems that acted to marginalize non-Whites and reinforce privilege for White identified people,

examples from other students included discursive themes about a perceived backlash against historically privileged groups. Jack, a White male, described racism and classism as being at work in causing resource disparities between public high schools, but he described that it was the “White” upper-class schools, which would typically be considered more privileged, that were really the ones being disadvantaged.

This [economic and achievement disparity between local public high schools] is a demonstration of classism and Whiteness because most people believe that it is the high socioeconomic, predominantly White schools that get all the funding... It is questionable whether a lower socioeconomic status truly has an impact on whether or not a student will be able to achieve at the same level as peers whose families are of a higher income bracket.

As evidenced in other classroom discussions as well, Jack is suggesting here in his writing that high schools with students whom he identified as having lower incomes and being racial minorities, get more resources from the state and therefore have the same opportunities as those who go to wealthier schools. While critical education scholars argue the opposite and vehemently assert that wealth is one of the highest determinates of academic achievement (Conley, 2001; Orr, 2003), Jack’s argument is that when it comes to educational opportunity socioeconomic class does not matter because he asserts that the educational playing field has been leveled when lower income schools receive more government funding than schools in higher income areas.

Jack’s discursive account here demonstrates the usefulness of a critical discursive analysis because while he gave his own interpretation of background and context to the issue of school disparities that were about race, class, and school funding; his ultimate conclusion reproduces a broader problematic narrative about low-income students who are part of racial minority groups. He proffered that the experiences of White and non-

White, high and low socioeconomically positioned students are equal, because low income schools received more government funding, and as he said, the “teachers teach to the same standards in every school district.” Stemming from these assumptions of equality in educational opportunities, Jack’s explanations of the continuing disparities in schools’ performances then turn to the students’ individual actions and motivations.

With all things being equal in terms of content and delivery of instruction in the classroom, are these students coming to school with the mindset that school is the priority? Are they receiving the message from home that that education is valued, and that learning is the priority? If these students are coming to school with no interest and efforts toward learning, and there are minimal expectations and support coming from home, then all the money put forth toward any curricular enhancement will not make an impact and these students won’t learn, and ultimately may not graduate.

Jack’s written account here also made use of a particular discursive form contrasting group positions through comparisons based on individualistic, personal experiences in contrast to the broad performance and orientations of others as group members (van Dijk, 2000). Also there is a positive-self and negative-other contrastive form in evidence (van Dijk, 2000). Below, he used his individual experiences, and those of his conversation partner Jelena, to explain a larger social issue of low-income and minority schools under-performing. He staked his argument on Jelena’s experience.

This comes from the twenty years that have been spent as a classroom teacher and school administrator at the middle school and high school level [and supported multiple education development initiatives] but there has been little to no movement in terms of gains in student levels of proficiency...parents make no effort at home to support an extension of the learning environment.

Jelena’s individual account was generalized by Jack to explain that the entirety of issues with the performance of students in their school system was about individual values, not broader societal structures of racism or classism, nor about educational structures like

differential funding or teaching strategies, which would be included in the application of critical context. Jack's own high school experience was also used as proof to make the case that being in "one of the higher socioeconomic schools in the city" did not give him an advantage over the lower-income schools because "a lot of things in my high school were very old and outdated." However, updated equipment is not the only indicator of success for a high-income school.

The presence of this discursive form that generalized individual experiences demonstrated how an economically marginalized community was made responsible for their own academic shortcomings and those with more privilege were framed as the ones who were disadvantaged. For me, it was especially startling to see this articulation of such blatant deficit thinking from a long term teacher. But it shows the pervasiveness of that discourse, even within the communities that deal with educational disparities. Johnson (2005) has reminded those studying the formation and maintenance of dominant cultural structures that multiple dominant forms of power tend to work together. He highlighted the prevalence of Whiteness, heteronormativity, and economic class privilege working together as representations are formed. While Jack does not discuss heteronormativity in this example, he does use race and class together to protect Whiteness. In his assessment he positions the White students and those with higher income as better, working harder, and more deserving because in the school system they are enduring what he perceives as an unfair situation, receiving fewer resources. This communication demonstrates the position of White subjectivity and the positioning of non-White others.

It is also important to point out that Jack's reification of Whiteness happens though the use of talk and terminology that sounds consistent with a more critical perspective. He calls his example one of "classism and Whiteness" but then implies that it is those who are positioned as middle and upper class and White are the ones who are being victimized and disadvantaged. Whiteness is about more than skin color, and is about the discursive practices and underlying ideologies that sustain dominant positioning (Shome, 1999, p. 108). From an assessment of social practices Jack's perspective is indicative of the same arguments used in political policies based on equality rather than equity, advocating for public school funding to be evenly distributed even when there are drastic disparities in the communities. These claims are also consistent with arguing that racism is at work "against Whites" when ethnic studies is a part of the curriculum. All of this demonstrates the need for recognizing the context of social systems and differential benefits of differential positions. Using terms such as classism and racism in ways that benefit already higher status group members, is counter to historically informed and contextually situated understandings of these processes and completely neglects the consequences of these processes on groups who continue to be marginalized (Roberts & Steiner, 2010). From a critical pedagogical perspective, instructors have to continually assess not only whether social systems and structures are being named, but also look for how they are being applied in specific arguments and examples.

This account above also reproduces a broader ideology of individual meritocracy in that the discourse valorizes individual effort and individuals' abilities to overcome whatever their circumstances might be. Jack rearticulated a longstanding myth that low-income minority families do not care about education, and that their cultural socialization

is to blame for internal cognitive and motivational deficits, which is deficit thinking (Valencia, 2010). This is a narrative that has been widely debunked by scholars, particularly for Mexican Americans, (Olivos, 2004; Quioco & Daoud, 2006; Valencia, 2002) who are the majority-minority population at the low-income schools that Jack was referencing. His discourse dismissing the role of contextual factors reinforced the master narrative/myth of the deficit model.

It is worthwhile to highlight that Jack and Bob, Aryn's conversation partner, described the same high school with notably contrasting accounts. Jack wrote that he went to a high school that was considered wealthy, but had friends who went to the low-income school (which is the same one that Bob attended). Jack said that "We would joke because [low-income school] was what we would call a 'ghetto' school, yet they had all the nicest, newest stuff, and [high-income school] was the 'rich' school and everything there was old and outdated." However, Bob, also a White male, described his high school as "very cheap, having outdated computers and trashed lockers." I assume that Jack and Bob's knowledge of the high school comes from the same time period because they are close in age. However, Bob's account contests Jack's description of the school's position. Jack's written anecdote also highlighted more deficit thinking practices as he emphasized that the lower-income school had better resources, but students there still did not perform as well academically, while students at his higher-income school were able to perform better with "less." The differences in the descriptions of [low-income school] from Jack and Bob also reflect the differences in their subject positioning, with Jack's higher socioeconomic position forming a generalized and disparaging view of those in the low-income school. Roberts & Steiner (2010) describe that in the classroom students

reproduce what they were taught to value outside of the classroom. The differences in the descriptions of the circumstances related to state and funding of these high schools highlights this observation.

As many of the students elaborated upon the root causes of their intercultural conflicts, there was a strong theme emphasizing personal experiences. These discursive narratives acted to constitute the sociocultural importance of individual meritocracy. Individual meritocracy operates as an important ideology, especially in the US American context where the notion that an individual's hard work is the solution to getting out of poverty or fixing disparities that she/he might experience (McNamee & Miller, 2004). For example, Karen, a White female in her 50's, wrote about how there had been times in her life when she was not aware of the ways that racism or classism impacted other people but she became more aware over time. Then she explained that she and her husband had been close to homelessness and that their work ethic coupled with opportunities helped them to keep their home.

We found bits of work, used social services to get through the worst of it and pulled ourselves out. So we do agree that one should be able to pull oneself up and out of a bad situation, but also that a helping hand can make a difference.

Karen highlighted earlier on in her reflection that she had come to generally understand the presence of racism and classism throughout society, but the application of context that would have recognized race and class privileges did not play a part in her explanation of her individual experience with economic uncertainty. Her own success after hard times was attributed to hard work by her husband and herself and also "the helping hand" of social services. However, part of the contributing background to her experience is that they already owned a home, and were able to access and navigate social services and

obtain work. These additional factors point to the class, nationality, and race privileges that also contributed to their ability to regain economic stability. This discourse reproduces individual meritocracy, as well as liberal pluralism, the notion that everyone in the U.S. has the opportunity for success if they are willing to work, while ignoring that other identity positions still impact everyone's opportunities. This discourse also reproduces neoliberalism, which has also become a pervasive cultural value. The belief that the betterment of individuals can be advanced through maximizing entrepreneurial freedoms without overtaxing institutional structures. (Harvey, 2007) is supported as Karen explained that she and her husband were able to use their own economic prowess to move out of their financial slump. The account is told as an example of individual resilience, but the implications also reinforce the role of Whiteness and economic privilege. What is overlooked is that individuals without race and class privilege are represented as deficient if they are unable to "pull themselves up" in the same manner as those who are the subjects of the success stories.

Amber, a White female, also wrote about the personal experiences of James, her husband and conversation partner, who identified as a biracial Hispanic and White male. She noted that his experiences have proven to him that some people "just choose to be homeless" because James' mother abandoned their family and continues to live "on the streets" to the present day. Amber described how James insisted that "his mother just made the decision one day to leave the family and live on the streets," and that if James' mother really wanted to she could live a better life. Amber did not give any additional details about the circumstances that surrounded James' mother's decision, but she did emphasize that his mother did not have good moral character by describing the burden

and hurt she left on the family and that she later got “pregnant with another homeless man’s baby” that James’ father graciously raised and cared for as his own. This account about homelessness operated through two important discursive forms. James and Amber, become the moral “positive self” compared with the mother who was positioned as immoral, promiscuous and choosing to abandon her family. Thus the mother’s chosen homelessness was the contrasting “negative-other.” A hierarchical relation between James and his mother was generalized to relations between those who choose to work, pay rent and make “moral” choices, and those who choose homelessness and immorality. These subject positions enabled James to validate his own choices and way of life as superior and those of homeless people, including his mother, as inferior.

This description of James’ experience also became an individual account that was generalized to explain the broader intercultural issue of homelessness because Amber noted that “Many people look at homelessness as a disease that needs to be cured, but many times it is a voluntary lifestyle.” Amber, concurring with James’ positioning of his mother’s choices, and applying that incident to homelessness as a whole, completely ignored the structural systems related to homelessness. While national statistics do not calculate the number of people who are voluntarily homeless, Simmons, Whitbeck & Bales (1989) conducted a small study where only 4% of their sample population of homeless people reported being “homeless by choice.” Similarly, Hartnett & Johnson (2006) surveyed a sample of the homeless population in a Midwestern city and determined that 19% of the respondents cited “choice” as their only reason for being homeless. These studies support a different reality than what Amber and James described, that homelessness by choice characterizes the majority of that population. Amber’s

comment that this was the case for “many” homeless people discursively veils the broader contextual factors that are more commonly the cause of homelessness, like the lack of affordable housing, poverty, mental illness, addiction, and domestic violence (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009).

These types of discourses that emphasize individuals detract from any structural critiques by essentially supporting master narratives that individuals should take responsibility for themselves and not depend upon systems, or that there are “reverse – isms” that the social systems actually create. Social structures are more invisible to those with privileged positions, (Johnson, 2001) which is apparent in this example from Amber despite the direct connection that her family has had to someone who is homeless. This perspective that relies on individual actions as the root cause of a cultural conflicts also frequently encountered in broader discussions about social issues in which, often a person positioned with a higher level of privilege offers an individual experience or observation alongside a generalization about another group involved in intercultural conflict, without acknowledging the influence of broader structures at work. This type of perspective drives social commentary in which speakers are quick to judge the individual for their shortcomings, but are slow to critique the systems of sexism, racism, or classism that are also influential. However, Yep (2015) describes the ways that social structures are inextricably connected to one another and societal conditions and argues that an individuals’ identities and interactions with the social world in which they reside are all in need of critical evaluation.

Further examples which downplayed contextual structures and systems, and reified the deficit model, emerged in thematic discourses about particular cultural groups.

Amber also wrote about how her husband James described some racial groups as being more affected by homelessness than others because of inherent cultural traits that they possessed.

A large contribution to [some groups experiencing more homelessness] is good and bad habits within cultures...in Asian communities that promote hard work and honor, you rarely see homeless people who are Asian...A large amount of voluntary homeless people are White people who align themselves with the hippie culture.

Again there was reference to the “voluntary homeless” but this description also highlighted how racial communities are discursively constructed as more or less susceptible to social ills, in this case homelessness, solely because of their racial background. This characterization of Asians contributed to a common US American theme of the “model minority” myth, which is seen throughout popular media and typically pits the entire ethnic group’s perceived positive characteristics against Black Americans (Washington, 2012). In this case however, Asians’ superior traits of “hard work and honor” are contrasted with “hippies” who are presumably free-spirited, anti-establishment, drug using, and White. This constitutes very particular values that protect Whiteness as conditional. In order to get to this diminished social position, White people have to make an individual and conscious choice to leave their privileged economic position. The comments also imply that individuals from cultures that do not fit the Asian model minority mold are deficient because they do not do enough on their own (i.e. support one another) and are not living up to their own group values such as honor to avoid homelessness. Amber described James’ claim that Asians are inherently hard working and honorable, as compared with White “hippies” and both failed to account for the ways that other structures impact homelessness.

Luis, a Native/Hispanic male, described his conversation partner and mother, June who identified as Native American, as making a strong connection between racial/ethnic identity and homelessness. Luis first made the argument that some individuals would not be homeless if they made use of existing community resources. As a Native woman, June was described as surprised to have encountered a homeless Native woman while working at a homeless shelter “because in all Native cultures, tribes/pueblos the people are supposed to take care of each other, not let someone stray away from home.” This comment reflected an assumption of community characteristics of care and support for women who are from Native communities. The strength of this value for June also positioned the homeless native woman as a failure in some way, since she was not as connected as she should have been to her community. This example connects to James’ assertions above and reinforces a broader discourse that some racial minority groups have a stronger sense of community and care for their own, and this should keep them from experiencing homelessness. Again, these views neglect context and here, focus on broad avowals or ascriptions about group identities and values.

While there is a similar articulation from James and June about the ways different cultural communities should care for one another they are also speaking from different frames. Sorrells (2010) explains how differing levels of evaluation can be used to reveal contextual factors and illuminate different interests and perspectives that might be at work within a conflict. These frames range from macro, to meso, to micro contextual factor; but frames can also be applied to levels of group identity. The last two examples illustrate different frames. June uses her own micro experience as a barometer to offer a meso level judgment about “Native people” which she positions as a broad racial and

cultural group with which she identifies. James, an outsider, nonetheless offers a meso/macro description of “Asians” which he positions as a broad racial and cultural group with particular shared values.

Many students volunteered recommendations about how to manage the intercultural conflicts. During the conversation outside of class, the students were asked to discuss potential solutions to their chosen intercultural conflicts. However, that was not a part of the prompt for the written portion. That so many students chose to reiterate their suggestions to fix these problems in their written reflections plays into popular discursive themes of simple fixes and immediate resolutions to complex intercultural issues. Even though the students were asked to evoke context, which is intended to illuminate multiple influences that contribute to the conflicts, many of the solutions were generalized and contextual, or only focused on individual actions that others should take. For example, some simple recommendations explained that people need to be nicer. Rose, a White woman, explained that people must learn to behave better in response to difference. “Teaching kindness, compassion, decency, and respect are key. Also, emphasizing more equality based on each individual's abilities rather than stereotyping as a culture is crucial.” Not only did Rose suggest that kindness and respect will solve intercultural conflicts, but she also reifies individual meritocracy and color-blindness by arguing that the effects of historical oppression, systematic cultural group representations in the media, or discriminatory institutional policies, are less important than each individual's abilities. Her discourse acts to discount histories of discrimination, racism, sexism, ethnic discrimination and their consequences for different cultural groups.

Randy, a White male, spoke along similar lines. He insisted that “We must bring ourselves to a level of equality with every person around you. Whether they are a different race, ethnicity, gender sexuality, etc. we must treat everyone on a respectable level. “These suggestions from the students fell in line with discourses that promote equality (rather than equity) and acceptance, but the applied solutions are vague and ultimately removed from any foundation of social constructs or social systems. Additionally, arguing for equality and equal distribution of resources and opportunities is based on assumptions of an “equal playing field,” while arguing for equity presumes a need for addressing where groups “start” or how they are positioned in particular structural and social contexts (Johnson, 2001).

Luis, who identified as a Native/Hispanic male, said that “[The] homeless need to be treated like humans and [we must] hold back judgments and stereotypes.” Kyan, who identified as a Mexican American male, stated that things will not change until “something or someone takes a step back and looks at the bigger picture.” He also noted bias and assumptions should be acknowledged in order to improve intercultural conflicts like school disparities.

The issue is not that people without money are less intelligent or do not deserve what others have, the problem is that there will always be a stereotype linked to less fortunate families, schools, and neighborhoods...With these assumptions the people and schools will never be able to overcome the stigmas they already have. Here, Kyan calls out deficit thinking and goes on to imply in his reflection that once there are fewer assumptions from others about the less fortunate then things can improve. However, Kyan’s solution to this issue still only involves individuals in a generalized way.

As sociocultural practice, especially in the US American context, the trend to focus on individual abilities is pervasive. I have encountered it at every level of teaching and personal interaction. The United States is broadly considered as the “land of freedom and justice for all” and individuals are quick to advocate for that sentiment as a matter of individual action. Comments such as calls to “look at the big picture,” “bring ourselves to a level of equality,” or “hold back judgments” articulate a vague sense that people need to do better, yet still protect social structures because they omit that level of critique.

Critical pedagogy was founded in the critique of capitalist relations and cultural, structural hegemony (Allen, Rossatto, & Pruyn, 2006) and those criticisms were frequently a part of my in-class instruction. With this prompt the students had the specific opportunity to critique capitalism and economic structures as they had to respond to the topics of homelessness or disparities in resource distribution for schools. In their reflections the students resisted that opportunity for critique and frequently reproduced dominant economic ideologies based in neoliberal “bootstraps” orientations and reinforced classism and color-blindness. This is a general trend that continues throughout all of the reflections in this study, which also exemplifies the need for students to step into more critical spaces. Pearce & Pearce (2004) in their assessment of applying dialogic principles to communication show that individuals want solutions but when meso and macro contextual factors are absent then the responses that are posed in relation to a conflict leave out attention to the root issues. The students’ reflections demonstrate this very disconnect of wanting to fix individual conflicts that are observed and experienced, but often failing to address the structural influences that undergird those conflicts. That

this types of response was so pervasive is also an indication for the need to teach about critically addressing contexts as individuals respond to intercultural conflicts.

It is also notable that these solutions came from both White students and students of color. This type of discourse adds to the constitution of broader cultural practices and structural discourses from many sources that push for fair treatment and equality but direct the weight of that action to generalized “others” or to the individuals who experience the conflict with the most salience. Examples include discourse that advocates for “frank talk” but does not indicate who specifically needs to talk to whom (Frieden, 2009) or discourse in higher education about diversifying those spaces that direct the burden of action to professors who are already a part of the marginalized cultural identity groups to begin with (Wilson, 2015).

Nonetheless, there was one student Liz, a White woman, who was very specific in naming actions at the systems level that could respond to homelessness. She advocated for actions like “counseling for people with high stress jobs and donating to shelters and providing more money to entrepreneurs.” That this amount of specificity was the exception in the students’ responses highlights that the discursive trend for conceptualizing solutions to problems like homelessness are often oriented around generalized values such as simply advocating for treating people better. This is important to note because even when the students were asked to orient their discussion around systems, the solutions that were suggested did not involve many social structures. As well responses implicated colorblindness and Whiteness which work in concert with individualism and neoliberalism.

Intersectionality & Context

In the next reflection paper the students were asked to incorporate context as well as intersectionality. I implemented intersectionality into the course to emphasize the complexities of individual's lived experiences, that representations are often oversimplifications, and that cultural identities are multiple, layered and interact with multiple structures of power in converging and diverging ways. During class I continued to emphasize the role that structures played in intercultural conflicts and emphasized that one intercultural conflict involves a variety of cultural identities. Often times intercultural conflicts are framed or discussed as being relevant to just one cultural identity at a time, but intersectionality challenges those types of singular narratives by incorporating the simultaneous work being done within a conflict by multiple identities and positionalities. For example, the organization of participants in some intergroup dialogue programs previously discussed are divided into binary identities like LGBTQ versus straight sexual orientations, and interactions are constructed around those single identity markers (Zuniga, 2003). Discourse about political analysis of voting habits for the Black community that distills behavior down to racial identity alone (Chait, 2016) misses the role of, for example, gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity, and educational status differences. Singular cultural identities that are avowed are surely salient and influential but they do not operate alone, and recognizing the ways that identity positions function in multiple sometimes converging and other times contradicting ways, can add more relevance and depth to the intercultural conflicts being addressed.

The class activity that I used to demonstrate intersectionality was centered on the students' creation of "identity boxes" for themselves where they brought in a container

decorated on the outside with representations of their ascribed cultural identities and with representations of their avowed cultural identities on the inside. There were several points throughout the semester that I participated in the activities that I assigned to the students, and the activity for this unit was one of them. I brought in my own identity box and shared it with the class as a way to include myself in the classroom community and also to demonstrate the types of cultural connections that the students could make when they shared their own boxes. The outside of my box had pictures of a Black woman with an afro and a “Black Power” fist that represented experiences where others have assumed strength and Black militancy because of my race and natural hairstyles. On the inside of the box I shared a picture of myself at the Leaning Tower of Pisa in Italy and used it as an example of how some people assume that Black people do not travel, but my socioeconomic class has allowed me to be able to do so. This pedagogical move was necessary to my classroom because it utilized the fact that as an instructor I was already a text being read by the students for a range of cues, including race, gender, sexuality, deviance, and weakness (Bordo, 1993). I used that to further explain and demonstrate the ways that culture and identities can be contested and positioned in relation to one another, which was one of my critical pedagogy objectives. (Fassett & Warren, 2004).

Participation in activities like these also highlighted the fluctuating levels of power that occurred in relation to myself throughout the class, which is another critical area to explore (Irving & Martin, 1982). There were times when I had to prioritize my role as the one with the ability to give grades and award or punish, at other times I became a subject and participant presenting my experiences as a Black woman while abiding by the same discussion or assignment rules as the students, and there were still

other occasions during class when students with dominant cultural identities, as well as most students in the class, resisted my critiques of dominant structures like Whiteness or Christian privilege.

The discussion that I facilitated with the identity boxes during class was intended to highlight intersectionality as the students described the perception and role of different cultural identities and also heard those experiences being shared by others. Similar to the discussion that accompanied the “web of oppression,” it seemed difficult for the students to move from their individual accounts to making connections about intersecting identities and broader institutional intersections. However, the exercise did demonstrate my pedagogical commitments at work and the presence of the connection between micro and macro cultural identifications and representations even if the student articulation was incomplete.

For the second conversation with their outside partner the students had a discussion about the cultural identities that were important to each of them and discussed what role their different cultural identities played in situations where they experienced a related conflict. By discussing the benefits and disadvantages of those identities I could see how they discursively engaged the notion that one can be in positions of disadvantage and privilege because of how cultural identities were positioned.

Conversation Prompt:

Talk to your conversation partner about his/her cultural identities. Ask her/him to tell you about an experience that they had where one or more of their identities caused conflict. What cultural identities were important to him/her in that conflict? Share with your partner a time when you experienced conflict around one or more of your own cultural identities. What are some other cultural

identities that were at work in that situation, and what are benefits/disadvantages that go along with them?

In the written reflection for this portion, intersectionality was the focus, while the students were still asked to consider context in relation to their experiences. In continuation of analyses that address my first research question, I examined these written reflections to see what general themes and discursive forms emerged, and the sociocultural practices that were implicated in the discourse.

Written Reflection Prompt:

Describe the conflict/s you discussed. How do multiple and intersecting cultural identities impact you/your partner's experiences? Give specific examples. How were intersectionality and context reflected in our identity box activity in class and in your outside conversation? How do they impact your understanding of the conflicts discussed? During your outside conversation did you include anything that you learned in class about intersectionality?

In response to the information from class and their outside conversations I looked specifically at how the students brought up the role and impact of multiple cultural identities that acted together in intercultural conflicts. The students described the different conflicts that their conversation partners shared, along with their own conflicts that they shared. Thematically, many of the conflicts they recounted revolved around incidents where the students or their partners felt isolated or singled out, for being different because of a cultural identity trait or particular representation. The specific examples they wrote about included such incidents as being the only person of color in a community, being removed from a church event for not being Christian, and not feeling welcome in professional circles because of a lack of education. The main thematic trends that I discuss below are: a difference in subjectivities and subject positioning by others, subject

positions that were stigmatizing, ambivalent responses to intersectionality, and shifts in the application of context to generalized definitions.

Many of the examples of personal conflict that the students described from their conversation partners and themselves had implications for agency. Some students and their partners highlighted intercultural conflict as incidents when their cultural identities were misunderstood or stereotyped. The students who were identified with salient marginalized cultural identities gave very specific examples of stereotypes and isolation that they experienced. Jane discussed the conflicts that her conversation partner, Maria who identified as a Hispanic female, had experienced due to being shunned because of her Catholic religion and lesbian sexual orientation. "She was told that being lesbian or gay was a disorder" and found that "to have an even balance between the two [her religion and queer sexuality] is a relatively difficult thing to do." Later, Jane explained that Maria had to find her own way to reconcile her faith and sexuality, which she did. This particular account highlights a cultural assumption related to the positioning of faith-based and queer identities, that someone cannot have a queer sexual orientation and be a legitimate person of faith. I recognize the prominence of this tension personally because I also used to maintain this rationale as part of my Christian beliefs. However, the assumed discord is increased because of the context of socialized teachings from the church. There are people who do balance a Christian theological identification that embraces queer positions (O'Brien, 2004) as Maria exemplifies in her account.

Aryn also described encounters that challenged her cultural identities due to general US American discourses about race and nationality. She described her

experiences being teased by schoolmates because she identified nationally as Mexican, and racially as White.

I went to Catholic school but was always assumed to be White. When I told my classmates that I was Mexican they instantly looked at me differently...People laughed and said "She should be a fluent Spanish speaker if Mexican."

Popular representations of Mexicans position them as having brown skin and speaking Spanish. However, Aryn explained, "My identities clashed with the assumptions of people from another race [about my identities]." In this case identifying as White does not align with the foreignness of being Mexican. This is conflict because her announcement activated the broader discourses in the U.S. that link brown skin with Mexicanness and with other characteristics in the current political scene such as illegal immigration. Both of these accounts of conflicts from Maria and Aryn highlight intersectionality and demonstrated agency to explain their "unexpected" identity combinations. Dominant Christian ideology says that Maria should be excluded from the religion because of her sexual orientation, but Maria explained that she maintains both identities. Whiteness fuels the challenge to Aryn's intersecting identities of Mexican, White, and not speaking Spanish. From a social practice perspective these identifications constitute resistant discourse to dominant ideologies about who can be included and excluded in Catholicism or in the nation, based on intersectional cultural group positioning (Fassett & Warren, 2004).

Tracee, conversation partner to Randy, also described experiences having to manage contradictory subjectivities and subject positions because she identified as ethnically Jewish and practiced Christianity. Randy described that the "tension between her Jewish heritage and her Christian religious beliefs "that came up. She was often

questioned at work where her “coworkers jokingly tease her about putting her in the 'oven,’” a crude reference to the Holocaust. Randy went on to explain that when people asked about Tracee’s spiritual beliefs she stated she was Christian “but people who knew that she had a Jewish background would always be skeptical of what her real beliefs are.” For Tracee, because representations of an ethnic Jewish heritage are so closely tied to Judaism the religion, and Christianity and Judaism are framed as contrasting, this became an identity conflict that Randy described. This example leaves out the historical context that Judaism and Christianity share the same religious narrative up until the advent of Jesus.

The other experiences that the students described in this reflection stood out because of stigmas and how they described being judged because of their already marginalized cultural identities, particularly those who were positioned as racial minorities. For example, Devin talked about conflict that she faced throughout her general life experiences as a Black woman. Her account links her everyday experience as produced by media and other public discourses.

I'm a black woman; there are already stigmas and prejudgment points of view that are brought up. I'm judged for being black and threatening or athletic and because I'm a Black woman I'm considered to be 'extra' and angry all the time. This is how I'm portrayed as a black woman in the media.

Ono (2009) confirms Devin’s account of being marginalized as a Black woman by popular media when he argues that when it comes to representations of race, the typical function of mass media is to reinforce racist rhetoric. Throughout the semester I used a variety of mass media examples to increase students’ abilities to critique media texts and

encouraged the students to analyze how representations of race in combination with other identities, produce broader social systems.

Kyan, a Hispanic male, described a time when his conversation partner Kylee, a Hispanic woman, was confronted by a co-worker who knew that she was from a small town and asked "if she had ever seen drug deals, people getting shot, and many other scary situations" because that is what the co-worker had heard was characteristic of the town. The conversation partner was upset by this assumption about her home town because she did not think it was an accurate characterization. She then encountered another intersectional position when social class was inserted because another co-worker from her small town suggested that Kylee's experiences were different because she "grew up in the rich part of town and was not exposed to that stuff." For Kylee the conflict was discursively activated by first positioning her with the other racially and ethnically marginalized groups but then moving her into a category of "exception" since her class level distanced her from others in her race and ethnicity. Delgado & Stefaic (2010), among others, have shown that the prominence or salience of different cultural identities depends upon the setting, material conditions, and experiences individuals. Kylee's higher class status created what she identified as a situation of conflict because it positioned her privileged economic status with larger discourses that enable speakers to position her as outside of marginalized, and lower class locations. This separation that can be seen as discursively constituting and affirming classism and what is seen or not seen because of class privilege. An example that came up in class is that wealthier communities are often placed and designed so that residents do not have to see or interact

with people who are in lower economic groups, even if they are in close geographic proximity.

Jelena, who was the conversation partner of my student Jack, described a conflict due to language and immigrant status producing what she characterized as a stigma because of language and her family's immigrant status after they moved to the United States from Eastern Europe. Jack described Jelena's account in the following way:

Her parents made it clear that they (she and her siblings) were to speak Macedonian in the home only, to learn as much as possible about living the 'American lifestyle' and to do the things that American children did for fun and entertainment. She speculates that there was a stigma attached to being an immigrant.

Even though Jelena's example did not explicitly refer to multiple intersecting identity positions, it does implicate US nationalism and Whiteness and the discourse produced in the writing of each of these examples shows the salience of subject positions that are marginalized, hence stigmatized, in broader societal discourses. The conflict shows how language is considered essential for assimilating into US American society, and the concern for language acquisition comes with an attachment to social practices of Whiteness because an immigrant who is of Eastern European descent, and presumably has White skin, would be able to blend in as US American more easily than an immigrant of color. Once fluent in English, the stigma of being identified as an immigrant lessens for those who have White privilege and presumably access to socio-economic class mobility.

Another theme in these written reflections was that students also deviated from directly referring to systems of power or contextual structures. Many of the students used the term 'context' to make very general claims about its role in conflict. Randy said that "Context played a role in this activity because people don't always see the full picture

before they judge you and they decide who you really are by what they see in one frame of your life." Thomas described the class activity and related context to a framework for understanding cultural identifications.

In and outside my box, the objects themselves had very little meaning. It was only in the context of my relationships and experiences that someone else could truly understand why those objects were important to me.

Rose explained that contextual factors as well as multiple cultural identifications are important in conflict.

"People have many different things going on in their lives that cause conflict which others have no idea about...Just because a person is performing badly in their job does not mean that they are incompetent. They could have several other cultures causing so many other conflicts that they are incapable of performing at the optimal level."

Students' discourse about contextual factors was disconnected from community histories and socially constructed institutions, and lacked examples or illustrations. Given my critical pedagogical goals, there is a need for more attention to be given to structural forces when it comes to addressing intercultural conflicts (Watt, 2007). But, similar to the previous set of reflections that focused on applying context, much of the structural considerations in connection with intersectionality are downplayed or absent. At this point in the class I was continuing to highlight the role of structures as they connected to individual intercultural experiences but the students seemed to return to a "default" focus on individuals interacting in a particular setting. In other words, the students remained resistant to critiquing structures and social systems.

The students' discourse from these reflections also contained comparisons taking the discursive form of positive self and negative other. Luis, who identifies as Native and Hispanic, explained:

I have been in situations where I am the only colored person and the way people looked at me like something they have never really seen made me feel awkward and different. The more I looked at it, I saw and noticed in myself that it's good to be different and I want people to wonder who I am...I am a pretty weird individual but there is a lot more to me than what meets the eyes.

Luis wrote later on in his reflection that coming from a lower-class household also influenced his relationship with his own identity positions. "I want to be able to prove I am different and not just another statistic...I'm not a drunk, poor, or uneducated Native man." His comments evidence a move to distance himself from the broader intersectional subject positions, which are each subjugating and act together to marginalize, yet his move returns to valorizing his individualism, which is activating other broader discourses of Whiteness and class privilege.

Another student, Kyan, a Hispanic male who focused on his regional Southwestern identification, also activated an individualist orientation. Kyan wrote that he got offended when people asked why he doesn't talk like someone from his home town, which is associated with a distinctive accent and a reputation of high poverty and drug use.

I personally do not like how people talk from there and am proud to be my own self. I felt that I had a benefit because no one would judge me right off the [bat] just by seeing me, but will always have a stigma or disadvantage when I tell them where I'm from.

In their responses, Kyan and Luis both distanced themselves from the stigmatized regional affiliation, and Kyan implies that his White appearance does not activate a link with this particular place. Both Kyan and Luis valorize their individuality and uniqueness in a distancing move from other group identifiers. These moves position their group identities as the negative-other, and their unique individuality a positive representation of self. This discursive move distances them from the marginalized cultural identities. Luis

and Kyan “Other” their racial, ethnic and regional identities as they privilege positive individual identities. Kevin and Luis in their discourse discount cultural identity intersections in a way that reaffirms the benefits of individuality, because of the negative social association with their group identities. US American narratives of success are often framed in a similar way, where individuals emphasize that they earned success despite their marginalized identities, setting themselves apart from those associated groups and reifying assumptions that those identities are inherently deficient.

The implications from the discourse in these narratives show how layered identities are sometimes avowed to counter overly simplified representations, and other times marginalized intersectional positions are resisted through valorizing individualism and uniqueness. Positioning of a positive individual self and negative other became a kind of “default” and was evidenced in discourse by students who aligned with privileged and marginalized cultural identities. Intersectional identifications and subject positions were minimized in the discourse due to the overshadowing of individualism.

Critical Reflexivity, Intersectionality & Context

The next concept addressed in the reflection papers was critical reflexivity, acknowledging one’s own positions and ideological preferences in critical dialogues about intercultural conflict. Critical reflexivity includes recognizing how we all are products of broader social systems which position ourselves and others into more/less equitable relations, and it is an essential component of critical communication pedagogy. The accompanying class activity for this concept was a “conflict gallery” where each student had to bring in a picture that represented intercultural conflict in order to get the

students to see how in the context of this intercultural conflict, their identities were positioned in various locations by social systems. The students were asked to identify a pop culture incident that revolved around an intercultural conflict that they considered problematic. My hope was that they would get to practice identifying their active and complicit connections to that conflict according to their different cultural identities, positions related to the conflict, and levels of privilege associated with the positions.

Conversation Prompt:

Ask your conversation partner about the last time that something in popular culture (movie, music, internet meme, popular figure etc.) bothered or upset her/him because of a connection to culture. What was it? What is her/his connection to that conflict? Share a popular culture incident that upset you and explain why it bothered you, the broader structural forces that are at work, and your connection to it.

After the outside conversation the corresponding written reflection had to incorporate the class activity. Students were asked to explain critical reflexivity through their discourse about how they positioned themselves in relation to the popular culture topics that they had highlighted. I chose to specifically require the students to evaluate a popular culture text for intercultural conflict because the use of those texts pushes beyond the boundaries of traditional locations for learning, and beyond orientations to intercultural communication as attitudes or behavioral skills that result in effective communication. Using popular culture texts encourages that culture be defined through non-traditional lenses (Weaver & Daspit, 1999). The types of popular culture issues that the students described were varied. However, there were several conversations about the nationalist and racist statements that had been made by Donald Trump and his growing popularity during his presidential campaign. Other students talked about the

marginalization of their religious beliefs, cultural appropriation in Halloween costumes, an internet “feud” between rapper Nicki Minaj and country pop star Taylor Swift, and sportsmanship at soccer matches.

As with the previous concepts, I looked at their written descriptions of these conversations to see how critical reflexivity was used discursively and uncovered themes, discursive forms, and sociocultural practices. Since this was the last written reflection based on a conversation with their partner outside of class, I also asked the students to explain which of the critical intercultural concepts they felt they were likely to use in the future.

Written Reflection Prompt:

How does using critical reflexivity impact the ways that you consider intercultural conflicts? Describe the conflict/s that you discussed with your conversation partner. What did you learn about integrating critical reflexivity, intersectionality, and context into an everyday conversation? How do they impact your understanding of the conflicts you discussed? Which identities came up in discussion and which did not? Do you think that you will use any of those concepts to discuss that conflict, or others like it, in the future? Why or why not?

From the written reflection discourse, I identified several themes. Critical reflexivity was described as a tool for recognizing how others were positioned rather than how one’s own identity positions were constituting relations and reproducing ideologies. The discourse also incorporated more frequent discussion of identity intersections, and context was mentioned in some of the written reflection discourse through references to systems, although indirectly. Overall themes about victimization and power emerged around dominant and marginalized identities and worked through disclaimers as discursive forms. All of the themes and discursive practices highlighted the strength of

personal experiences in the narratives about intercultural conflict and structural systems. I expected that the students would carry over their discursive practice of incorporating context from the first reflection and that they would continue to address the role and implications of broader social structures while writing about intersectionality. While context was inconsistently applied through the first set of reflections, in the second set of reflections it was virtually absent, which displays the challenge in getting concepts to be applied consistently over time.

The students wrote about critical reflexivity by describing it as a tool that could be used for two different purposes, understanding different cultural perspectives, and to facilitate a generalized idea of “better” interactions. In their reflections on the topic the students explained that critical reflexivity was a way to better understand themselves and the world around them. Liz, a White woman, first talked about the public issue that her conversation partner, Taylor, who was also a White woman, brought up about a recent controversy between rapper Nicki Minaj, who is a Black woman, and pop singer Taylor Swift, a White woman. Minaj had recently made public critiques on Twitter about not being nominated for MTV’s Video Music Award (VMA) for “Video of the Year” because her video “Anaconda” celebrated curvaceous women’s bodies instead of skinny ones. Swift, who was nominated for that VMA category, responded to Minaj’s criticism directly by calling it out as divisive of women entertainers. While neither Minaj nor Swift referred to race, media outlets covered the exchange as racially charged and about the specific celebration of Black women’s beauty. While Taylor, Liz’ conversation partner, was described as wondering why such issues of race and beauty had to be brought up in the first place, Liz explained how she alluded to racial constructs that could be at work. “I

suggested that maybe Nicki Minaj had experienced past and/or present discrimination for her body size or type and skin color which led her to make those guesses as to why her video was not nominated.” Additionally, scholars of Black Feminist Theory argue that the discussion of this identity intersection is imperative because race, gender, and class are intertwined. Even if race was not the issue mentioned by Minaj it is indeed implicated and part of her experiences because she is a Black woman (Collins, 2008; hooks, 1984). However, when Liz’ wrote in more detail about her application of critical reflexivity she considered the positioning of others but did not incorporate her own.

When thinking of critical reflexivity, I realized that recent attention of discrimination of African Americans in the public eye may have put more attention on them feeling treated as "less-than" and suggesting impact on such things great and small, like votes for movie awards.

This assessment is contextually based but it is also somewhat dismissive of concerns that do evoke race and are dismissive of an increased public discussion of discrimination. While Liz stated that there could be contextual reasons for Minaj’s criticisms, she also asserted that the attention on VMA nominations is insignificant and really just an overreaction, which diminishes the significance of the broader critique of media representation and contributes to practices of White privilege (Hall, 1981). Liz was able to enact a sense of agency and make a judgment about the value of the conflict as a whole while also ignoring her own positions as a White woman, in coming to the conclusion that the issue was an “overreaction.” With her discourse about the conflict between Minaj and Swift Liz constitutes the social practice of White people being able to talk about the experiences of people of color from a distance and lending an air of objectivity because the circumstances “have nothing to do with them.” However, it is their dominant identities that typically veil their understanding of the perspectives of those with

marginalized cultural identities. The positions and advantages of people with dominant cultural identities do impact their interpretations and opinions (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012), but that privilege also enables them to speak as individuals and allow those influences to be unnamed and rarely accounted for.

Liz' own summation of critical reflexivity was that "Critical reflexivity can be seen as taking part in how an issue is portrayed to us individually" and that it "plays a part in each of our lives as we share experiences and what issues being portrayed influence us as individuals and then as a society." A more encompassing application of critical reflexivity would have included individual reflections about her positionalities in relation to histories, the larger political context, racist systems and discourses. This is another example of the persistence of staying with the individual as the focus rather than connecting specific social systems and structures to intercultural conflicts. Giroux (2003) argues that in order to create a radical democracy that is inclusive, both instructors and students benefit from critical reflexivity and uncovering the differential benefits of policies and social systems on diverse groups.

The generalized interpretation of critical reflexivity that Liz wrote about was expressed similarly in other reflections as some of the students described critical reflexivity as a tool to "raise awareness" in discussions about intercultural conflicts. After having a lengthy conversation with her conversation partner about whether "Watch Me Whip" by hip-hop artist Silento was "good music" as well as discussing current controversies within the Church of Scientology, Karen said,

I think using critical reflexivity helps me both within a conversation and afterwards to look at my view and sometimes adjust it, sometimes not...I found I

tried to get my husband to look at the pop song he discussed from a different perspective, to see if I could help him to look from another viewpoint.

Again, the application of critical reflexivity is presented as a vaguely defined inclusion of information or perspective in a conversation that the other person should adopt. Karen did not acknowledge the ways that histories and current contexts positioned her, and her husband's, identities, or positioned the identities of those about whom they were speaking. She had also addressed the conflict of Leah Remini's public separation from the Church of Scientology. Karen remarked that she did not care at all to reflect on her own or any other point of view. "Regarding my own part in the conversation about religion and religious intolerance, I didn't verbalize much in the point of view of Ms. Remini or other detractors as I just don't get it, nor do I care to." Karen identified herself as a member of the church in the reflection and even though she asked her husband to consider the merits of a music style he was unfamiliar with; she did not apply that same discursive move to the issue that was close to her religious identity. She also missed the opportunity to critique how the context positions her and her husband's identities and their level of privilege to offer judgments about and resistance to different musical and religious perspectives. These comments not only illustrate individual agency, but also a version of the positive-self and negative-other discursive form, in that one's own unique views are valorized through saying "I just don't get it" and others are positioned as not worth talking about.

Jane, a White woman, wrote about her discussion with her friend Maria, about cultural appropriation of Native culture for Halloween costumes. She was also the only student who defined critical reflexivity as evaluating the impact of her own identities on the discussions of conflict. "Critical reflexivity is an important aspect of intercultural

conflict because understanding how you contribute to conflicts is essential to figuring out a solution to the problem.” However, her examples were not consistent with her definition. Jane brought up critiques of US American culture in general, and young women who use headdresses as a fashion accessory at music festivals specifically, but none of her own identities. She did not mention being a straight White woman with the agency to afford costumes on holidays, or her positions of aligned historically with the oppression of Native Americans in the US from which Whites have benefitted. Jane’s conclusion focused on the general process of how critical reflexivity is reflecting and talking about conflict as a different way of interacting.

I mostly think it was different because you do not usually get the opportunity to reflect on those kind[s] of topics so you almost do not know how to talk about them either. While it was different to discuss these topics, I believe it is important that we integrate them into everyday conversation more often because we need to learn how to discuss topics with others in a more in-depth and productive [way] than we are used to.

This example from Jane displays her spoken desire to talk more about such topics and “learn from others” but this move stays at a clearly self-serving level of general “discussion,” and reproduces practices of individualism that acknowledge the need for a response or solution to personal intercultural conflicts but does not place that conflict in connection with broader societal structures.

The use of context in this set of reflections was present through mostly general, but some specific, talk about histories and institutions. For example, Amber noted, “The people who hold the power in these institutions (US citizens & people in the higher categories of caste systems) have their identities in these institutions and are afraid that the power they do have might be taken away.” She concluded that those who have access

to “power” through higher status positions in “caste systems” and in institutional positions will act to maintain those locations. Devin talked about an incident of police brutality that was against a young Black woman and stated that she “did research on my own” to reveal that the officer had been accused of similar attacks before. She historically situated state violence against people of color in saying “the police go by the darker the skin the more likely that person [is] to being a bad person.” It is also noteworthy though that the discourse still points to individual actions taken by police personnel against a black individual, instead of discussing the historical, political and social structures that enable and defend police violence. As another example, Thomas described larger issues that contribute to the conflicts surrounding gay marriage and identified that, “We both agreed that religion, and its history within the US, was the primary force behind the conflict.” In summary, most of the students’ discourse did address some contextual structures and situated conflict within social systems and power relations, but it is apparent that making concrete micro to macro connections lacked depth.

In these reflections, students were speaking from identity group positions that were associated with varying levels of privilege. It is important to note that two people specifically indicated that critical reflexivity was not a tool that they would want to use in the future. These two individuals aligned with cultural identities positioned in the US as having higher degrees of privilege, White males from middle class backgrounds who also identified as strong Christians. Their written resistance to critical reflexivity is complex; they valorize their own status positioning and exert individual agency, and these moves protect those dominant identity positions. Trevor co-opts critical reflexivity. He did account for his perspective related to “anti-Catholic” voices in the media because these

speakers made jokes about priests being pedophiles. He explained that he got offended by these types of jokes because “some of the best men I have ever known have been priests.” Trevor explained his use of critical reflexivity as helping him recognize the sources of his views. “It [critical reflexivity] made me realize that my personal disposition, attitudes and my culture all influence why I am bothered by popular media's depictions of Christians and Catholics in particular.” But in conclusion, he specified,

I doubt that I would actually talk about it in my future conversations. Asking someone to consider their positionality comes off as rude and/or condescending to me. It seems that bringing that up will only make someone defensive or disengage.

He uses acknowledgment of his own attitudes and culture as a way to defend his attitudes and cultural views. He concluded that his personal and individual backgrounds are the central features contributing to his own subject positioning. As one of the students who held several positions of privilege in relation to his cultural identities, it is telling that Trevor was unwilling to talk about them. He also uses his status and privilege to appear considerate with others because of the potential for discomfort (for them) that might happen.

While talking about one's own positions of privilege could be awkward or uncomfortable, Trevor's comments are consistent with research that domination and privilege are not talked about because these positions are normalized as the default cultural position or are replaced with orientations of individualism (Nakayama & Martin, 1999; Sorrells, 2016, p. 12). Trevor discursively exercised the dominance of his cultural privileges in exercising the agency to opt out of addressing his identity positions and the positions of others in relation to social structures. His privileged status provides him

enough agency in this context to choose not to engage. This ability to opt out of the discussion is not an option for others whose identities are visible and marginalized in broader media and public discourses.

Randy, another White male who identified as straight and devoutly Christian, made a very similar case when it came to addressing the role and impact of his own identities and positions in relation to intercultural conflict. Randy wrote about an intercultural conflict as the text of a video that was used to make Christianity appear more welcoming. He described that the main message of Christianity was actually lost in the content. He expressed he was “open to other opinions,” and he acknowledged that “because of my Christian background and my establishment in a middle-class state of living, I am blind to many of the struggles people face on a daily basis.” However, Randy then declared that “The level of open-minded[ness] that critical reflexivity required is almost extreme because we are all hard-wired a certain way because of our experiences in life because of our selected cultures.” He concluded that critical reflexivity “has its place in society, but personally I prefer to have my own opinion, but I still think it's morally correct to listen and try to understand someone else's opinion.” Randy’s discourse contains several disclaimers (van Dijk, 1993) and some equivocation (Billig, 1996; Bull, 1998). Randy positioned himself as reflexive, then discounted the need for reflexivity due to individuals already “being hard-wired.” He then noted that critical reflexivity “has its place” but “I personally prefer to have my own opinion,” but then acknowledged a moral call to listen to others. This ambivalence works to construct Randy as a morally aware individual with the agency to decide when and where to discuss diverse opinions. His discourse also enables a view of him as open-minded as a Christian, but also being “hard-

wired” as an individual. In this way he can resist the invitation to apply critical reflexivity to address those with different positions and different conditions of living, but still appear “morally correct.”

Randy and Trevor’s discourse reinforces broader sociocultural practices, because they reify their individual agency and right to maintain their individual positions. They construct themselves as “moral” and “not condescending” and respectful of others, which enables them to maintain their dominant positions and privileged ability to engage or not engage others with whom they disagree. From a sociocultural frame their discourses reproduce the status quo and their own privileged positions, by constituting Whiteness, masculinity, economic class privilege, and hegemonic Christianity. These two narratives are particularly noteworthy because of my critical pedagogical goals to encourage students to apply critical reflexivity in order to broaden their understanding of their own positions of advantage and disadvantage (Fassett & Warren, 2004). It may be that my raced, classed, gendered and educational identity positions, coupled with my asking students to recognize their own levels of privilege in comparison to others’ locations, sparked their resistance. From their reflections and conversations throughout the semester it can be seen clearly that they held on tightly to and valorized their individual right to decide what kind of reflections were beneficial. I consider their discourse as a broader message to me, that “You are presenting an approach that aligns with your Black, female, progressive identities, but that doesn’t work for me so, no thanks.”

While the two White male Christian speakers’ discourses reified and preserved Whiteness and individualism as ideologies, the students of color also used discursive forms that reinforced Whiteness. Kyan, a Hispanic male, talked about the racist rhetoric

that Donald Trump used to talk about Mexican immigrants in the United States, and an internet meme about his home state that portrayed Hispanic people as poor and stupid. After he discussed the racist stereotypes he offered a qualifier that not all White people are racist.

Although we both were upset with those memes, we also noticed and acknowledged that not all White people are racist because of someone like Donald Trump. We learned that we will not be any better by assuming he [Donald Trump] put that up or that the whole group of people are like him just because of their culture either.

Qualifiers work to momentarily construct limits to generalizations (van Dijk, 2000). Here the discursive qualifier demonstrates a reflexive move acknowledging that Donald Trump is not representative of all White people. Although he contested Trump's racist representations, Kyan assigns that racism to one individual politician, and one who is already positioned in the media as an extremist. He omits any discussion of racism as a social system that produces subject positions and material conditions affecting not only Mexicans but multiple groups; and reifies Whiteness linked with valorizing individualism in the process. By not addressing racism as an institution and insisting that racism is embedded only in the actions of some individuals, Kyan's discourse constitutes Whiteness as well because if racism is only practiced by some individuals then institutionalized White privilege does not have to be interrogated or dismantled. Directing attention to this type of identity creation is a key objective of critical pedagogy, and examples like Kyan's show how entrenched these ideologies are.

Similarly, Monica, a biracial woman who identified as Black and White, talked to her conversation partner about how Native American mascots and the portrayals of Latino and Black males in films are often racist. Dawn, a Hispanic woman, was Monica's

conversation partner. Monica described her as being empathetic towards these issues that involved people of color. She described Dawn as saying, “many of the students I work with are racial minorities, and I find it offensive when categorization occurs that speaks ill of people in particular to whom I am close and have good relationships with.” Monica then explained that “If all people had the mindset that she [Dawn] does, taking offense when racial discrimination or stereotypes happen, then racial discrimination and stereotyping could potentially be eliminated.” This discursive move again focuses on racism being a set of individual attitudes. Monica ignored the positions of herself and her partner in this analysis. She is also implying that getting rid of the structures of racism requires only a “good mindset” like her friend Dawn had, which absolves her from engaging her Whiteness and the implications of it in exchange for positive thinking.

Devin and her conversation partner Meryl both identified as Black women. Devin wrote about her concern with racism and law enforcement and a recent incident where a security officer at a high school was caught on video wrestling a Black student out of her seat during class. Devin called attention to structures setting the scene for this action, and asserted that racism influences how Black people are viewed and treated by the police. However, she suggested that any change would have to come through individual attitudes. “There are many senseless acts that are affecting the community [that] can be avoided if people become more patient towards one another.” Devin’s discourse excluded mention of the history of racism in the US and ignored current social norms in which racism circulates widely. She turned to individual attitudes as the solution to racist actions by police and security representatives. Each of these examples shows how

ideologies steeped in Whiteness and individualism are reproduced and continuing racism attributed to individual actions rather than social structures.

My own reflections on this unit from a critical pedagogy perspective are that while I sought to show how and why there is need for talking about relations between micro and macro structures, the students' discourse mostly missed connecting their individual experiences and views to socially constructed systems and how those position all of us very differently. Generally, their reflections showed that their critical reflexive discursive moves consisted of a general awareness of the context (where, when, and who is present) and calls for acknowledging their own unique identities and voices. Overall, the students' discourse included many examples of their own "open" approaches to intercultural conflicts, which were self-validating. Talking about the need for tools such as critical reflexivity, and calling others to be more open to talk about alternatives is easier than practicing critical reflexivity and interrogating how their own identities, as well as others' identities are positioned into relations of difference by histories, current politics and social norms. These reflections can also be categorized as accounts of situated, mundane communication practices; these, in large part, reproduced larger social structural systems (Fassett & Warren, 2004). Overall, the students' discourse about intercultural conflicts acted to reinforce ideologies of individualism, class privilege and Whiteness, and acted to reify the status quo. I came to see that critical intercultural dialogues, and the discourses of contextual critique, recognition of intersectionality, and application of critical reflexivity, were competing for space in the same discursive field in which individualism, color blindness, Whiteness, nationalism, and classism had a long history of domination and endorsement.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS OF RECORDED CONVERSATIONS

In this chapter I focus my analysis on the conversations that the students recorded with their outside conversation partners during the unit of the class where the third key concept of critical reflexivity was incorporated. This analysis addresses my second research question that is focused on understanding the ways that the students practiced these key concepts in their conversations outside of class. I use Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine the themes, discursive forms and implicated sociocultural practices.

Below, I use a number of the rich examples that emerged from the conversations that the students had with their conversation partners to analyze how students talked about the three pedagogical themes related to critical intercultural dialogue: context, intersectionality, and critical reflexivity during their assigned outside-of-class conversations about an intercultural conflict in popular culture. In the previous chapter I organized the analysis with a chronological, building-block approach to the key concepts in order for the reader to understand the pedagogical context generating the discourse analyzed. In this chapter, the discourse was from the last set of recorded conversations outside of class. The discourse from the interactions provided me the opportunity to analyze how the concepts interrelated and how textual themes, discursive forms, and sociocultural practices constituted knowledge and reproduced subject positions and ideologies within each of the different examples cited. I also continued to connect my analysis of the exchanges that the students had with my own critical pedagogical goals for the class in relation to the ways that the students' discursive moves resist and reinforce ideologies.

To conduct this analysis first, I listened to each conversation and deductively took note of how the key concepts from the study emerged, the degrees to which they were applied and/or missed opportunities at application. Second, after identifying the textual themes and discursive forms that were produced by the students' discourse, I uncovered the hierarchal positions, systems of power, and ideologies implicated by the discourse. I found a number of dominant discourses that were reproduced and a few that were being resisted. While the students were prompted to engage a critical intercultural dialogue perspective which draws attention to the strength that dominant subject positions and narratives have on discourse; most of the exchanges lacked critical depth and emphasis related to talk about structural systems, intersectional positions or use of critical reflexivity, and therefore reproduced dominant, widely circulating ideologies.

Because the recorded conversations used for this analysis were the third and final outside conversation, I hoped that in this final conversation the conversation pairs would have been the most comfortable, or at the least generally familiar, with talking about cultural identities, intercultural conflicts, and considering themselves in relation to those in the conflicts. I also assumed that the students would have developed some familiarity with the key concepts of context, intersectionality, and critical reflexivity from the activities that they had engaged in during class. The audio recordings allowed me to hear the specific ways that the students used the key concepts and provided a broader sense of their practice in an unfolding conversation. The conversation prompt was designed to allow opportunities for the different concepts to emerge within the context of a conversation that might occur between individuals who have a familiarity with one

another. I assumed that this type of exchange could benefit from the incorporation of critical concepts.

Conversation prompt:

Ask your conversation partner about the last time that something in popular culture (movie, music, internet meme, popular figure etc.) bothered or upset her/him because of a connection to culture. What was it? What is her/his connection to that conflict? Share a popular culture incident that upset you and explain why it bothered you, the broader structural forces that are at work, and your connection to it.

This prompt spurred a variety of conversation topics that the students and their partners framed as intercultural conflicts related to popular culture; many were related to prominent current events at the time. The most popular discussion topic was the rising prominence of Donald Trump as a GOP candidate for US president. Many students talked about how they were put off by the comments that Trump had specifically made about the deviancy of Mexicans who migrated to the United States without government sanctioned documentation, and the amount of support that his bigoted rhetoric was accumulating along the campaign trail. Some examples of other intercultural conflicts that came up in the conversations were the appropriation of Native American traditional clothing for Halloween costumes, misrepresentation of Christianity in popular culture, police violence against Black people, and derogatory portrayals of marginalized race and class groups in film and television.

During class time I used the “conflict gallery” as the activity to engage critical reflexivity by emphasizing how students’ cultural identities connected them to different intercultural conflicts in ways that were overt and covert. This type of critical reflexivity was one of the primary pedagogical commitments of Critical Communication Pedagogy

(Fassett & Warren, 2004) and of the class that I taught. I envisioned that when the students discussed “their connection/s to the conflict” from the conversation prompt that there would be opportunities for them to articulate critical reflexivity in how their cultural identities contributed to their direct experience of and/or influence on those conflicts. Another demonstration of this concept would have been if the students were able to position others in relation to structures such as classism, Whiteness, homophobia, or religious doctrine.

For example, I assumed that students who identified as Latino/a could use the key concepts to talk about the conflict caused by Donald Trump’s comments about Mexicans in terms of being inherently racist, feeling targeted because of their ethnicity, and also being connected to the perpetuation of that racism through their US American citizenship and ideologies or policies that marginalize Latino/as. What I found in the conversations is that there were a few instances where the students identified the broader systems at work and discussed how their cultural identities are impacted by the conflicts that were highlighted, but none of them discussed how their own cultural identities positioned them in connection to the conflicts that they were addressing.

Since critical reflexivity was introduced to build upon the other key concepts that had been introduced previously, I also anticipated that intersectionality and context would be integrated into the students’ responses and discussions. When analyzing intersectionality, I wanted to see if there were points in the conversation where the students or their partners discussed the dynamics of multiple cultural identity interactions, for themselves and through the conflicts that they were discussing. I looked at conflict descriptions that incorporated the tensions being positioned with more than one cultural

identity, along with points where the potential for this application was present but the students or their partners did not engage that aspect. For the analysis of context, I looked for discussions about how structural systems of power were brought into the explanations of the conflicts, and the opportunities that the students missed to address those topics. When the students were asked in the prompt to explain the conflict and “the broader structural forces that are at work” this is where I envisioned that I might identify responses that called out the hierarchal systems that the conflicts were grounded in.

This conversation was the third time that the students had the opportunity to integrate context from a critical perspective into their discussions, and the second time that they were prompted to use intersectionality. I expected both of these key concepts to show up strongly because assumed that they were the most practiced. However, I found that the applications of context and intersectionality were highly variable between the different conversations. Most of the discussions addressed the conflicts as an issue that involved just one identity, even when the transcripts showed that there were multiple cultural identities mentioned. Context was present in some of the discussions, but not the majority, and there were several instances where the students adjusted the meaning to be more about additional general information instead of specifically related to social structures.

From the example that I used above about a Latino/a American discussing Donald Trump’s derogatory comments about Mexicans and applying critical reflexivity, I thought I could expect to see the application of intersectionality and context to the same topic. An intersectional perspective would show if either of the participants brought up tensions experienced between their ethnicity as Latino/a and their American citizenship

because while Trump positioned himself as speaking for Americans the student or their conversation partner might also highlight how their Latino/a ethnicity places them as connected to the group being negatively targeted despite their American citizenship. The application of context in this example could be seen if, for example, someone in the discussion drew specific attention to the structures of nationalism or racism, or policies of increasing surveillance along the border that are at work through Trump's comments about Mexicans.

Along with the key concepts I used CDA to identify a variety of themes, discursive forms, and sociocultural practices in students' discourse about different intercultural conflicts. I looked for trends and practices that mediated hierarchies and inequities in the discussion of intercultural conflicts. There were many themes and practices throughout these conversations in relation to the key concepts and the discourse used. Because of my own political positioning that prioritizes social justice, I was especially interested in discourses that involved the marginalizing of historically disadvantaged groups. The following examples highlight some of the intercultural applications, omissions, and implications that were constituted throughout the students' conversations. I also analyze how the discourse of the students constituted relations of difference and contributed to reifying and resisting broader systems and ideologies.

Naming Donald Trump's Rhetoric as Racist and Privileged

As I previously mentioned, one frequent topic of discussion amongst the conversations was the rhetoric of Donald Trump and his increasing popularity at the time.

Several students' responses were consistent with the discussion that Aryn had with her conversation partner, Bob, as she brought up Donald Trump. Aryn commented,

Aryn: Like I'm just gonna bring this up, because I think most people will, but I'm gonna bring it up anyways. Donald Trump, making his racist comments about Mexicans; I take great offense to that because I am Mexican and what he said is definitely not true... Yeah, we're not rapists. We're not...we are, I assume, good people.

Unknown Speaker: That we're not rapists? We're not rapists?

Aryn: Yeah, we're not rapists. We're not...we are, I assume, good people.

Bob: What was that video where he was like, 'I started from the bottom up, I got my small loan from my father.'

Aryn: Yeah, a small loan of like one million dollars.

Bob: One million dollars. It's like what the fuck? That's not a small loan.

Aryn: Like I'm never...I have to save up now if I ever wanna see one million in my bank

account. It's like no. And it's so dumb because he was filing for bankruptcy so many times. Anyway I was pissed off about that, like my family was pissed off about that too. Like they found out that people in LA were making Trump piñatas. And man my family went crazy for them. I'm pretty sure they went and bought a couple. It is funny... like Donald Trump piñatas. Who would not want that?

Bob: So that just angered me today.

Aryn: Yeah...that's the only issue that I have because that's the only thing that really, really angered me.

Bob: I hate people. So much.

In this excerpt Aryn's comments show discursive resistance to Trump's over generalizing. Aryn identified as Mexican, and this salient cultural identification came up frequently throughout the semester. It is understandable that Donald Trump's comments were contentious for her and her family, as the political success and broad acceptance of the racist and nationalist rhetoric that Donald Trump was promoting would have direct consequences for them. Bob identified as a White male and his comments convey judgments of Donald Trump about masking his class privilege and therefore linked with people whom he hates. In this excerpt Aryn's discourse links racism to nationalism and Aryn's Mexican nationality and race are also linked with being "rapists" which

implicates gender. Aryn's comments show the need for attention to intersectional identities. While Aryn called out Trump's racism, in a move that applies some context, she misses the opportunity to overtly critique Trump's generalizing about all Mexicans, overlooking intersectionality, and conflating nationality, race, ethnicity, and sex.

I expected that the application of critical reflexivity would facilitate more discussion about the implication of her identity positions that might have acted as counter discourses. I hoped for more mention of Aryn's other subject positions such as gender, class, religion, or nationality and the multiple ways that those identities are situated in relation to one another. However, there was a resistant discursive element because her declaration discursively contests the racist and nationalist hierarchy that subjugates Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the United States.

Throughout the discussion that Aryn and Bob held along with an unknown third individual, Bob did critique Trump's "small loan" of one million dollars. However, his comments demonstrate what could be called a very flippant attitude toward the intercultural conflicts that were discussed. His closing comment was "I hate people. So much." This comment takes the focus away from Trump's classism and racism to bring it back to himself. In another part of the conversation he described people's objections to there being a Black Stormtrooper in the latest Star Wars movie, to the point where they were calling for a boycott, to people just being "stupid" or "wanting attention." Bob seemed to apply a similar conclusion after Aryn expressed the disdain that she and her family had for Trump. His response, along with the ones that he posed prior in the conversation, show him exercising his individual agency to judge others' actions and views. Such agency is encouraged by levels of privilege enabled by being White and

male in the U.S. Neither speaker recognized that the prominence and popularity of Trump might also be enabled by systems of racism and nationalism of the United States.

Earlier in the semester when Aryn and Bob were talking about the disparities that they observed at their high school, Aryn reported that she and Bob determined that one of the primary reasons that their school was under-resourced was because of racist practices. Bob's discourse around this topic exhibited a sense of ambivalence in identifying structural causes to the intercultural conflicts that he discussed with Aryn. Notably, in these two examples the applications of blame are characteristic of privileged cultural identities because Bob used them in service to his own point of view. While he criticized Trump's class privilege as a reason to "hate" people like him, he also criticized Trump's obvious class privilege and named the issues with the high school that he attended as the consequence of racist structures.

Positive Self & Negative Other: My Christianity is not Their Christianity

Randy, who identified as a White male, told his conversation partner about a video produced by BuzzFeed that he had seen online. In the video Christians talked to the camera about their faith stating what their faith did not mean in response to commonly held representations of their identity and beliefs (Buzzfeed Yellow, 2015). The video was an installment in a series of videos created by the website to challenge cultural stereotypes. Prior to this one that featured Christians, there had been women, Muslims, Black people, Atheists, Natives, fat people, and Republicans stating their featured cultural identity and saying "but I'm not..." followed by stereotypes often related to their identity. All of the videos have a progressive slant, so the point of the video featuring

Christians is to contest popular assumptions and representations of Christianity with the words of people who identify as Christian. The message of the video shows cultural intersectionalities that demonstrate a range of different representations of Christian beliefs and perspectives. The people in the video said phrases like “I’m Christian, but I’m not conservative,” “I’m Christian, but I’m not homophobic,” and “I’m Christian, but I am a feminist.” Rather than applying the intersectionality that I had promoted during class and recognizing the moves that highlight multiple identity positions in the video, Randy critiqued this call for recognizing diversity of subjectivities and invalidated it through the application of his own view and practice of Christianity. Randy expressed a strong connection to his own identity as a Christian and shared that the video bothered him because,

It really didn’t bring any light to the faith at all...it had nothing to do with the *Bible*, the name of Jesus wasn’t even mentioned once. It was just about Christianity as a religion. And I’m a person that’s not necessarily for religion. I’m for a relationship with Jesus Christ and I think that if you’re so focused on just religious aspects, you completely lose focus on what’s important.

Randy’s Christian identification is positioned through his discourse here as superior to others’ Christian identifications in the video. Using his own views as the standard, Randy’s discourse contested the value of recognizing the diversity of Christian voices and accompanying intersectional identifications which is the message of the video. There is a version of Christian cultural membership that is often promoted as dominant, concerned with enforcing the rules and principles of the *Bible* in a very literal and legalistic fashion. Given my own Christian beliefs, I recognize these sorts of assertions as a mechanism of the broader social practice of those who identify as Christian. I have often encountered them as some Christians attempt to leverage arguments about what is

legitimately Christian and what is not, whether the topic is for example, a popular Kirk Franklin song, a message delivered by Joel Olsteen, or Dan Brown's *The DiVinci Code* book series. Randy remarked that he was not interested in "religion" implying his critique of institutional aspects or religious rules and regulations. But then, evidencing contradiction, he immediately applied his own rules that dictated that the only way for that brief two-minute video to be a true representation of Christianity the speakers had to directly reference the *Bible* and Jesus. He exercised his own individual agency by asserting his authority to judge and define what is representative of "real" Christianity, a relationship with Jesus Christ. This counters the message of the video, and calls into question the right of those in the video to call themselves Christian.

Randy and Tracee continued their conversation:

Randy: ...And so the video really upset me. It was kind of hypocritical to be getting on a pedestal to tell them to get off a pedestal. The video really wasn't helpful; it just tried to make people feel like it's okay and that they don't need to change. And that it's okay to live in sin...Whereas, the real belief system is that it's not okay to live in sin and that you're not supposed to be a slave to that sin and that you should choose to be a child of God instead. That really just upset me a little bit but it connected to me because of my faith. I think that's just about it [for the conversation] ...

Tracee: Thank you.

Religious identity is often discussed as a cultural identity because of the shared values, norms and practices. However, it is difficult to define it within clear boundaries (Ono, 2010). Many Christians are deeply invested in boundaries that have been used to determine a range of religious sects, denominations, sinful behavior that exclude membership, and institutional legitimacy, as can be seen here in Randy's explanation. A more contextually informed and critically reflexive response would have accounted for dominant structures within conservative Christianity, such as policies endorsing

homophobia or patriarchy and the oppression of women, and Randy's own positioning in relation to these ideologies. The pervasiveness of those very ideologies and accompanying norms is likely the reason that the video was made by BuzzFeed to begin with.

Randy used two notable discursive forms to establish a theme of his own "elite Christianity." The way that Randy described his reaction to the video to his conversation partner demonstrates discursive equivocation. He starts out by saying that the video "really upset" and "really bothered" him, later on his description he said "it just kind of bothered me," and near the end he reduces the strength of his concern and said "that really just upset me a little bit." He also used a positive-self versus negative-other, form (van Dijk, 1989) as evidenced in the use of his own standard of Christian faith to judge others' faith. As well, when he remarked that the people in the video were hypocritical and placing themselves on a pedestal. It is notable that this is a common criticism voiced by non-Christians about Christians. But Randy used the comparison to create distance from others who were also identifying as Christian and explained that they were advocating acceptance of "living in sin." With this form Randy implied that there are "good Christians" and "bad Christians" and that he is one of the good ones who also has the right to identify those who should be included and those that should be excluded. My own practice of Christianity intersects with my progressive politics and also contrasts with Randy's assessment. For example, I do not believe homosexuality or feminism are sins, nor believe that these create a contradiction with Christian principles.

Randy's response reproduces the practice of promoting narrow interpretations of Christian positions, along with other positions of privilege, in discourse and

demonstrating the agency to declare how others should be and act within the Christian faith. Randy identifies as a White, male, middle-class Christian. He was one of the students in my class who occupied multiple positions of privilege. These identity positions intersect, compound his levels of privilege, and enable him to enact agency to pronounce judgments (Roberts & Steiner, 2010). These also act to reinforce ideologies of individualism and autonomy, and thus blind him to see social structures at work. This is the type of discourse that leads to actions to remove queer Christians who are “out” from church congregations, or calls for conversion therapy because of the belief that someone can choose to give up being queer if they want to be accepted as a Christian (O’Brien, 2005; White & White 2004). Also, after Randy explained his position on the online video he immediately ended his conversation without getting any feedback from his conversation partner. Since he was speaking from his dominant subject positions as a White Christian male, the exchange is also an instance where Randy’s subject positions enable dominant opinions to be expressed in an uncontested manner. That one-sided articulation within the bounds of the conversation activates an elite or singular type of knowledge about the conflict, negates any opposing perspectives, and reinforces Randy’s voice as dominant.

Contested Views of Agency: Debating Individual Intention Versus Systemic Racism and Sexism

Liz spoke with her conversation partner Taylor, and talked about the conflict where hip-hop artist Nicki Minaj did not get nominated for a 2015 MTV Video Music Award for “Video of the Year” for her *Anaconda* video. Taylor stated that Minaj “believed that it [not getting nominated] was because black women’s bodies weren’t celebrated in the same way White women’s bodies were” which was supported by the

fact that pop/country artist Taylor Swift did get nominated for the “Video of the Year” award for her music video *Bad Blood*. Taylor explained that when Minaj critiqued that occurrence Swift responded by insisting that Minaj was pitting women against one another instead of criticizing the men who took up 3 of the 4 other nomination slots (Beyoncé was also nominated for her *7/11* video).

Both of the discussants agreed that Minaj’s concerns were valid and likely influenced by experiences of racism as a black female. This acknowledgement is indicative of an intersectional application. When Liz brought up that Minaj’s experiences as a woman might be different because she is Black her observation articulates the tensions of positions of White and Black feminists. Historically, White women have used feminism to combat patriarchy, but ignore the different experiences that Black women have in relation to patriarchy because they also deal with the intersections of racism at the same time (Carby, 1996; Combahee River Collective, 1983). Swift contributed to this very dynamic that perpetuates racism and patriarchy by suggesting that Minaj should criticize the majority of men nominated instead of the woman.

Liz and Taylor recognized that intersectional interpretation but also continued to fall back into prioritizing individualism as their conversation continues. They missed an opportunity to apply critical reflexivity in this example because they did not mention their own positionalities as White and Latina identified women. Nor did they recognize Taylor Swift’s positions of privilege as White, thin, upper class, and a nominee for the award, and how these positions enable her to speak as an individual. Ultimately, they determined that the Nicki Minaj video would have been nominated if it was really the “better” video. Liz concluded “Honestly if it was a really good video a lot of fans would

probably have tweeted for that person to win.” Despite the fact the nominees were not selected by the fans through social media, discursively, this omission centered the discussion of the conflict primarily on the Black woman as an individual. While Black women have historically experienced higher levels of subjugation due to racism, the speakers ignore this context and focus on the quality of the product she produced. This replicates the practice of focusing on individual meritocracy while the context and inequities remain invisible and not questioned. The ideology of individual meritocracy implicated here is accompanied by the assumption that all female performers have the agency and choice to determine how they are viewed by others. This is exemplified further when Taylor was asked by Liz about whether or not she had experienced any similar conflicts related to her own race that might connect her to the Swift/Minaj conflict. Taylor, who identified as Latina, replied:

I don't [experience a similar conflict] because Latinas are very sexualized but I wear sweaters everyday so it's not an issue with me. But the thing that bothers me sometimes is that they want to be sexualized and so that's where I'm conflicted because... Nikki Minaj wanted to be sexual.

With this assertion Taylor uses her own individual experiences and choices in dress to minimize any appearance that is “sexual.” She responds to structural forces of racism and sexism through describing her own actions to ensure she is not overly sexualized. While it may appear she is exerting individual agency and choice in what to wear, this overlooks the context in which she must cover her body with sweaters in order to not be overly sexualized by others. An opportunity for critical reflexivity is missed.

Liz and Taylor's conversation incorporated context through the discussion of structural forces once they moved on to discussing Liz' intercultural conflict example.

They talked about the television series “Wife Swap” where Liz was concerned by the displays of wealth, the lack of emphasis on family time, and the large amount of time spent focusing on material things by the people featured in the episode.

Liz: I think she just has had a lot of jobs and what I mean is like she had her lips done and you know, excessive money. Like people, you know the average American, cannot do that. So, I don’t know. It’s wealth, and wealth, and then just...

Taylor: The equality gap is huge.

Liz: And then plus if that wealth wasn’t brought up by you know, their own, maybe the family gave it to them. So, it’s passed down...

Liz: My connection? Well I kind of shared that my connection isn’t any part of that. [Laughter].

Liz explained that there was a level of wealth displayed on the show that is a class conflict, but not one that she can relate to individually because she does not have that level of wealth that was displayed on the show. However, in one of the written reflections she discussed her own income instability; she described that if she missed a paycheck she would have a difficult time keeping her home and paying her immediate bills. This is the impact of the “equality gap” that Taylor mentioned during their exchange. Instead of making that connection the dynamics and consequences of class, she makes a similar move of creating distance on an individual basis, which is consistent with Taylor’s discourse earlier. In their discussion of these conflicts that they classified as related to race and class they both resort to talking about others instead of using reflexivity and analyzing their own positions and experiences in any detail.

Liz did identify structural forces of racism and classism during their conversation as the contextual factors at work within both of their examples.

Liz: So then let’s get back to questions. Yeah, structural forces? Structural forces. Can you think of any structural forces on the Taylor Swift thing maybe? Well we already said maybe like the racism for structural forces.

Taylor: Yeah. And everyone's defensive for a reason. So I don't know. I don't know what you mean by structural forces though

Liz: Yeah. That's not real clear. [Laughter]. But yeah, I think mine is classism. Where yours was maybe a little racism based on assumptions. But you know basically the Wife Swap show is talking all about these upper, you know the upper class here in America. So many people can't really relate with that.

Even though they articulated some confusion with the prompt, Liz provided an assessment of contextual forces at work. Few of the other conversation partners specifically incorporated the portion of the prompt that had to do with structural forces.

Contesting Cultural Exoticizing and Commodification

Luis' discussion with his mother, June, was about their experiences as Native Americans and the appropriation of elements of their culture by non-Natives. They talked about Halloween costumes and art that non-Natives purchased, assuming that it was "authentic" when it actually did not have any connection to a Native American community. June also told Luis about a time when she took a tour of a site that is sacred to Native Americans. She explained that the tour group was Native American artists, they were led by a Native American guide from her Pueblo, and the tour was to learn about their ancestors and history in that place. At one point during the tour of the historic site their group was allowed to spend time in the kivas, sacred rooms, which non-Native tourists are not allowed to enter.

June: The shocking thing was when we were getting ready to go back out of the kiva and I was the first one coming out from the kiva on the ladder. I looked up and there's all these non-Native tourists staring at me like, "Oh my God, there's someone coming up on the kiva ladder. Someone's coming up from the underground" ... I felt naked, like I was fully clothed but with all these people staring at me, I felt naked... in front of us was like 30 tourists staring at us and they had cameras flicking off.

Luis: Like you were actually Natives that came up from the underworld. [Laughter]

June: There was a guy videotaping that I recognized when we went down there an hour and a half before. He was still there waiting for us to come up and he was videotaping [us] and I was shocked and everybody that came out with my group was like, “whoa, what are all these people doing here?”

Luis: You think they were gonna do something with that footage and say, “real Native Americans coming out of the ancient ruins?”

June: Yeah. It was like “they’re crawling up from the underworld. “One of the ladies actually followed us as we walked away. [The non-native woman asked] “How long were you all down there? What happened down there?” One of the young [Native] guys just turned around and said, “That’s something I don’t wish to share.” And that was it. We just kept walking. “I do not wish to share anything.” And that was all we had to say.

This account highlights the ways that different cultural positions influence experiences of the same space. While the Native Americans were there to engage in sacred practices at the site, the non-Native tourists were positioned to consume this space as an exotic experience where they could catch a glimpse of “authentic” Native Americans performing traditional rituals. June noted that her group consisted of Native American artists and implied that they were also practitioners of sacred traditions. She did not discuss the historical gender norms in which only males were invited into the kivas. June’s discussion of this intrusion by the non-Native tourists was, however, historically and reflexively situated as she also commented that during the encounter “I just could imagine what did our elders-- what did our ancestors feel like-- when they first came into contact with other people besides themselves?”

There is indeed a long history of systemic exploitation and consumption of Native American culture and imagery in the United States that constitute a hierarchy that privileges non-Natives with the resources to consume Native American spaces and art. Luis and June’s discourse highlight that tension in relation to June’s position as Native American and the positions of the tourists who were framed as voyeurs of June’s

religious practice. The discourse from June accomplishes the creation of resistant knowledge about how Native Americans read the presence and actions of non-Natives in a space that is historically sacred to the Native American community. She implies that the tourist activity in that space was disrespectful. She positioned the non-Native Americans as a violating presence who acted like they were there to watch an exhibition. The description of cameras flicking, videotaping, and staring making June feel “naked” suggests the tourists were in fact intrusive and unable to see the humanity in those they were observing (Evans-Pritchard, 1989).

Jane and her conversation partner Maria discussed the use of Native American and other exploitative costumes for Halloween. They identified capitalism as one contextual force at work, discussing how the perpetuation of that form of cultural appropriation is assisted by economics because people will continue to buy the costumes and companies will continue to sell them as long as they are making a profit.

Jane: And we talked about in class, how things like that...headdresses and Native American costumes or Mexican costumes or things like anorexia costumes, it's just ...since we are a capitalistic [society]...we do it for profit. So a lot of companies are just like oh this would be funny, people will buy this, so we should make it. So a lot of cultural stuff ends up becoming products that you can buy later. We tend to monetize cultural things and like take away the intrinsic value or we take away the actual meaning and we just sell it as a thing.

Jane: And then it [prompt] asks “What broader structural forces are at work? And [what is] our connection to it?” So, structural forces are things like the government or schools or society in general as a structural force.

Maria: I don't know if this answering the question but you were just saying with these big companies that...

Jane: Yeah.

Jane: They're just doing it for profit. That they're not really...they don't really care about the actual meaning. They just wanna make money because they know people...they know people will buy [the products]

Jane: Yeah.

Maria and Jane discussed the different costumes as representations that “take away the intrinsic value” in a context of capitalism. There was a missed opportunity for critical reflexivity to be applied because Jane did not address that the consumption of those ethnic costumes is typically by people who do not identify with the cultural group being exploited. The consumption of such costumes demonstrates how ethnic and racial difference also contributes to sustaining this type of consumption. Later on in the conversation they mentioned that one of their friends was planning to dress up as a Native American that Halloween, but neither Jane nor Maria mentioned any type of intervention to prevent their friend from wearing the type of costume they had just discussed as being so problematic.

Jane: [our mutual friend] is going to be an Indian [for Halloween] and I’m like “Oh man. Eh. Okay.”

Maria: Yeah.

Jane: If you want to.

Immediately after this statement Jane segued into another example of appropriation of Native American culture by generalized others, “I was reading this article for festivals like Coachella and EDM festivals where [the attendees] all like to wear like extravagant Native American headdresses.”

Discursively, the tepid response to their friend’s costume choice coupled with later comments a need to be “conscious” about the issue, demonstrate that they view such consumption as up to individual choice. This discursive practice also shows the way that remaining relatively silent stands to reinforce the friend’s agency to exert individual choices without being questioned about the consequences of such costumes. In this case Jane’s and Maria’s responses gave a pass to their friend’s costume and as a result they

reinforced the ideology of continuing appropriation of Native American culture by non-Native Americans.

Another set of discursive devices that were used within Maria and Jane's conversation was the creation of distance from "undesirable" cultural identifications through disclaimers and ambivalence. As Jane and Maria talked about the ways that Halloween costumes which depicted different ethnic groups can be offensive to those groups, the conversation partner remarked that even though she was Mexican, the Mexican costumes didn't bother her too much.

Maria: Yeah. And like I mean there are a lot of Native Americans around here, so I think that's really important that we're conscious about that because there's so many people around here that could get offended, if we were to wear costumes like that or something. And I also saw, I don't know if it was a video or an article or something, but I just saw the title of it and it was a similar thing but for Mexican costumes or costumes celebrating Mexicans.

Jane: Cause it's like all tacos and sombreros?

Maria: Exactly. Yeah. And there were some ones like that. And I didn't really take the time to read through all of that, but seeing...being that I'm Mexican, some of those things, I'm like okay yeah that can be offensive going from...and I'm not super, extremely Mexican and I don't get extremely offended by those things. But seeing like, taking from ancestors and stuff, the things like that just like the Native American things like the headdresses that they wore, Mexicans have the same kind of things. So those were super special and significant to them and had a lot of meaning behind it. So I mean, seeing that, I can totally understand how that can be offensive. And like I said, I'm not extremely offended by it or anything.

Jane: So like it doesn't personally offend you?

Maria: Exactly

Jane: But like it kind of relates to your...

Maria: But I can see how it would offend people coming from that background. I think that's really important to just kind of be aware of that.

Maria used a disclaimer and emphasized that she is not "super, extremely Mexican." She created distance between her own Mexican cultural identification as a collective label and the representations of it that could be offensive. Therefore, she was able to declare that she was not personally offended by the stereotypical costume depictions. The disclaimer

of not being “super Mexican” was also accompanied by ambivalence (Billig, 1999) on the subject because Maria also stated that she “totally understands” how the costumes could be offensive when “taking from ancestors and stuff” but this is not an offense to her personally. The removal of personal critique and downplaying the stereotypes of Mexicans represented in the Halloween costumes discursively works to produce the continual perpetuation of those stereotypes. This example demonstrates that the discourse of groups who speak from marginalized positions can contribute to their own subjugation.

Maria resists being characterized as the Mexican person who would find offense with stereotypical Halloween costumes of Mexicans, by stating that that she doesn’t strongly identify with the group. While individually she has the ability and is situated in a context that enables her to distance herself from being “super Mexican,” this discursive move ignores the consequences of this characterization for anyone who is read as Mexican. Actually how others read her identities is not something within her control. Maria will experience consequences of institutionalized racism, and other structures subjugating Mexicans as illegal immigrants, criminals, or lazy (Flores, 2003) regardless of her personal feelings. Encouraging my students as well as their conversation partners to bring more recognition and interrogation of these subject positions is called for given my critical pedagogy goals.

Advocating Color Blindness Reifies Whiteness & Individualism

In the conversation between Amber and her husband James, James held the floor for the majority of the conversation; he was able to present many unchecked opinions as

a result. Amber identified as a White woman, and her husband James identified as male, White and Hispanic. Throughout the 43 minutes of their audio recording James spoke for over 70% of the conversation. There were long sections of the recording where James gave detailed perspectives and Amber's only replies were "right," "yeah," or "interesting." The following exchange was one example.

James: You know I think...I mean it's a very big conversation right now, you know. Racial issues you know. We've got hashtag Black Lives Matter happening all the time. You got Ferguson. You had you know, just tons of things going on, some hot button issues. But I think the problem is, honestly is that we are focusing on it. You know you talk about equality and you talk about racist and you just have to realize like it's just a literally a different you know, melanin count in some one's skin.

Amber: Yeah.

James: You know there's no significance to this. So I think if we can get to a point where we're not saying, "how should black lives be viewed" How should Mexicans be viewed? How should Whites be viewed? I'mma just going to view everyone as people.

Amber: Right.

James: That's the ultimate goal. Now, is it okay for people to have their own cultures? Of course. You know if you're from Mexico and you celebrate a certain holiday, you know you dress a certain way, you know, like that's fine. You know you can have your own cultural identities, I guess you could say, but you know when we're talking about the actual integrity of a person, every culture has good people. I mean, it's just human nature, you know? I think it dwells across the globe. You know? Every culture has complete jerks, has horrible, horrible people. Like you know, no one has the cornerstone on any of it. Yeah we do things differently but ultimately, we're all people...

Amber: Right.

James: Who all have the same instincts, have the same wants. We get scared and we laugh and we cry and we love and we everything.

Amber: Right.

Not only does this sort of exchange limit the interaction of the conversation between the two speakers it also allows particular dominant ideologies to be perpetuated freely. In this case, James' comments were in response to the Black Lives Matter movement, which is a social, ideological, and political movement that specifically emphasizes the value of

Black lives in direct response to social systems in a world that intentionally targets the demise of Black lives (Garza, 2014). When James asserted that the best thing to do is look past those “skin deep” racial differences and just concentrate on the fact that everyone is human, he promoted liberal pluralism and post-racial individualism (Goldberg, 2006; Sorrells, 2016, p.68). Because of his own subject positions James framed the heart of the conflict as an issue with individuals. His assertions about how little skin color should matter rely on colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2014, p. 2). While divisions and assessments according to skin color treat race as a social construct, a hierarchy has been institutionalized and to ignore that material consequences persist beyond individuals (or what James calls “horrible people”) is another form of racism itself (Bonilla-Silva, 2014, p. 25). A broader contextualization of his claims is missing; that people of color have disproportionately less wealth, receive poorer qualities of education, are incarcerated at higher rates, or have limited political representation. Such consequences are not based on whether individuals have “good” or “bad” intentions or act with/out integrity (Bonilla-Silva, 2014).

James’ argument was that generalized human nature is diverse but these differences do not matter since “ultimately we’re all people.” James’ statement demonstrated how he is able to discursively position himself as concerned with individuals and therefore he can dismiss the need to talk about race. This sort of post-racial discourse is pervasive and can be found in broader sociocultural narratives in which speakers insist “I don’t see color” or “People should just be treated the same regardless of differences since we are all human.” Whether or not Amber wholly agreed with her husband, her lack of response is one way to be complicit in the perpetuation of

such ideologies. Here her husband dominates and holds the floor while Amber only agrees. Similar to the example above with Randy, this is another display of discourse from someone with dominant identity positions and a conversation in which particular ideologies around individualism, erasing race, and liberal pluralism are validated through comments such as “right” and the absence of any counter discourse.

In contrast, in most conversations about intercultural conflicts, differing ideological positions can be common. For instance, in discussions of police brutality against blacks, fairly frequent given the instances of violence that have become so prevalent and controversial in the U.S. views pointing out racism might be countered with valorizing of security and the need for police action. In addition, Harris, Palazzolo & Savage (2012) studied how sexism is reinforced through talk about intimate partner violence. They found that ideological dilemmas appeared alongside sexism, through discursive forms such as disclaimers, competing repertoires of interpretation, and extreme case formulations that were used to replicate sexist ideologies.

Throughout the audio recorded conversations in general, and these in particular, I observed how these types of discursive forms were used by the students and their conversation partners in just this way, to reinforce and replicate dominant ideologies. Also noteworthy is that James continued his critique of US American race relations in a section of their recorded discussion that Amber did not reference at all in her written reflection. The students could respond to the written reflection prompts however they wanted to, so long as they addressed all of the different elements. I was able to directly compare the third reflection paper to the text of the conversation that was the topic of the paper. Generally, the students did a good job in providing me a summary of the key ideas

that were addressed during their conversations. Amber did not describe or comment on James' comments. This glaring omission enables the reproduction of post-racial individual meritocracy to be unchecked.

As an instructor I am constantly being read by the students for my own cultural identities and politics (Bordo, 1993). Prior to this final conversation and written reflection there were at least two conversations that I facilitated during class where I advocated for Black Lives Matter. I cannot ignore that those conversations plus my Blackness could have contributed to Amber's omission of any mention of the following conversation:

James: That's fundamentally the difference between the Civil Rights Movement and more of what's happening today [Black Lives Matter]. It seems to be a lot more "We deserve better. We need to blah, blah, blah." I saw a poster someone took a picture of at their school the other day, and it said "If you're a White person, look at history, you've been messing everything up for all these years." Like, "you need to step back and let people of color run the show."

Amber: Yeah.

James: And not only is it woefully inaccurate. I mean history is painted with every color.

Amber: Your family had slaves. Looking back [at] genealogy, your family had more slaves than mine did. And I'm...

James: Yeah.

Amber: I don't have...

James: You're the White family

Amber: [Laughter] I'm the White family.

James: Yeah. On one side, if you trace it back, one of my ancestors owned slaves and on the other side, one of my ancestors was a slave.

Amber: Right.

James: Back in Civil Rights Movement, it was less of a battle cry of "We want more. You need to give us more as a people, group. We deserve better." And then it [was] more "We're all equal. We want what you want. You can vote, we wanna vote. You can sit in the front of the bus; we want that too." Whereas I feel it's right now more of "us versus them" [and] "What can we get from the other person?"

In his comparison between the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement of the mid 2010's, James spoke without contextualizing his

claims in any way. He contrasted the civil Rights Movement of the 1960's as more positive than the BLM. He also defended Whiteness through his critique of current rhetoric about racial conflicts. In James' discourse the Civil Rights Movement is characterized as a struggle for "equality" whereas BLM is discursively classified as selfish and about taking, as in, "we want more." While James used these to distinguish one movement from the other, both movements were created to contest the same fundamental structures of systemic racism. BLM is widely recognized as focusing on the marginalized experiences of Black people but does so with the understanding that everyone should be liberated. A primary principle is that "When Black people get free, everybody gets free" (Garza, 2014). Additionally, the Civil Rights Movement which demanded equal rights and treatment, was absolutely about Black people "wanting more" and "deserving better" than what they had historically been experiencing in the United States. But James attributed that characteristic to the selfish nature of BLM. Discursively, James' discourse diminishes the credibility of the BLM and therefore acts to support the status quo and reproduces Whiteness.

Teun van Dijk discusses discursive patterns that become evident in talk about race. Some of his most prominent investigations revolve around the tendency for individuals to deny that racism exists (van Dijk, 1992). There is a discursive form in race oriented discourse that occurs as a disclaimer followed by a racist assertion. Disclaimers (e.g. "I'm not a racist, but...") allow the individuals to position themselves as moral and nonbiased but replicate racism at the same time (Chiang, 2010). James used this discursive form in a slightly different way, by stating that part of his family owned slaves. James identifies as Hispanic and White in the second reflection paper, but during

this conversation Amber brings up that James has familial ties to Spain, Mexico, and Black Americans. It is not made clear if James is referring to Whites, Hispanics, or even Black people who have owned slaves. On one level it doesn't matter because he is ultimately arguing that lots of groups owned slaves and lots of groups were slaves. He discounts the necessity to talk about slavery all, since it was pervasive and also in the past. This claim also acts to reinforce that White people, or elites, should not be the collective target for social problems.

There are several references in this conversation to Mexican heritage for James, and if James' slavery reference was specific to the Mexican side of his family owning slaves, the historic legacy of owning slaves for Mexicans is directly aligned with Spanish colonialism where indigenous and African people were enslaved to replace the working population that was decimated by the violence and diseases that came with Spanish colonists (Tulloch, 2009; Simms, 2008). However, the role of the Spanish, the experiences of Mexicans, and the positioning of Hispanics versus Mexicano/as in the Southwest currently were not acknowledged by James. His discourse contributed to the construction and reification of Whiteness as well as imperialism, without reflexive acknowledgment of his own race, class and gender subject positions in relation to his argument. The rationale that James used is reflected in social practice that downplays the impact that dominant groups have had in institutionalizing violence and marginalization. James leveraged his mixed racial heritage against Amber's White racial background to make the point that people of color were also participants in slavery. With such a pluralistic approach, and numerous groups enslaving and being enslaved, the practice of slavery ceases to be in need of interrogation. Consistent with post-racial orientations

which also feature the present, these moves reify Whiteness as a dominant ideology. Nakayama & Krizek (1995) describe that White students in their study voiced a need to focus on the present so mechanisms that render collective memories of the past become irrelevant, this dismissing of history works to erase White bodies from the privilege that they are inextricably connected to. James exercises this discursively as he wields a color-blind brush to explain historic injustices, racism, and marginalization.

It is notable that in the written reflection Trevor did not write about how his conversation partner offered claims and positions that contested the existence of White or class privilege either. Trevor's conversation partner Brandon, who identified as a biracial (White and Hispanic) male, characterized media attention being given to police brutality as a cultural conflict because of the "unnecessary focus" on White privilege.

Brandon: Another popular idea that really frustrates or bothers me is people calling out what's being called White privilege. It frustrates me because people sit there and they talk about...online at least...they talk about how much better off people [are] because they're White. How police won't beat or kill them because they're White. While at the same time that's [giving]an unintentional fear to the minority groups because they're not a part of the White majority. So they [racial minorities] have to sit there and hear about this White privilege thing and have to deal with this constant fear, which they shouldn't have to fear as much.

Trevor: In my mind it is kind of like auto crashes and murders, all these different violent crimes do happen, and it's terrible. Certain patterns, you can definitely tell are discriminatory. But one individual's chances of dying at the hands of police are still really low.

Brandon: Statistically equal to someone else's

Trevor: Yeah. So it's like, although, it's something that is important. It's something we need to address and need to keep at the forefront but you ought not to fear for your life or treat police like they're about to kill you.

Trevor: Yeah, it's tough cause each time that happens, the situation deteriorates because it gets out so quickly and people can take it out of context. And you mix those with instances where it was actually happening. And then it's...and then suddenly you're looking...

Brandon: At skewed statistics.

Trevor: Even if you're not a minority, anyone would start looking at the police differently. And then when you start approaching them differently, you're gonna notice different things about them.

Brandon: Exactly.

In the conversation above the two speakers who identify as White males first argued that White privilege should not be discussed so much because these prompted perceptions of difference and fear of police. White privilege and racism are relegated to ideas or perceptions rather than systems with consequences. Their suggestion protected dominant subject positions by denying the historical legitimacy of institutionalized racism and police brutality while constructing them as both individually caring about and later dismissing the fears of “minority groups.” The discourse positions the speakers as concerned and good intentioned while contributing to the subjugation of persons of color.

Brandon removes legitimacy from the concept of White privilege when he used passive phrasing to present it as “what’s being called White privilege” which marked it as an idea that other people use. This constituted White privilege as not a “real thing” or that the gravity of it is overblown to the point where it does not have to be considered.

Brandon continued to discursively position himself in a dominant position by speaking for racial minorities without critical contextualization. He said that it is the exposure to rhetoric about White privilege and police brutality that is causing constant fear, not those systems and occurrences on their own. As well the speakers note that there is a difference in “actual” occurrences of police brutality against racial minorities and “skewed statistics” which seemingly affect selective perception to create more fear.

Brandon went on to use discursive equivocation to emphasize that when it comes to the police, racial minorities “shouldn’t have to fear as much;” but on the other hand, they “ought not to fear for your life or treat police like they’re about to kill you.”

Trevor’s equivocation had the same result because stated that discriminatory patterns

exist, but reasoned that discrimination should not affect individual experiences. Each of these discursive moves operate in preservation of Whiteness, even when presented through the lens of kindness and care. They remove the implications and privileges of systemic White privilege (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995) and sustain dominant ideologies that doubt and qualify the accounts of people of color.

Even though Brandon does identify himself as racially mixed, and one might expect him to take on more of a voice for marginalized racial groups, in an earlier reflection Trevor also explained that Brandon rarely even thinks about race because “it does not play a big enough role in his life for him to notice.” If Brandon does not experience a racialized identity in a salient way, implying that he is most often read by others as White, then he experiences privilege because of that. However, Trevor and Brandon did not discuss their own privileges in connection to this intercultural conflict of police brutality. As seen with previous examples, they framed the onus of racism as “unintentional” and infrequent because statistics were “skewed.” This removes attention to institutional implications, which replicates the practice of ignoring broader structures or systemic forms of oppression, in favor of selective perception or misunderstandings to explain intercultural conflicts.

Trevor and Brandon insisted that the chances of being killed by the police are low and equal between all people, but the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2011) has reported that a Black person, on average, is 4.2 times more likely to be killed by a police officer than a White person. The discourse from Trevor and Brandon in this context contributed to broader sociocultural narratives that insist that “talking about racial

difference only makes situations and experiences worse” (Bonilla-Silva, 2014, p. 60-61). Such narratives act to reify Whiteness, current status hierarchies, and the status quo.

I was particularly surprised to hear this exchange when I listened to the recording because in class Trevor was one of my most attentive students, who frequently demonstrated an ability to articulate and connect key concepts to his own experiences and observations. Yet, this strain of his conversation with Brandon received no mention in his written reflection. Applying a critical pedagogy perspective here, the relationship and context of communication matters. It is challenging to interrupt a friend or family member to offer a critical response or even a reflexive one. Brandon does start this discussion in the conversation but clearly there is a reproduction of Whiteness. In the future, I could spend more time soliciting students’ oral responses to their conversations and talking about strategies for incorporating critical dialogic orientations in discussions with friends and family members.

Cis-gendering and Individualizing Celebrities

At another point in their conversation Trevor and Brendan also used contradicting arguments to privilege cis gender identity. Trevor talked about how popular media influenced which celebrities are celebrated more than others. During this discussion his conversation partner made an assessment about the prominence of Caitlyn Jenner, a former Olympic athlete who had recently transitioned from male to female. His argument was that just because Caitlyn is transgender, doesn’t mean that she should be praised as a good person or a “hero” throughout popular media.

Trevor: Like no doubt that’s hard. That takes courage but that doesn’t

Brandon: Doesn’t dictate you a good person.

Trevor: make you a good person. Yeah.

Brandon: Yeah. And like that's the thing that drives me nuts, how they play that. And I find it kind of funny because Kyle on South Park, actually pulled that in. But the way he said it was something that I thought for ages. It was the fact that I didn't like Bruce Jenner as a person, so why should I like Caitlyn Jenner? Just because he's now a she in a sense. I find that ridiculous. People, like I guess it's the fact that people will...

Trevor: It's like...

Brandon:...misconstrue what being a good person is.

Trevor: So like getting...something else from pop culture that bothered you would be like the ESPY [Excellence in Sports Yearly] for Courage Award.

Brandon: Yeah. Cause that's just retarded to me I guess. That's not the right wording but still, you know, it drives me nuts at how idiotic they can act because this person was a crappy person beforehand. They were only about vanity and they're into self-perseverance, I guess that's the right word. And they still just act like he's a great person because he dealt with hardship. I've known multiple people who've gone through that transgender change, who have been a much better people and yet, their personality didn't change. What they called themselves or what they asked people to call them changed and that's dangerous, kind of scary work, or not work but you know...

Trevor: Process.

Brandon: Process. But still, that doesn't make you a good person. That's something I've always drove me nuts.

Trevor: Yeah. That does bother me a little bit too.

Brandon argued that even though Caitlyn Jenner was being praised because of her recent transition into the transgender community, based on her individual characteristics she should not be praised with the heightened level of media attention that she was receiving. He gave himself the agency and authority because of his ties with the transgender community to make this pronouncement about Jenner, as someone he didn't like, not deserving to be given an award for her gender transition. Brandon discursively positioned himself as someone with knowledge of the transgender community because he was described as having "personally known multiple people who have gone through changing their gender, but were still better people" than Jenner. Brandon enacted the agency to say who in the transgender community is deserving of praise and who is not.

However, later on in the conversation Brandon elaborated that Jenner was a reflection of what he considered problematic about the dissemination of information and popular culture in the United States. He used Lance Armstrong, the former world champion cyclist, to make the case that Armstrong was a celebrity who should be recognized for his good deeds and having overcome cancer. Brandon claimed that what Armstrong represents in the “big picture” is primary and audiences should appreciate his work for cancer awareness, not be concerned with his personal failings (getting caught doping and being banned from cycling).

Brandon: Yeah. I want them to stop talking about people as what would you call it, I guess icons, for you to use later on. Kind of like how people will take Lance Armstrong, or I think that’s his name, the biker, and use him as a huge reference towards cancer or testicular cancer and those things, awareness. Those are the things we should focus on, not the fact that he’s done some stupid things throughout his life. Cause who the hell hasn’t done stupid things...

With this comparison, Brandon positioned Lance Armstrong as a valuable individual and spokesperson for cancer awareness despite his cheating within his sport. Alternatively, he positioned attention to Caitlyn Jenner as unnecessary, due to her perceived personal failings. In the second written reflection Trevor noted that Brandon identifies as bisexual and biracial, and that race “did not play a big enough role in his life for him to notice.” His critique of Caitlyn is enabled by heteronormativity because his discourse positions Armstrong as deserving of praise for his athletic and personal accomplishments while Jenner’s gender transition is not appropriate for public praise. Heteronormativity is often intertwined with Whiteness and class privilege (Johnson, 2005) and despite Brandon’s identification with a queer sexual orientation, this example shows the how those ideologies can be replicated in social practice by individuals who identify with marginalized cultural identities. The comparison between Jenner and Armstrong

discursively evidences ambivalence in first praising transgendered persons and then critiquing Jenner. Equivocation is evidenced by Brandon's reasoning Armstrong, the cis-gendered man, was praised as a spokesperson for cancer survivors and an individual who has "done stupid things" as everyone has, but the transgender woman, who had been an Olympic athlete, was denied that right. Looking toward implicated sociocultural practices, this discourse works to reinforce individualism, normality, and humanity for White males, the dominant gender identity, but marginalizes others.

Decorum as Nationalist Code for Sports Fans

Jack and his conversation partner Jelena discussed the behaviors of fans for the national soccer teams from the United States and Mexico when they were competing in the United States. Disclaimers arose as the discursive form used to reinforce the subject positions of the speakers within this example. Both Jake, a White male, and Jelena, an Eastern European female who identified as White, were particularly offended by Mexico's fans. As they talked about what bothered them, they centered on how during the games Mexico's fans often chanted "puto," a derogatory Spanish slur for homosexual men, at the opposing team.

Jake: I mean that's disgusting and it's just not something that you know other, you wouldn't see an American fan doing that.

Jake: What offends me about the whole thing, I don't want to sound like I'm attacking Mexicans or anything, but just the fact that I'm proud to live in America and be an American and just that you know, these people live here too. Whether or not they live here legally, they live here, and just the disrespect that they show it just really bothers me, especially in soccer because I too really love soccer and love watching it. And yeah it bothers me to see that. Especially between USA and Mexico when it's played in our country.

Jake's use of a disclaimer, "I don't want to sound like I'm attacking Mexicans" before going ahead to chastise Mexico's fans is using a personal qualifier but then using a discursive form that reproduced Whiteness and positioned his US American identity as more civilized because of a lack of decorum from the fans of Mexico's team. Because the games are played in the United States, the discourse constructed these fans as legal and illegal US American residents who were disparaging the country where they lived, via soccer team surrogate. Jake supported his own subject position as a US American because he did not question whether or not the fans of his team, USA, were legal or illegal residents. While the term "puto" is certainly derogatory, the characterizations that Jake made framed the collective United States as the place with "class" and Mexicans as the ones who are "classless" in comparison. His discourse here contributes to ideologies of US imperialism where the Jake's accounts of the norms of the United States, particular soccer fans in the U.S. become the standard to which all fans' behavior is measured.

Later in the conversation Jake admitted that US American fans are no strangers to bad behavior by telling a story about soccer fans in Seattle who used derogatory chants, which discursively contributed to an equivocation tool because he stated earlier in the conversation that "you wouldn't see an American fan doing that [using offensive language]." Jake did not specify what chants the Seattle fans used, but those fans ended up being valorized in his account because they stopped after an announcement was made over the stadium loud speaker system. This discourse from Jake is an example of how social structures become inextricably connected to an individual's positioning of his/her cultural identities (Yep, 2015) and how experiences vary depending on the salience of the identities involved (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012). Jake explained on the recording that he is

a big fan of the Seattle soccer team, and it is a salient identity that he referenced frequently throughout the semester during class, but when those fans used derogatory language they are described as too “passionate” and that “they don’t need to use that type of language to show it [passion].” Jake’s discourse disparaged Mexican soccer fans without acknowledging that there are sports fans who exhibit offensive behavior in many nations, and particularly in soccer. While Jake claimed that he was not attacking all Mexicans, his discourse created a positive-self versus negative-other binary, with the United States fans being the positive standard and Mexico fans being the negative other. The conversation reproduces the broader social practice overlooking the actions of those who are aligned with an individual’s more salient identities, but condemning similar behavior in those who are “others.”

This type of contrastive national positioning of the United States in opposition to Mexico is also present throughout many US American sociocultural practices outside sports. US news reports, especially those from more politically conservative media organizations, often represent Mexican culture as deficient. The news coverage of Mexico is disproportionately negative (Wanta, Golan & Lee, 2004); research about education often contains the problematic positioning of education as devalued by Mexicans (Valencia, 2002). Jack’s discourse about the soccer fans activates these prominent representations that position the United States on the moral high ground and characterize Mexicans as crude, dangerous, or uncivilized.

Jake and Jelena discuss this conflict about the soccer fans as an issue of nationality. The critical application of context would have shifted the root of the conflict away from deviant fans and considered how sexism and homophobia were implicated

through the “puto” chant and how nationalism contributed to the interpretation of the Mexico fans’ actions. Since the offensive term being used by the Mexico fans was used to diminish the masculinity of the players, this could have been included in the assessment of the fans’ experiences along with nationality. Jake and Jelena commented on how they are big fans of USA soccer, but critical reflexivity would have drawn attention to more of their own identity positions as they related to the conflict.

Enacting Individual Agency to Prevent Racism

The final excerpt below demonstrates the ability of individuals to adapt to contextual constraints to project a particular self-image. Devin talked to her conversation partner Meryl about the way that Black Americans have been treated by police officers. Both of the discussants identified as Black women and Meryl identified herself as being middle aged. They talked about assumptions that are made with appearances. The conversation partner began to invoke respectability politics as she explained her position while also creating some distance from the violent experiences that Black people have had at the hands of the police.

Devin: Okay. Then since you’re talking about police and the law enforcement, just law in general...In one of my classes I had to read an article about the justice system and when pertaining to the justice and law system, physical appearance is like one of the major things that people look at without even...like before they go further there...what’s it called. Further their investigations, cases.

Meryl: So I have an interesting take on that. I do not disagree that people are stereotyped based on appearance. And so yes, some people will make a decision on their perception and based on appearance. But on that same note, I make a choice to carry myself in a certain way, regardless of that’s how I am or that’s not how I am. When I decide to carry myself in a certain way knowing that that’s the perception of what I’m choosing at the time. Basically, I’ve got some ownership on that too. I know you’re talking about from a law enforcement standpoint, that’s just like saying if I was out by myself at night and I was walking then I came up

on somebody who, you know, who may not, to me, may look a certain way or in the environment that I'm in, I don't feel safe. I don't have to be a law enforcement officer to kind of be biased on what I'm seeing and even what I'm feeling, you know, draw some conclusions.

Meryl did not specifically describe what actions she took to temper her appearance, by stating she chose to carry herself “in a certain way” she describes enacting individual agency and making particular choices. This ignores the role of histories of discrimination, racist policies in criminal justice institutions, and allegations of police brutality that are widespread. Because of Meryl's choices for dress, look and demeanor, her discourse constructs her as having more control over whether she is likely to be perceived as a threat or not when compared to other Black people or people of color.

In Devin's earlier reflections, she identified Meryl as having a close connection to her church. It is one of the places where she experienced conflict because while she held a leadership position as a deaconess she also felt that people often talked down to her. While the Black church in the United States has been a fixture in transforming the Black experience and politics (Brown, 1994), often the tactics prioritize respectability, or doing whatever is possible to be seen as safe by the dominant White culture (Nelson & Nelson, 2015). However, respectability politics also typically replicates Whiteness ideologies, placing the responsibility on Black people to avoid racism instead of calling out the racist systems themselves. Meryl's response endorsed police acting based solely on the appearance of those they see when she insisted that everyone has to draw conclusions based on what they see and feel. These views reproduce the social practice of blaming the victim, placing responsibility on Blacks to change their conduct, while ignoring the implications of Whiteness and White privilege. While not all police officers are White,

the broader implication also would address the institutionalized violence in policing, sentencing and incarceration that impact Black communities at higher rates (Bonilla-Silva, 2014, p. 42-51). This discourse activated problematic notions that racialized practices like profiling are legitimate and that Black people can avoid being subjected to them if they present themselves in the appropriate way, or stick to the right environments. While some attention was given to context in Devin's discourse in her references to the justice system and unequal policing, there were no references to intersectionalities or reflexive acknowledgment of subject positions related to class for example.

Overall Reflections

From these recoded student conversations there are some prominent trends that I observed in connection to my critical pedagogy goals and the critical intercultural dialogue tools I encouraged students to use when conversing about intercultural conflicts. Across all of the exchanges there was a strong tendency to position the conflicts as due to individual choices or deficiencies in an individual's character instead of recognizing the economic, political, and social systems contributing to the conflict, histories of discrimination that became the contextual frame, or exclusionary policies and practices of numerous institutions. Ideally, I thought that because of the prompts that I gave and the correlation to content from class that addressed the impact of dominant institutions and ideologies, that there would be more incorporation of those factors when they explained what the "broader structural functions at work" were. As a result of weak connections between specific examples of intercultural conflict and the role of macro institutions,

many of the exchanges replicated dominant ideologies of Whiteness, heteronormativity, Christianity, and class.

Overall, the frequency of dominant ideologies that were reinforced demonstrates the strength of these ideologies throughout US American social practice. Additionally, that the dominant ideologies were reproduced in discourse offered by individuals who have marginalized racial, gender, and sexual identities as well as those who identified as White, male and middle class, is even more evidence of the prevalence of dominant ideologies. As well the prominence of color-blind, post-racial discourse showed the persistence of ideologies of individual meritocracy.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

Pedagogical Context for Discourse Produced

Because my study was situated within the context of the Intercultural Communication course that I was teaching, all of the texts that the students produced and analyzed for this dissertation were a part of my broader critical pedagogical goals for the course. While these were not the direct focus of the study, they were an important part of the context for the course. I used my critical pedagogical commitments to guide design of the content of the intercultural communication course, with particular attention to critical intercultural dialogue, to teach the students critical methods for considering intercultural conflicts and ways to incorporate those critical perspectives into their conversations outside of class. I assumed that the students (especially the ones who were doing well in the class) would be able to learn the key concepts and use them in their conversations with relative ease. My assumptions, instructional discourse, and choices in administering the tasks were influencing elements that are part of the context for the students' discourse. The general class structure and ways that the key concepts were incorporated frame some of the trends that emerged from the students' reflections and practice of critical intercultural dialogue. I discuss these below.

My efforts to teach and encourage students to critically engage and practice critical intercultural dialogue had varying levels of effectiveness. Part of the theoretical focus of both critical pedagogy and critical intercultural dialogue is to teach about systems of power as inextricably connected to everyday experiences and also as fluid and dynamic, depending upon the context. I facilitated strategies with the students for

intercultural interactions about topics related to cultural identities and systems of power that ranged from listening (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999) to media critiques, and strategizing actions in response to intercultural conflicts that they encountered in their own communities. Because this study took place within the context of my Intercultural Communication class there were many opportunities to have discussions in class about current cultural issues and the need for a critical perspective. In the outside-of-class conversations the students sometimes referenced the topics that had been presented first in class. For example, homelessness was part of our first class activity and one of the options for discussion during the first conversation, and most of the students chose to discuss that topic. During one of our classes close to Halloween I facilitated a discussion about the cultural appropriation of Native American imagery for costumes. Luis and Jane each brought up how they had discussed Native American Halloween costumes in class and integrated their own perspectives further into their exchange with their conversation partners. Donald Trump also came up as a topic of discussion throughout the semester and some of the students used his rhetoric as the focal point for their reflections and conversations.

There were several tensions that emerged in my simultaneous teaching and conducting research. It was challenging to balance attention to the key concepts of context, intersectionality and critical reflexivity in critical intercultural dialogue with other concepts and communication processes that make up intercultural communication. I had a set of broader objectives for students and broader readings that were also a part of the course. Another tension was the amount of emphasis to place on study goals of analyzing reflection and conversation discourse and how much emphasis to place on

other assignments and activities. The need for obtaining data for my study was sometimes a driving force for my teaching. I was continually trying to re-emphasize my key concepts while also teaching a broader range of information that was covered through additional concepts, assignments, and exercises. I had to balance enough emphasis on my approach and key concepts to get sufficient responses for my research. When we were covering globalization in the textbook, for example, I highlighted how globalization was one structural factor that could be considered when applying the key concept “context” to understanding intercultural conflicts.

Overall, my pedagogical commitments drove my choices of what and how to teach the course. As a reminder, the specific commitments that I had were:

1. Cultural identities are constructed in communication.
2. Power is fluid and complex.
3. Cultures are contested; cultural groups are positioned in relations that reproduce in/equity and in/exclusion.
4. Concrete, mundane communication practices constitute as well as reproduce larger social structural systems.
5. Critical reflexivity is an essential condition for critical communication pedagogy.

As I taught these commitments influenced content, objectives, and interactions throughout the semester. Cultural identities were the focal point for the assigned readings, media texts used in class, and student activities and discussions. For example, the students were required to read about the way French-Muslim women negotiated their identities in connection to the hijab (Croucher, 2008), watch satirical interpretations of Asian stereotypes from YouTube (Wong Fu Productions, 2011), and present a performance of their own cultural identities to the class; each of these exemplified

different ways that identities are created through communication and were also related to the complexity/fluidity of power and how cultures are contested and produces inequity and exclusion. The article on French-Muslim women showed the fluidity of power between the intersections of religion, gender, and ethnicity, along with the ways different individual practices reproduce broader social systems. When the students gave presentations on their own cultural identities and experiences my objective was to get them to engage reflexivity and connect their own cultural positions with the systems that they were also connected to. My actions and presence in the classroom was also connected to my pedagogical commitments. I used communication to define culture as I identified and frequently discussed my own cultural identities, highlighted how my cultural identities were connected to marginalized and privileged positions, while I was still the person with the power to assign grades for the class. I presented the importance of recognizing how cultural identities are constructed and positioned in everyday communication and legal, political, religious and media organizations, the complexities of systems of power, connections between micro communication practices and macro social systems, and the need for critical reflexivity. Even though I kept these commitments at the forefront of my teaching, after completing the class and analyzing all of the conversations and reflections I realize that it would be useful to build an entire class around intercultural conflict and critical intercultural dialogue. I intend to develop and offer such a course as soon as I have the opportunity.

The students' applications of the three concepts that were essential and interrelated components of critical intercultural dialogue were uneven. Context was the concept that students were asked to incorporate the most frequently since it was

integrated into all three sets of conversations and reflections. However, the definition of context that the students operationalized varied widely from one student to another and changed from the first reflection to the third one. For example, in the first reflections some of the students talked about context as structures and addressed social structures like racism or classism as the root cause of homelessness or school disparities. Others described the immediate situation and talked about who was present or where people were. Still others neglected context almost completely and claimed that individual attitudes were the cause and solution to conflict. By the final conversation in which students were asked to integrate all three concepts, context, in particular, was only addressed at a general level by most students. My observation is that more practice with a concept, and adding attention to an additional concept while still incorporating attention to the previous concept, did not necessarily mean that the discourse about context became more detailed or nuanced. In fact, it was more the opposite. For example, in his last reflection Trevor said that he contextualized the treatment of Catholics by offering an unclear reference to “multiple layers of this phenomenon.” Aryn reverted to talking about context as the immediate situation saying that context showed “situations were different, so people reacted differently” in response to reactions people had to Donald Trump. Neither reference incorporates description of macro structures or social systems which had been featured in definitions and instructional examples.

These inconsistencies in applications of context can perhaps be attributed to the instructional process. During the group activity to introduce context, I could have been more specific about how context could be connected to institutional influence. Also I emphasized my encouragement of students to voice their own individual experiences and

views, which placed the emphasis on the individual and micro-level contexts. There was definitely a tension between evoking individual experiences and points of reference in order to make content relatable, or tying in macro systems of influence and control. Also, I believe that these inconsistencies that are seen in the student's reflections show that individualism and a face-to-face, situational perspective is the default one, especially when discussion conflicts in the U.S. Fassett and Warren (2006) describe this tension between the individual and the institutional. They note that "to locate and create emotional connections and complex portraits of a self in culture" is not always successful but the scholarly validity is in the analysis of that interplay (Fassett & Warren, 2006, p. 48). But they do not provide strategies for how to overcome the persistence of the individual perspective.

In my study, even when different systemic influences could be identified as contributing factors in an intercultural conflict, discourses that prioritized individual interpretations and experiences were still pervasive and often with minimal connection back to the institutions that construct oppression and inequity. This is evidence of the pervasiveness and strength of individualism in the U.S. Laws have been designed to protect individual freedoms, ideologies of individual meritocracy reward individuals for individual performance on the job or in school, and in university settings students are rewarded for speaking as an individual, appropriately advocating for their personal point of view and evaluated on individual performance. To engage a critical pedagogical orientation, I could have spent more time uncovering the pervasiveness of individualism as in intercultural conflict, and designed more activities to have students compare and contrast analyzing conflicts from an individualistic orientation, using micro or situational

contextual analysis, meso group level of analysis, or a macro structural level examining social systems producing racism, sexism, homophobia, anti-immigrant standpoints, and so on.

I wanted the students to clearly articulate the link between context and the intercultural conflicts that they addressed and move clearly into a more critical space. In reflecting upon the discourse related to context, particularly structures, my lesson planning could have better attended to this slippage in the students' use of the different key concepts throughout the semester. I did not spend much time re-emphasizing the previous concepts when introducing the new ones. Better reinforcement might have helped to reorient the usage of context.

For the second key concept "intersectionality" I asked the students to consider a personal conflict and how it impacted their different identity positions. The activity for this unit was the "identity box" exercise where students put avowed identities inside of a box they created and ascribed identities on the outside. I allowed a lot of leeway for the definitions of cultural identities for this activity to show the range of ways that individuals identify and are identified by others. However, this meant that representations of broader cultural identities like race or sexual orientation were included with more individualized locations like 'daughter' or 'snowboarder.' I found that in the associated reflections there were some students who gave long lists of generalized identities that intersected in their lives. Rose said that she was a "student, daughter, female, sister, niece, aunt, friend, martial artist, girlfriend, role model [in her] early-twenties and lower middle class" and that being a student and daughter was the source of intersectional conflict for her. Similarly, Helen, one of the conversation partners said that being a

traveler interfered with her family and professional life, and that was what caused conflict for her. I could have given more emphasis to building understanding of how the intersectional cultural identities sometimes acted to show within-group diversity of positioning, and other times became a mechanism for reinforcing the uniqueness of individuals and diluting the continuing consequences of systematic oppression based on one identity category such as race.

Another notable trend in the discourse was that students who identified as White were the ones who offered more individual traits and interests to define their identities which is consistent with past research on Whiteness (Simpson, 2008; Wander, Martin & Nakayama, 1999; Wise, 2008). More restriction on the definition of cultural identities may have helped the students to orient around a more critical approach to cultural identifications and representations. Critical intersectionality was also difficult to draw out of the responses because most of the students only addressed one identity at a time in relation to conflict. Luis discussed experiencing conflict as the only person of color (Native/Hispanic) in some situations but did not evoke his masculinity, for example. I also hoped that the students would connect their intersecting identities to systems of power, but that was rare.

As illustrated in the overly general discussions in the reflections as well as the outside conversations, critical reflexivity was the concept that was evidenced least often and again, there was a lack of consistency in usage. During class I had to push the students to reflect upon and critique their own positions, their own levels of privilege, and how difference impacted the relations between cultural groups. When the students' discourse did include references to reflexivity, the examples pointed to applying a general

critical sensibility to structures such as mentioning racism or classism, rather than acknowledging their own levels of privilege/marginalization, ideological preferences, or subject positions relevant to the intercultural conflict. Not only is this a challenging connection to make, it was also the last of the key concepts that the students were introduced to, so they had the least amount of time to engage and practice it. With the activity and class instruction I could have been better at stressing how individuals can also be complicit in their contributions to the conflicts they encounter. The students' discourse reinforced an ideology of individualism which also counters the need to recognize one's own biases. There were very few who mentioned their own levels of privilege or gave accounts of how they were positioned.

Overall, the reflection papers were 3-4 pages and each was worth 30 points out of a total of 500 points for the course. If each short reflection paper was worth only 6% of the total grade, this factor may not have encouraged students to reflect deeply. Also, the general wording of the prompts left the application of the concepts up to the students, and this may have helped produce an overly general frame for the discourse of the reflections and conversations. After hearing and reading all of the students' responses to the prompts, there are a couple of places where I think that the questions asked could be made more specific to direct the students to more specifically apply the key concepts. For example, many of the conversations that were supposed to address intersectionality only dealt with one identity in conflict. The prompt for that discussion asked that the students and their conversation partners discuss an experience "where one or more of their identities caused conflict." When I wrote the prompt I assumed that students would talk about identity difference and the follow up question, "What are some other cultural

identities that were at work?” would lead the conversation into discussion of intersecting identities. However, since the wording of the prompt allowed for one identity to be the focus of the conflict, the students typically did not add reflections about other cultural identities and therefore missed the opportunity to discuss intersectionality in any detail.

Since the students were having conversations with people who were not a part of the class I tried to make the discussion prompts general enough for the conversation partners to be able to engage even though they had not been learning about the topics in the same way as my students had been. From the responses, it seems like some of the terms and wording came across as confusing or as jargon to the conversation partners. Monica said “My partner was confused by the discussion question” and Jane also reported that her conversation partner did not know how to respond to the question because she did not know what cultural identities were. While I assumed that “cultural identities” would be general knowledge, this bit of confusion also worked in a productive way in that it allowed the students to share what the term meant based on class discussions and readings.

Another part of the pedagogical context that impacted students’ discourse is the instructions for the conversations outside of class. The instructions for the discussions encouraged the students to allow their exchange to flow as a normal conversation would, and I assumed that “natural” conversations would be aided by the students talking with individuals with whom they already had a relationship. While the majority of the students chose partners who were family members or friends, listening to their exchanges showed that they were not as dialogic or as conversational as I anticipated. Frequently, there was more of an “interview” feel during the discussions where the students asked questions

and the partner responded, but they did not engage the statements any further. This kind of interaction was not the kind of intercultural dialogue that they practiced in class, and perhaps made it easier to continually replicate dominant ideologies since the interview format encourages one-way sharing of personal opinions. At times the discussions became more oriented to questions and answers or one partner holding the floor for a long period instead of a mutual exchange. For example, Monica did not contribute any of her own opinions to her conversation with Dawn, choosing instead to conduct the exchange like an interview where she asked a question, got an answer from her conversation partner, asked for an example or point of clarification, and then moved on to the next part of the question. Dawn identified herself as a Latina woman and talked about how she was offended by stereotypical representations of Black and Latino people in movies. Monica's lack of input eliminated the dialogic aspect and any opportunity for Monica to share her perspectives as a biracial woman with her partner. The discourse created a circumstance where Dawn was able to talk about the marginalized media representations of people of color with the authority of her Latina identity and her own experience, spending "a lot of time with diverse individuals." Similarly, the discussion that Randy and Tracee had consisted of questions from the prompt being asked of the conversation partner and responses of "yeah" and "okay." At the end, without interruption, Randy shared his views about the video that he felt misrepresented Christianity. When Randy was done talking about what concerned him, he said "I think that's just about it though. So thank you, conversation partner" and the conversation ended. Given Randy's discourse, there was no opportunity to respond to or critique his position, and since he was speaking from his dominant subject positions as a White

Christian male, the exchange is also an instance where Randy was able to present his dominant opinions in an uncontested manner. In the future, I will encourage students to model conversational dialogue, monitor talk time, and adjust level of engagement to encourage probes and more in-depth analysis.

Throughout all of the conversations there was also a lack of disagreement. The one-sided articulation within the bounds the conversation activates a singular type of knowledge about the conflict and negates any opposing perspectives. Because the students were asked to choose a partner with whom they were comfortable, there also seemed to be a lot of shared values and like-mindedness between the partners. While oftentimes the students and their conversation partners had cultural identities that differed from one another (race, gender, sexual orientation etc.) their approaches and perspectives to the different conflicts were presented as being very similar. Those similarities seemed to contribute to the frequent constitution and replication of ideologies like individualism, neoliberal pluralism, and Whiteness, despite who was speaking or the relationship between the speakers because there was rarely any push back on either person's assessment of a conflict or response. Differently worded prompts could stress the need for clarification, elaboration of ideas, more specific applications, to and asking the students to identify points of disagreement.

Since the reflection paper discourse offered by the students was being read by me, as the instructor, for covering points in the prompt and the students knew I would be listening to their recorded conversations, there could have been a dramatic response bias with students writing or saying what might earn them a higher or passing grade. Given the wide range of topics, views, and limited attempts to offer quoted definitions from

course lectures or readings, it did not seem like they were making their responses up just to appease me, earn an “A,” or to align with the perspectives I presented during class. Thus, there did not appear to be a response bias in the discourses; there was variation and incongruity in evidence offered. Additionally, those who did the conversation received credit as part of their class participation grade. The students got credit for addressing each section of the prompt in their written reflections and avoiding grammatical errors, but they were not evaluated on whether or not their opinions and experiences aligned with examples from class. I could add a prompt for them to cite course material in their reflection papers to encourage them to make links between course material and their reflections.

Implications of CDA across Conversation and Reflection Discourses

The topics covered in the reflection papers about the outside conversations included: disparities in local high schools, assumptions about being from a small town, homelessness, conflict being Catholic and lesbian, and a clash between Nicki Minaj and Taylor Swift. I identified discursive forms such as: positive-self/negative-other, ambivalence, and specific versus generalized arguments. The discourses acted to reify status hierarchies, existing power relations, and enacting individual levels of agency. From the reflection paper discourses, I uncovered ideologies of neoliberalism, liberal pluralism, nationalism, sexism, Whiteness, religious hierarchies, and individualism.

The topics I identified in the transcriptions of the outside of class conversations included: police violence against Black people, derogatory comments from Donald Trump, the impoliteness of Mexican soccer fans, and the problematic appropriation of

Native American Halloween costumes. Discursive forms I pinpointed were: ambivalence, positive-self/negative-other, and disclaimers. Reinforcing the status quo, existing status hierarchies, prevalent power relations, and enacted levels of agency by some of the discussants, were all evidenced. Ideologies that were implicated in the discourse were: Whiteness, U.S. nationalism, dominant Christianity, individualism, patriarchy, neoliberalism, liberal pluralism, heteronormativity, and cis-gender privilege.

After identifying topics of discussion as well as discursive forms such as Us-Them comparisons or equivocation, I wanted to analyze how the discourses constructed cultural difference and relations between groups. I re-examined discursively produced subjectivities in relation to subject positioning. Related to Fairclough's analytical steps (1989), this can be thought of as an intermediate step to analyze a discursive form with implications for relations, which informs sociocultural practices related to relations of power and levels of agency.

The ways that the students and their conversation partners positioned themselves could be seen through analyzing who was speaking to whom, and about what. Generally, the students and conversation partners were quick to distinguish themselves as individuals and "good people". Some of the trends that I identified were related to how the students identified themselves in concert with their partner who had similar or different identities. There were several instances where partners identified as the same gender but had different racial identifications. When one partner identified as White and the other as a racial "minority," I observed that more often than not, the person of color used discursive forms that positioned him/her as more of an individual than racialized. Trevor, a White male, wrote about how his conversation partner Brandon, who identified

as a biracial White/Hispanic male, said that his race did not play a big enough role in his life for it to matter; this statement resonated with how Trevor thought about his racial identity. Trevor noted that “Being White or Hispanic in [their city] does not make you stand out at all...and as far as the two of us know, there is no racial tension between the two.” Their racial identifications were framed as unimportant, a non-issue. This is consistent with ideologies of a color-blindness and living in a “post-racial” era.

The discursive trend for racial identifications, such as White, to occur alongside a long list of identifications such as middle class, heterosexual, male, and/or an individual, became a way to individualize the talk about identities. This is a long recognized form of an additive model of those with race, class, sex, ethnicity, sexuality and other forms of privilege speaking as individuals (Collier, 2014; Johnson, 2001; Wise, 2008), or here as young and male only. Those discursive moves constitute White privilege seen in the inclination to ignore collective memories of people of color or focus on racist or sexist events as the work of evil individuals instead of productions of systems with long histories. (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995).

Sometimes students who identified with “minority positioned” identities, constructed their own national or racial identities as not a salient part of their subjectivities. Maria used disclaimers to downplay the salience of her Hispanic identity when she was talking to Jane, who identified as a White woman. Maria insisted that she was not “super, extremely, Mexican” when talking to Jane about stereotypical Mexican costumes for holiday parties. When Jane pointed out that these costumes were related to Maria’s culture, Maria explained that it could be offensive to some Mexicans, but still not to her individually. Individualism enabled Maria to downplay her “Mexicanness” and

enabled her to exert agency to speak as an individual. This was then accepted by her conversation partner and constituted the social practice of people of color who also use individualism to create distance from the negative implications of their marginalized identities.

Sometimes the students' discourse about intercultural conflicts included subjectivities and discourses that acted to resist dominant subject positions. For instance, when Luis and, his mother, June talked about her experience at the kiva they highlighted their shared perspective of their culture and the incident where June's group was being watched by the tourists at the historic site. Luis said "We're [viewed as] a race that's old and was here... But yet they don't realize that we are here...[we're] just looked at as an old ancient culture." These subjectivities were offered in contrast to and as a critique of essentialized subject positions by others. The tourists were positioned in Luis and June's discourse with the agency to view and consume the artists as exotic commodities, which constitutes acknowledgement of a power hierarchy that privileges the non-Native tourists and subjugates the Natives.

Luis and June also identified having shared marginalized identities of being Native American and having a lower socioeconomic status, but those connections implicated different subjectivities being salient at different times. Luis explained that he was biracial (Native/Hispanic) but identified as Native because that was the side of the family that he was more familiar with. Luis and June did not discuss how their experiences might differ because of gender or generational differences, but their points of reference for conflicts to discuss revolved around the shared race and class identities that they had. For example, their discourse referenced not fitting in because they were Native

evidenced by Luis describing how his mother was positioned by others and had to defend her identities. “She was the only Native American in her class and had to defend Native people.” However, in the first reflection, June was also described as being critical of Native women who she encountered in a homeless shelter because she assumed they would not need help in that way if connected to their Native communities, implying individual fault. As well Luis, noted “Both my parents came from lower class areas...I want to show that I have much more to offer than what people may see,” to discuss the broader context of their Native American and low-income identities.

Luis and June’s identities were positioned as marginalized and subjected to judgment from outsiders. While their resistant discourse illustrates a level of individual agency, their discourse also evoked other dominant ideologies such as individual meritocracy. Varying degrees of distance and connection were illustrated in their narratives and reflections and were dependent upon the context.

Along with the examples cited above about the fluid and contextually situated nature of subjectivities, there were several instances of common identifications with groups positioned as marginalized or with “minority” status. But these were complicated by resistant discourse that evidenced intersectionalities. Kyan and Kylee discussed conflicts that related to their marginalized Hispanic and Mexican identities and their shared geographic identity because they were from the same small town. However, their cases converged and diverged around social class positions when Kylee explained how coworkers called out her experiences as different because she lived in the wealthier part of town. In this case their intersectional class difference contested the generalized subject positions imposed by others.

Additional discursive trends emerged that reinforced dominant ideologies when conversation partners shared dominant identifications. Positive self and negative other forms were common for those who aligned with dominant cultural identities. Thomas and Helen identified as White and middle class and the conflicts they discussed maintain a positive portrayal of those identities and cast others negatively in comparison. For example, they explained how it was assumed that the two of them would attend college because they were economically well positioned to do that, but evidencing deficit thinking (Valencia, 2010) their discourse contained critique of the families of low-income friends who did not encourage nor expect them to go to college. The discussion did address financial limitations, but it also constituted a dominant view of other low-income friends as victims and their families as deficient.

Rose and Zia, both identified as White middle-class women. Their discourse neglected overt discussion about how, as women, they were positioned in broader discourses as marginalized, but highlighted their Whiteness and class privilege. These gave them the agency to position positive self against negative other, and to valorize individualism. They described religious conflicts and increases in sex and violence on television as conflicts, but as distant from their own experiences. Zia talked about “religious groups killing each other for what I consider not consequential reasons” as a conflict and constructed a positive-self and negative-other form and then demonstrated her agency to construct her own religious institution. She remarked that she exercised her own version of religion by “put[ting] together the pieces that I thought should make a decent human being.” Later she declared “I am [my own] church.” Similarly, Rose was concerned with sex and violence on television, but said she could also turn it off

whenever she wanted to. These examples further demonstrate the complexity of cultural identities and positioning, including intersectionality and differing levels of agency depending the macro structural context and ideologies, as well as micro context, the particular circumstance (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012).

There were several examples where White identified speakers critiqued Others, and positioned them as different. Jack explained that his majority White high-income high school was disadvantaged because it received less government funding and that Mexican soccer fans were more poorly behaved than American fans. In separate accounts Trevor and Randy described how Christians and Catholics were being attacked and misrepresented. These examples are discursively activated by these individuals' dominant subject positions of middle-class, Christian, and US American, along with their White identifications. Each interaction is an example of how power relations are reified in broader social practice through the demonstrated agency to administer criticism on other cultural identifications, and bypassing critiques of their own identities. As well, these Othering discourses come from multiple positions of privilege, which combine to form clear standards of judgment and increase the ease with which Others can be subjugated.

Another common discursive form used by speakers aligning with a wide variety of subjectivities and describing a wide variety of others' subject positions, was generalizing widely from specific instances (van Dijk, 1989). An example is when Jack talked about all Mexican soccer fans in comparison to fans of the American team based on a single experience. In order to dilute his critique, he used a disclaimer (van Dijk, 1989) to position himself more positively as a reasonable individual "I don't want to sound like I'm attacking Mexicans," but also his comments reify the power dynamic that

positions Americans as more “civilized” than Mexicans. Jake’s conversation partner Jelena also talked about her individual experiences as a teacher. Her discourse replicates a pervasive assumption that low-income and Mexican American students are not as invested in education, which also reinforces deficit positioning. Jack and Jelena’s discourse creates a hierarchy that places US Americans as better behaved than Mexicans, and White European American students with privileged economic positions value education more than low-income Mexican American students. The discursive reassertion of this dynamic continues the racist and classist subjugation of Mexican Americans.

What was missing in the students’ reflections and conversations, was overt description and application of the value of attending to intersectionality and reflexivity. Generally, there was not a lot of multiple subject positions brought up when the students addressed their conflicts; this is particularly evidenced by the minimal presence of discussions about gender and sexuality Brandon’s ambivalent discourse about Caitlin Jenner and Lance Armstrong, where he admonished Jenner for her perceived personal shortcomings and suggested that Armstrong’s missteps be dismissed, did not discuss sexuality or gender and acts to promote an ideology of cisgender privilege. Taylor argued that she was not connected to the media’s sexualization of Latina women because she “wears sweaters every day” and is not sexualized by others. Without mentioning sexism and oppression of Latina/os, her discourse promotes the sexist ideology that women can control unwanted sexual attention by making sure that they dress “conservatively.”

A common discursive trend across both the reflections and conversations, and for students with varying identifications was to speak for all members of their own cultural groups or to speak for all members of other cultural groups. These discourses not only

erase intersectionalities but also evidence a lack of reflexive acknowledgment of the speakers' own positions. Devin and Meryl both identified as Black women and brought up conflicts that were related to Black women and the general Black community, such as police brutality and the prison industrial complex. Meryl's discourse positioned her with sufficient class privilege and agency to argue that Black individuals could choose to present themselves presumably as professionals and choose to avoid certain places to steer clear of police attention. Similarly, when Trevor and Brandon were discussing police brutality and the Black community they stated that the rhetoric about White privilege and police violence were making people of color more fearful than necessary, and they discursively generalized how people of color do and should feel. Their assertion constitutes a power relationship that promotes the notion that these White men are positioned to proclaim what is in the best interests of people of color. When James talked about the causes of homelessness he also positioned himself to know the motivations of other identity groups. He asserts his own agency to speak for others when he argued that many are "homeless by choice," because of his specific family history where his mother "chose" homelessness.

Also some of the participants whose discourse located them with marginalized identities, offered examples that subjugated others and reified systems of dominance. James used discursive ambivalence (Billig, 1999) to contrast the Black Lives Matter movement to the Civil Rights movement. He constructed the current Black Lives Matter movement as extreme and selfish, while valorizing the earlier movement. James identified as biracial and his discourse constructs a status hierarchy for resistance movements for communities of color. Meryl also discursively creates a negative "other"

for other members of the Black community who do not “carry themselves well.” Meryl elaborates the hierarchy when she establishes that some Black people are smarter than others because they do not go into particular areas or present themselves in ways to draw understandable attention from police. The discourses create subjectivities, subject positions, and hierarchical relationships across groups; different ideologies were activated by these multiple discourses. The most prominent ideology across all of the different identities and positions was individualism. Students and conversation partners who aligned with dominant cultural positions spoke frequently as individuals and exercised individual agency to talk both about others, as well as to contest how intercultural conflicts impacted them individually. Participants who identified with marginalized groups frequently identified and spoke from individual positions by articulating beliefs about themselves and others.

The strength of this individualism was apparent at each stage for application of the key concepts. Generally, the students could identify some of the contextual factors that were at work within the intercultural conflicts that they were examining, but when it came to discussing responses and solutions the vast majorities were oriented around individual responses alone. Also, when it came to critical reflexivity their explanations were tied to individual feelings and understandings instead of the connection between the individual and the macro structures in place. The implication for the strength of this ideology of individualism is that it makes invisible the work of broader systems of dominance. The framing of views as based on individual entitlement to speak shows the dominance of a positive-self and negative-other perspective. With this taken-for-granted ability to speak for others and judge their actions according to one’s own standards, the

role of the individual speaker is so valorized that no one thinks that s/he needs to address him/herself, or one's own levels of privilege, and the conflicts persist.

Whiteness (Wise, 2008) was another persistent ideology that emerged. The activation of Whiteness could be seen as some students were openly dismissive of critiques of Whiteness and others reinterpreted situations so that the impact of Whiteness was minimized. Even if they identified racism or racist practices, several students used disclaimers to emphasize that the problem is “not all White people.” These moves that constituted Whiteness came from students of color as often as they came from those who identified as White, which implicates the dominance of individualism as a frame for Whiteness. Although many of the examples were oriented around race and class, some of the students focused more on how everyone in the U.S. has the chance to succeed, and therefore constituted the ideologies of liberal pluralism (Crowder, 2007) and neoliberalism where individual freedom is the centralized value socially and politically (Harvey, 2007). When she explained homelessness Karen said that “one should be able to pull oneself out of a bad situation.” Rose noted that people just have to “emphasize equality based on individuals' ability” to combat homelessness. This discourse diminishes attention to the impact of systemic forces like racism or classism and makes the individual wholly accountable for their sociocultural positions. Arguing that individuals have the capacity and responsibility to fix their own circumstances demonstrates the activating of overlapping discursive resources related to individual meritocracy, neoliberalism and liberal pluralism.

The prominence of the dominant sociocultural practices and ideologies show how difficult it can be to apply critical pedagogy to invite students to incorporate critical

engagement and practice throughout a semester and in multiple conversations over time. A major contribution of this study is the showcasing of multiple examples of discourse that demonstrate the messiness from overlapping, sometimes convergent sometimes divergent, identifications and positions applied to others. Ideologies were reinforced as well as resisted in the same conversation and salient cultural group alliances embraced and contested. Those with Identities that were marginalized by dominant structures and discourses did not always take up critical or resistant positions, and individualism was used in service to promote intersectionality as well as essentialize all members of cultural groups. If this messiness occurs across multiple levels of identification, then it also demonstrates the challenges that critical pedagogical approaches face even with commitments to the disruption of those dominant ideologies.

Reflections on Theoretical and Methodological Foundations

I integrated a critical and interpretive theoretical perspective to this study. This was useful because I was examining how broad social systems impact the ways that individuals create discourse about subjectivities, subject positions, and relationships between groups. It was just as necessary for me to attend to who was doing the speaking, as it was for me to consider what was being said. This was important in understanding and analyzing how discussions of intercultural conflict functioned from varying positionalities. It was also important for me to emphasize critical orientations due to my pedagogical goals and overall goals for the study. For instance, as students explained

their conflicts I was primarily concerned with addressing the institutional forces emerging from their discourse over the individual experiences on their own.

This integration allowed me to utilize a framework where I could attend to the positioning of the speaker in both the reflections and the recorded conversation, along with what the discourse produced in the way of ideologies, relations between groups and levels of agency. I was able to highlight the ways that individuals used numerous discursive forms to implicate, and occasionally contest, various power structures and ideologies.

Critical Discourse Analysis as a methodology gave me the tools to examine what the students, singularly in their reflections and in connection with their conversation partners, were producing with their discourse as they engaged and practiced the key concepts that I incorporated into the intercultural communication course. For the study I encouraged the students to link the micro to the macro, to move back and forth between their individual perspectives and experiences with intercultural conflict to the broader structures and ideologies that also create those conflicts. CDA provided the tools for me to be able to examine the students' discourse at the micro, meso, and macro levels.

Fairclough (1989) focuses on text, discursive practice and sociocultural practice. My analysis enabled me to move back and forth between topical themes in the texts, discursive forms, and sociocultural practices in the reflections and discussions and also look for correlations with how speakers were positioned by their own racial, ethnic, sexual, class related, religious identities. I was able to analyze how, for example, a student's discourse about his/her individual racial identification connected to the ways

that they discussed race, in relation to existing societal practices. Fairclough advocates that researchers acknowledge the connections between micro and macro discourses and ideologies. My analytical orientation to connect the micro and meso levels to the macro level discourses, is a strength of this study. This study showed how conversations about Halloween costume choices enact as well as contest hierarchical relations between Native Americans and non-Natives.

One limitation with CDA is that its focus is on discourse alone. I relied solely on what was being written and said by the students and their conversation partners. I did not factor in material conditions. As well I did not address actual public discourses which were in evidence during the period of the study. Since this is a presidential nomination year, the rhetoric from political candidates has been pervasive and influential. Comparing the local discourse of students and conversation partners with such public discourse could be a future study and could have provided additional layers of context for the discourse from my students.

Reflections on Design

I focused on just one class, and 14 respondents gave their consent to participate, so my results are specific to that group and their experiences. However, this in-depth focus on student discourse from one semester enabled me to gather both written reflections and tape-recorded conversations and gather multiple examples from each student.

While this study did produce rich data to examine, future research could move in a couple of different directions. The first would be to follow up with the students who participated in the study to have them describe their use (if any) of the key concepts of critical intercultural dialogue in their interactions since the class ended. Another avenue of future research would be to expand the breadth of the data by examining discourse that is produced in different locations and across different demographics which would reveal additional trends or the depth of the ones that I already examined. I taught the same Intercultural Communication course during the semester that followed the one where I collected data for this study and incorporated most of the same activities and pedagogical commitments. The following class had different dynamics and responses to the same general content. Further research might examine the similarities and differences in responses across different courses.

The results of my study may prove useful to work that theorizes how different dominant ideologies are sustained or to work that evaluates the strength of ideologies within and across different identifications. Certainly there are implications for researchers of intercultural communication, as well as researchers investigating critical dialogue, critical pedagogy, and public pedagogy. For example, researchers and practitioners such as those described in Pearce & Pearce (2004) could adjust their implementation of town hall meetings to better account for the ways that individualism permeates discussions about cultural conflicts and how ideologies such as liberal pluralism, neoliberalism, and Whiteness can obscure systemic influences. In the implementation of intergroup dialogue, practitioners such as Gurin, Nagda & Zuniga (2013) could incorporate the ways that dominant systems get reified across multiple identifications and within discourse

about critical responses to intercultural conflict. These commonly used models of dialogue carry problematic assumptions that were illustrated in my study. For example, it is clear that some students positioned with multiple forms of privilege, presumed that everyone in the U.S. had equal agency and voice and should take responsibility for their own life circumstances. These assumptions are the foundation of intergroup dialogue. Also, some of the pervasive ideologies that were activated showed assumptions of an equal playing field. However, the discourse of others contested such assumptions. My study also showed the importance of recognizing that these ideologies have differential benefits and consequences for differently positioned groups. Nonetheless, trainers and practitioners working in the nonprofit sector may benefit from seeing how one set of diverse respondents engaged critical intercultural dialogue.

While my critically oriented conclusions found that the students and their conversation partners frequently constituted dominant systems and ideologies through their discourse, I think that it is also important to highlight what some of the students said that they took away from their experience in the class in relation to their engagement and practice of intercultural dialogue. In connection to the learning process Monica explained that “by listening to my peers share their culture I learned how much I can relate to different things.” Liz said that in the course she had to “think differently [but] could see how the concepts connected.” Several of the students also said that they would continue to practice these types of interactions. Thomas wrote that “It is likely for me to use this kind of dialogue in the future.” Amber proclaimed that “If I want something to change, I need to do something about it. This dialogue will definitely be something that I continue long after this class is over.” A definite opportunity for future study would be to see if

these sentiments extended past the conclusion of the course, but I also find it encouraging that they might have taken away at least one or two more tools for creating and identifying critical discourse about intercultural conflicts.

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