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Malikkah Rollins
Breaking it Down:
Contributing Factors to
Racial Identity Development
In Elementary and Middle
School Youth

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore which aspects of a multiracial elementary school most contributed to the racial identity development of alumni. The central question asked of the participants was "Do you believe that attending Manhattan Country School affected your racial identity development?"

The outcomes of this project can be useful for educators and administrators in both public and independent school settings to understand how best to help their students develop a healthy racial identity. This information may also be useful for clinicians working with young people in an effort to explore their sense of self in a racial context.

The participants were all alumni who graduated from Manhattan Country School a small, independent elementary school based in New York City. The sample had three specific characteristics: 1. all alumni attended the school for a minimum of four years, 2. all alumni graduated from the school during the 1980's or the 1990's, 3. and the sample strove to be as gender and racially balanced as possible.

The findings show that the most relevant contributing factor to their racial identity was the school culture as defined by the curriculum, the faculty and the student demographics. An unexpected second finding was that the participants all had a difficult

adjustment to life after MCS due to less racially diverse high schools lacking a focus on

issues of difference.

BREAKING IT DOWN: CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO RACIAL IDENTITY

DEVELOPMENT IN

ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL YOUTH

A projected based on an investigation
at Manhattan Country School, New York, NY
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to explore the factors that contributed to the racial

identity development of twelve graduates from a multiracial elementary school in New

York City. Manhattan Country School (MCS) was founded in 1966 as an independent,

intentionally multiracial/multiethnic-elementary school. The participants, six men and six

women of varied racial categorizations, were asked to reflect on the following elements

of the school and if they contributed to their racial identity: the faculty, student

demographics, curriculum, parent involvement, and the farm (an outdoor

education/community building component of the school). The interviews began with the

overarching question: did MCS contribute to your racial identity development, and if so,

how? Then they proceeded to the specific aspects of the school previously mentioned.

"It has long been hypothesized that one's racial identity attitudes relate to sense of

self and comfort with person's of diverse racial groups." (Ponterotto, Utsey, Pederson,

2006, p. 105). Understanding one's sense of self around racial categorizations is an

important factor in one's psychological health and intergroup relationships.

The literature on racial identity development has been studied and explored from

a variety of angles since the first models were designed for African Americans in the

1970's. It is clear that effort has been employed to understand African American and

European American racial identity progression, but additional research needs to be done

2

on behalf of other people of color to truly understand how various identities are formed over time. In addition, there are no racial identity development models for elementary/school age children. This may be attributed to the reality that theorists believe that over time people progress through specific stages and adults have had more opportunities and experiences to warrant progression. Despite this fact, further research into the racial identity development of elementary and middle school students is necessary.

Ultimately, racial identity research and this present study are useful to schools, and school social workers in particular, to broaden their understanding of the youth they are charged with educating. Teachers and administrators need to be educated about the models and accompanying theories so they can devise and implement intervention strategies to help their students, particularly ones who may be struggling with their sense of self around racial categorization. Racial identity development could be interwoven into the curriculum of our schools just as sexual, religious and spiritual education is.

This study is salient for several reasons. Racial identity development occurs for all people and typically peaks in adolescence. However, many educators and school administrators lack an understanding of the racial identity development process and theoretical foundations of racial identity development. This study can help those working with children and adolescents by raising awareness of how to support them, specifically, what aspects of a school culture best contribute to a healthy racial identity development. School counselors also play a part. Once aware of the racial identity developmental process, they may be sufficiently informed to help students who may be experiencing doubt or challenges around their racial identity. As clinicians they play a unique part in

the lives of their students and knowledge about the process is crucial if they are to be effective counselors.

The findings of this study illuminate techniques that can be useful for those working with adolescents navigating the world of racial identity. The participants were asked to reflect on what aspects of their elementary/middle school contributed to their racial identity development. The overwhelming majority of interviewees noted that the school culture played the most salient role. With further inquiry, they specified three aspects of the school culture: the faculty's support and demographics, the student body demographics and the social justice/civil rights curriculum. These findings can be very helpful to school educators and administrators. For example, from this study, educators may be inspired to develop curriculum focused on racial identity or social justice. School principals may be more attentive to racial identity in their faculty hiring practices. Educators may also create activities centered around helping the students explore and examine racial identities within their classes. There are a myriad of options for developing strategies for addressing racial identity in schools that can benefit students and educators as well.

MCS is a very unique school. As previously stated, MCS was founded in 1966 as an independent elementary/middle school in Manhattan and remains a thriving institution today. The founders, Gus and Marty Trowbridge are educators and civil rights activists and also have a great a deal of outdoor educational experience. They both come from affluent White Anglo Saxon Protestant families from New England but who had activist members. They founded MCS somewhat in reaction to *Brown v. Board of Education*; even twelve years after the decision, they saw a slow and unintentional move toward

integrating America's schools, despite the ruling. They also founded the school as a way

for European Americans to confront and overcome their own racism and prejudice. Their

goal was to create a school that could achieve unity and integration in part through an

intentional focus on the aspects that make up a school community: faculty, student, and

the curriculum. But MCS looked at these factors from a very innovative angle by

recruiting a racially and ethnically diverse faculty, a diverse student body and a

curriculum centered on social justice and the principles of Martin Luther King, Jr. such as

non-violent protest to create social change and creating a beloved community of equals.

An additional and very critical aspect of the school, which continues to make it unique, is

"The Farm." The founders believe in outdoor education and that working on The Farm as

part of the curriculum makes the educational experience richer and builds community. To

this end the founders were able to raise money and purchase a 160 acre working farm in

Roxbury, NY which is located in the Catskills. Starting in the 7/8 year old class, students

live and work on the Farm for several weeks a year starting with one week at the younger

ages and advancing up to 3 weeks in middle school. The Farm not only teaches about

building community, but it also educates about sustainability, interacting with nature and

provides an opportunity for city children to live in the country.

This study is comprised of five chapters. After the introduction, the Literature

Review will examine the theoretical underpinnings of racial identity development

throughout the lifespan. A particular focus is placed on how people of color and

European Americans experience racial identity development differently. The chapter

explores how people learn about their racial identity from childhood through adulthood

through a theoretical lens. The third chapter describes the methodology used to conduct

this study. This chapter explains the research process in detail including explanations about the sample population and the recruitment process. The fourth chapter discusses the findings gleaned from the data collection. Out of the research emerged two salient topics which I discuss in detail in this chapter using specific data from the alumni interviews. The final chapter relates the previously explored theories to the study's findings. This chapter also suggests areas for further research and ways in which MCS can continue to promote racial identity development among its students.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study explores the racial identity development of a group of alumni from an intentionally multi-racial/multi-cultural elementary/middle-school in New York City as they reflect back on their experiences at the school and their lives as adults. This focus is predicated on the idea that all people develop a racial identity over their lifespan. The subsequent review of the literature will be defining the models and theories that describe racial identity development and explain the process by which children and adults navigate this developmental process. Furthermore, the focus is founded on the assumption that, like families, schools are integral to the development of young children's identity formation; the literature will also examine research that shows how school environments effect racial identity development and it will look at specific school-based interventions designed to increase tolerance and positively impact racial identity development.

Racial Identity Development in Young Children

"Racial… identity becomes an element in the child's emerging sense of self" (Davies, 2004, p. 306). Moreover, the literature on racial identity all points to the very early age at which children begin to notice and eventually question racial differences. "Research over the past few decades has shown clearly that children develop awareness of race differences very early in life" (Katz, 2003, p. 898). In fact Katz's (2003) research has found that babies as young as six months old can notice racial differences and categorize faces based on those differences. She believes that children's socialization, for

instance, the level of diversity of their neighborhood or school, explains their understanding or awareness of racial differences.

Similarly, Tatum (2004) and others have found that children as young as three notice physical differences among people such as facial features. Tatum also notes that "at the same time preschoolers (ages three-six) are identifying the colors in a crayon box, they are also beginning to figure out racial categorizations" (Tatum, 2004, p.132).

Derman-Spark, Ramsey & Edwards (2006) point to environment as the main source of learning about racial identity for preschoolers. These young children pick up stereotypes and prejudices from what they hear within their families and society in general; as a result, they "…achieve an adult-like concept of (race) by age five" (Baron & Banaji, 2006, p. 53). Many children form their opinions without direct contact with racially dissimilar groups of people but they echo views expressed in books, on TV or by family. In fact, "…a high level of television viewing has been found to reinforce both gender and race stereotypes in grade school children" (Katz, 2003, p. 901). They express stereotypes such as "…all Indians live in tepees and shoot bows and arrows at people…" without knowing any such people (Katz, 1976, p. 102).

Additionally, another factor in pre-schoolers' racial identity awareness is their natural cognitive immaturity: young children tend to see the world (and people) within a duality framework; they see differences between groups but are not yet able to see them among individuals within these groups. They are able to see difference but not make sense of it yet and as a result develop biases based on their environment.

Research points to an interesting racial identity phenomenon occurring during the preschool years. Baron and Banaji (2006), Katz & Kofkin (1997) have all found a

divergence in racial identity awareness between European Americans and children of color. Baron and Banaji (2006) argue that due to environmental factors, such as family viewpoints, media and societal messages, by the age of three, European North American children develop negativity to other ethnicities and races particularly if they have not been exposed to other groups of people. Katz (2003) found that young children's preference for their own racial group was similar around age three; but once they enter elementary school there is a decrease in African Americans children's preference for their own racial grouping. She attributes this divergence to African American children's understanding that European Americans hold the highest status in our society.

This divergence is also found among elementary school age children. In a study of racial attitudes among European American children, at ages six and ten, Baron & Banaji found that "…the 6-year-olds had already developed implicit pro-White/anti-Black associations" (Baron & Banaji, 2006, p. 55). In this study, European American children tended to prefer images of European Americans over that of African Americans but by age ten, the participants' own group preferences decreased. Aboud & Fenwick (1999) also found this to be true, although they argue that by age seven the same-group race preference declined. Due to the massive amounts of positive societal and media messages, European American children tend to imbue themselves with a sense of superiority not reported in children of color (Derman-Sparks, et al., 2006, p. 39). Derman-Sparks et al., (2006) argue that denying racial differences to children is not useful but challenging the placement of values (superior/inferior) onto the differences is the goal of helping children make sense of themselves and others of different races.

9

Derman-Sparks et al., (2006) also found that 5-8 yr. olds wrestle with different questions than youngsters. They "…have the major task of acquiring information about their own identity and understanding others' differences" (Dutton, Singer & Devlin 1998, p. 42). This is the age when kids begin to associate with the groups they belong to and explore how they are different from other groups. They are curious about their group membership and "…develop a sense of pride in their identity and identity with well-known role models" (Derman-Sparks et al., 2006, p. 14). These authors also point out the salient factor of children developing their sense of identity within a racist society. They become more aware of racist thoughts or feelings against their own group and can develop personal prejudices that may emerge as hurtful (racist) language towards other children. For example, in their study, a "White mother overheard a group of her daughter's seven year olds friends talking about how they were glad that they were not Black" (Derman-Sparks et al., 2006, p. 14). These authors argue that because 5-8 yr. olds have developed cognition that allows them to make their own judgments versus accepting what they see or hear at face value, they can learn to discern prejudice and thus challenge it.

European American children often create their sense of racial identity development from the pro-European American world in which we live. The messages they receive from the media, for example, are that European Americans are normal, safe and good while people of color are bad or dangerous; or at the least, less than European Americans. Thus it is not surprising that Katz & Kofkin's (1997) longitudinal study concluded that by age six, half of their participants demonstrated attitudes that were pro-European American and anti-African American.

In sum, the racial awareness components of racial identity develops at a young age with those children exposed to more diversity having a greater awareness of racial differences; this holds true for all children despite their racial or ethnic origins. In addition, the component of racial identity related to attribution also develops early in childhood, around school age, and is markedly different for children from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. In this situation both races assign more positive qualities to white people. Research attributes this early development of racial identity is related to both social environments and cultural messages embedded in the media and family attitudes. Children are aware of the value messages their parents, communities, society, and the media place on the racial differences they see and this is, in part, how their racial identity develops.

Racial identity development in middle childhood

Research on racial identity among middle childhood, which encompasses ages 6-13, is sorely lacking. Nonetheless, Davies (2004) found that middle childhood is a time when children become even more aware of their racial identity. Children these ages tend to choose friends based on common identifying factors, such as ethnicity, race or gender. For the older children in this segment, this may be due in part to their search for an identity in general, not just about their racial categorization. "One thing that begins to happen is puberty. As children enter adolescence, they begin to explore the question of identity, asking "who am I? "…in ways they have not done before" (Tatum, 1997, p. 52). Also at this age, "minority children show greater awareness of race…than do children who identify with the majority group" (Davies, 2004, p. 383) and they tend to delve deeper into self-exploration around issues of identity (Quintana, 2007; Tatum, 1997).

Sadler (1994) argues that European American children are more comfortable with their own identity development depending on the amount of contact they have with children of color. Phinney & Tarver's (1988) study of 8th graders from an integrated school found that about 1/3 of the children had begun to explore or think about their ethnicity. The study also found that the African American students in the grade were doing more searching and exploring than their European American friends. However, "…at least by age 13, young Black Americans do not show the in-group preference that has come to be the hallmark of White Americans" (Baron and Banaji, 2006, p. 57).

However, Tatum argues differently. She opines that because of this general identity search during pre-adolescence, African American youth tend to cluster together as a way of identifying with sameness (Tatum, 1997). Minority middle school children's racial identity development also becomes more complex because they tend to experience their first taste of racial discrimination in elementary school. At this age, the lesson learned for minority children is that "they can be subject to social rejection based on categorical rather than personal basis" (Davies, 2004, p. 384).

Even though middle school age children tend to choose friends based on common identifying factors, the bias seen among preschoolers and early elementary age children sometimes declines by middle school (Baron & Banaji, 2006). Developmentally, this age group has more mature cognitive, emotional and social skills and thus can better recognize individual differences and various perspectives. But the factor that determines their decrease in racial bias is the community to which they belong and the messages they receive from that community (Derman-Sparks, Higa & Sparks, 1980, p. 103).

Tatum (2004) suggests that African American adolescents developing a healthy racial identity by being honored for their academic achievements and abilities is crucial as is knowledge of their ancestor's academic and professional success. Tatum also argues that it is critical for African American youth to have same-race friends helps to solidify their sense of self as minorities navigating in a majority world. During this complex stage of youth, research has shown that racial identity awareness is more prevalent in children of color partly due to all pre-adolescents identity quest but also because they may have experienced racism firsthand. At this age, youth of all races, tend to choose friends based on commonalities such as race, religion, or language, thus we see more intentional segregation during middle childhood.

Adolescent's racial identity development extends into high school where the intentional segregation is often most visible. However, for all adolescents, the transition into high school can be challenging. Ruble & Seidman (1996) found that the transition to high school can have negative psychological effects on adolescents. This is attributed to the timing (adolescence) of the transition and the fact that they are moving on to a substantially different environment. The various new aspects of high school such as larger school, more demanding academics, social pressures, new teachers, and less or more racially diverse environment can negatively affect any adolescent.

Adolescents of color shifting into high school may experience a unique transition in their racial identity development. At this age, adolescents of color may encounter their first taste of prejudice, thus explaining Tatum's (1997) notion that African American adolescents tend to self-segregate as a way to build a community of people who may

sympathize with each other's experiences. This self-selection may apply to all students of color as they learn to navigate the unique high school culture. Their racial identity development evolves in that high school adolescents may use a "race/ethnicity consciousness-raising" (French, Seidman, Allen & Aber, 2000, p. 598). Events, like being the target of prejudice or the change into a more or less racially/ethnically diverse environment, serve as a racial identity wake-up call. This is congruent with Phinney's (1998) assertion that "…with age, students exhibit greater ethnic search" (French et al., 2000, p. 598). European American high school students may experience racial identity growth similar to students of color. For example, if they attend a homogenous elementary school and then attend a diverse high school, this is an encounter experience as claimed by French et al., (2000). Thus, they will also have to re-examine their own identity as it relates to their new environment.

Racial Identity Development: Theoretical Foundation

Cross (1971) was the first to develop a model for how to assess the process by which African Americans progress through their sense of self as African Americans. His model, also called the psychology of nigrescence, consisted of five "stages" through which one evolved starting with pre-encounter. In this stage people tend to be unaware of their race and absorb the values and beliefs of the dominant, i.e. European American culture. This stage is marked by the notion that European American culture is superior to African American culture. The encounter stage is marked by some jarring event that personally affects the individual and usually that event is racist or discriminatory in nature. The result is an examination about what it means to belong to a minority group.

14

The immersion/emersion stage is significant for its sense of empowerment and embracing

of one's minority culture. Usually people at this stage immerse themselves in their culture

through books, history, music, etc. Anger at European American people is not a critical

aspect of this stage; it is more about discovering and appreciating one's cultural

background through immersion into an accurate depiction of that culture. Emergence

from this stage culminates with the stage of internalization where one has worked

through enough to now feel confident and assured in their identity. In the fifth stage,

internalization-commitment, one is not only a self-assured but also committed to end

oppression on behalf of all people of color. Cross's (1971) model has been extensively

used and referred to in the literature on racial/ethnic identity development and has been

"revised accordingly since its introduction in 1971" (Tatum, 2004, p. 118). It is the model

on which other racial/ethnic identity assessments have been based. Cross's (1971) work

provides a foundation for other models designed for Latino American, African Americans

and European Americans by theorists such as Parham (1989), Helms (1990, 1995), and

Phinney (1989).

Phinney (1989) designed another significant model for a variety of ethnic groups

based on three stages. Her model posits that all people of color must resolve two

conflicts. The first conflict derives from stereotyping and prejudice received as a result of

non-dominant group membership. The second conflict relates to the fact that people of

color must navigate a "bicultural" value system and the clash of values between them and

the white culture. She believed that adolescents move through three stages of ethnic

identity development. Stage one is classified as unexamined identity; like Cross's (1995)

model, one tends to absorb the values of the majority group and is ignorant about their

15

own culture. Stage two is about searching for one's ethnic identity; usually this is inspired by a direct experience with discrimination or prejudice. Stage three culminates in a clear and secure sense of one's ethnic identity. One is able to appreciate and internalize their identity rather than subordinate it in favor of the majority identity. French (2006) reminds us that Phinney's model has been extensively used in studies on identity development (Clubb, 1998; Chatman, 1990; Peron, Vondracek, Skorikov, Tremblay & Corbriere, 1998). Specific theories or models about racial identity development for other people of color (such as Latinos) are scarce; usually when studies are done on Latinos (for example) the theories described above are used to explain their identity development as well. This paucity of models for Latinos also extends to Asian Americans and Native Americans. Clearly there is a need for more research into racial identity development and people of color besides African Americans.

Other theorists have delved into an exploration of European American racial identity development: Hardiman, (1992), Sabnani, Ponterotto & Borodovsky, (1991), and Helms (1990) have all designed theories (and in some cases models) to help describe how European Americans navigate the process of racial identity development, of which they may be ignorant. Helm's (1990) model is by far the most studied, tested and critiqued. Howard suggested that

> Whites can overcome this history of ignorance and superiority by attending to several key developmental issues. The White person's developmental tasks with regard to development of a healthy White identity…require the abandonment of individual racism as well as the recognition of an active opposition to institutional and cultural racism…. (Howard, 2006, p. 2).

Helms (1990, 1992, 1994) and Helms & Piper (1994) argue that there are six stages associated with European American racial identity development. The process begins with being colorblind, exhibiting racist stereotypes, and being ignorant to white privilege, a developmental stage she calls contact. Stage two is called disorientation and is exemplified by guilt about the way people of color are treated except one addresses their angst by re-adopting European American culture as superior or normal. This stage leads into reintegration which is characterized by anger and intolerance towards people of color and a shoring up of white privilege. Pseudo independence follows reintegration: one enters into an intellectual explanation for racism and acknowledges its injustice but is unwilling to take steps to end discrimination. Immersion takes the previous stage one step further when one becomes more involved in social activism in an effort to redress past injustice against people of color. The emersion stage is heralded by European American's joining a community of like-minded people who are also social activists. Finally, Helms (1990) sees European American developmental process ending with autonomy: their social activism extends to fighting all forms of oppression and the relinquishing of white privilege.

Much of this racial identity development work for all racial groups is based on Marcia's (1966) work in the field of ego identity development, based on Erikson's (1968) work and influential book "Identity, Youth and Crisis." Thus, racial identity development has its roots in developmental psychology and the notion that all people progress through identity stages.

In general, adult African American (and other people of color) and European American racial identity development has both similarities and differences. Research shows that both identity developments have various stages or phases; people can alternate between stages at different points in their lives and not necessarily proceed in a linear fashion; and "…awareness at each level involves attitudes about self that, in turn, shape how one views the primary out group." (Sue et al., 1998, p. 76). Despite some commonalities, European Americans and people of color experience their racial identity development in divergent fashions. One reason for this discrepancy has to do with power: "due to power differences, whites, as members of the dominant racial group in the U.S., may experience a different racial identity." (Sue et al., 1998, p. 76). European American racial identity models acknowledge that European American have an unearned privilege, based on skin color, which needs to be acknowledged and owned as part of their identity development (Sue et al, 1998; Helms, 1995). In contrast, African American models of identity development acknowledge the costs of living in a racist society and the importance of rejecting racial stereotypes as a way to connect with and honor one's racial heritage and sense of self (Cross, 1971; Helms, 1995).

Efforts at School-Based Intervention to Reduce Prejudice

The effectiveness of school-based interventions to reduce ethnic or racial prejudice is disputed in the literature. Beginning with younger children, Rooney-Rebeck & Jason (1983) conducted a study of first and third graders at an integrated school. The study was designed to test the effectiveness of cooperative learning (peer tutoring) to "increase inter-ethnic association among children." (Rooney-Rebeck & Jason, 1983, p. 65). They hypothesize that the way teachers conduct integrated classes influences kids

attitudes and behaviors towards one another. Thus, a cooperative learning atmosphere is more likely to encourage respect for difference than a competitive environment. From their findings, they suggest that better interracial interactions can be had based on cooperative learning activities but more so if they are introduced before second grade "…before the behavioral manifestations of ethnic prejudice become ingrained." (Rooney-Rebeck & Jason, 1983, p. 72). Thus, the first graders more easily gravitated to a cooperative learning activity than the third graders. These results illuminate that curriculum interventions and teaching styles greatly influence youngsters' interethnic interactions.

Aboud and Fenwick (1999) found that a curriculum intervention could reduce prejudice in 5th grade students who had a high level of bias, as measured by the MRA: Multiresponse Racial Attitude Test (MRA). In their 1999 study, they explored two such interventions with 5th graders and then eight-eleven year olds. The first study with pre-adolescents was designed to "…reduce prejudice by strengthening attention to individual, rather than racial, qualities of people." (Aboud & Fenwick, 1999, p. 769). The study focused on teacher led activities and discussion where the students were encouraged to view people based on individual characteristics of a person vs. their group membership. This particular design was chosen because "…there is empirical evidence…that attention to individual differences in people, rather than race differences, is associated with lower prejudice, develops noticeably during preadolescence…and can be increased during a short training session." (Aboud & Fenwick, 1999, p. 769). They were hoping to capitalize on the natural cognitive development of a typical preadolescent in order to most effectively reduce prejudice.

The materials for the study was a book called "More Than Meets the Eye" and teachers used such activities as group discussion, dyadic problem solving and individual work as they interacted with the textbook. They found that those students who were most prejudiced benefitted from the eleven week class in that their level of prejudice was reduced based on a pre and post MRA. In addition, the discussions led by the teacher had the effect of training students to use individual characteristics when comparing people from different racial groups rather than massing them into one group.

The second study, focused on eight-eleven year olds, was designed to see what effect peers could have on one's level of prejudice. "We examined how children differing in racial attitudes express these orally to a friend and how such expression influences the other." (Aboud & Fenwick, 1999, p. 775). The authors concluded that when high and low prejudiced peers openly discussed racism and racial differences, the high prejudiced students began to have more "similar" viewpoints with their low-prejudiced peers and their post test MRA scores were lower compared to the pre-evaluation.

Despite the aforementioned studies' conclusions, Bigler (1999) suggests school-based intervention programs to reduce racial stereotyping and prejudice lack effectiveness in changing student's minds. Bigler's (1999) study evaluated the effectiveness of curricula-based intervention programs to reduce racial stereotyping and prejudice in children. She concludes "…the failure to design more effective programs is attributed to a lack of breadth and sophistication in the theoretical models and empirical research on which intervention strategies have been based." (Bigler, 1999, p. 687). To reach her conclusions, Bigler reviewed articles about bias reduction interventions in schools across the United States. Many of these interventions relied on multicultural

curricula that highlighted the positive role that racial and ethnic minorities have played in our society. For example, she explored a 6-week program where children were exposed to books about diverse racial and ethnic groups, then found those group's countries on a map and participated in an art project about the cultures studied. In another study Bigler reviewed, the authors focused on an African American consciousness raising project specifically for African American students using songs and stories about African Americans who have contributed to our society in a variety of ways. Thus, Bigler (1999) combines an examination of the theory and actual bias reduction interventions to reach her conclusions.

Hughes, Bigler & Levy (2007) also conducted a study teaching racism through a historical lens with six-nine year olds. The motivation of their study was that "despite the importance of the topic, little research has investigated the consequences of learning about historical racial discrimination among children." (Hughes et al, 2007, p. 1700). The goal of their study was to teach history lessons to European and African American elementary school-aged students focused on historical racism. They found that "…discussion of racism is a promising means of promoting positive interracial views among European American and African American children…." (Hughes et al, 2007, p. 1702). From the results of this study the authors posit that schools that provide a forum for their students to air negative emotions about interracial dynamics may contribute to prejudice reduction among the student body.

In general, the research gives hope that continued use of school based interventions can help to address and decrease intergroup racial prejudice and discrimination. But more studies need to be conducted to ensure accuracy and uniformity

21

of these interventions so additional schools can take advantage of techniques or curricula that are successful and effective. In particular, no studies have explored how such school based interventions have affected former students in their adult lives as this study does, nor how the school environment promotes or hinders racial identity development. In addition, the research demonstrates that racial identity development occurs for all individuals and begins in early childhood. Minimal research, however, on racial identity development among middle childhood and pre-adolescence exists. This study will contribute to adding to knowledge about racial identity development during early and middle childhood. Furthermore, the proposed study attempts to look at the differences in experiences among European Americans and persons of color in the school and what the school environment meant to their racial identity development. This study will add to the literature by bringing the voices of a sample of alumni to the forefront so we know better how school based interventions in an intentionally multi-ethnic school environment impact racial identity development; this will be a lesson learned about which interventions and aspects of the environment promote racial identity development and which aspects may need to be re-conceptualized.

The central question of this study is how did the MCS school experience relate to the sample's racial identity development? Specifically, what aspects of the school contributed to this development and how? This study also examines differences in the racial identity development of the alumni of color and the European American alumni.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study which explores the contribution that a multiracial elementary/middle school had on a diverse group of alumni as they reflect on their experience at the school, Manhattan County School. This study closely examines which aspects of the school environment factored into to their racial identity development. I designed a data collection instrument (see Appendix A) which was used as an interview guide with all participants. Finally, Smith College School for Social Work approved this study (see Appendix B.)

Definition of Term

In order to understand this study, the term racial identity development needs to be defined. There are various theorists who offer a definition and I chose one by British social psychologist Henri Tajfel (1986) because it most reflects this project: Racial identity development is "…part of an individual's self-concept that derives from her/his knowledge of her/his membership in a social or ethnic group or groups together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership." (Tajfel, 1986, p. 24). For the sake of clarity between researcher and readers, it is important to have one definition of a term that is central to this project. I used this definition to conceptualize racial identity both when creating the data collection instrument and in my interviews; when I

23

met with the alumni, I explained racial identity development by paraphrasing Tajfel's definition. Finally, his definition provided a framework for how I imagined racial identity development throughout this study.

Sample and Recruitment

The sample was taken from alumni of Manhattan Country School who had attended the school for a minimum of four years during between 1980 and 1999. The time frame of four years was chosen because it allows sufficient time for a student to be fully exposed to the philosophy and ethos of the school's mission and the practical reality of racial equality and racial integration. Although the school was founded in 1966, sampling from earlier years was excluded because the school was still in its fledging state in terms of racial equity until approximately 1988. The cut-off of 1999 was used so that participants would be adults and able to reflect on the experience of attending MCS within the context of the progression of their racial identity development. The school's alumni director assisted with recruitment. She utilized the alumni directory to solicit participants through a letter of introduction from the head of school (see Appendix C). The letter was emailed to alumni who fit the following criteria: attendance for four years during 1980-1999. Interested people emailed or called me back to express their interest. Next I spoke on the phone with interested alumni and sent them an informed consent form (see Appendix D) to sign and mail back to me. For those people I interviewed in person, I brought the informed consent for them to sign in person. Each participant received a copy of the informed consent to keep for their records.

This was a non random and purposive sample where my main goal was to maximize diversity. To this end, I created a chart with each respondent's gender and racial categorization to help keep track of the group's diversity. Of the twelve alumni participants, half were male and half female. Two men were African-American, one identified as European American and North African, and the remaining three as European American. Of the women, three were women of color (African American/European American, Japanese-American and African-American) and three identified as European American. I set up interviews with the twelve respondents who matched my criteria. A total of eighteen alumni contacted me and once the first twelve committed to participate, the remaining six alumni were kindly told their participation was not needed.

Sample Description/Demographics

Of the twelve alumni participants, half were male and half female. Two men were African-American, one identified as European American and North African, and the remaining three as European American. Of the women, three were women of color (African American/European American, Japanese-American and African-American) and three identified as European American. The ages were not formally gathered but all participants graduated from MCS between 1981 and 1996 so their ages ranged from twenty-eight to forty-three. All participants attended the school for at least four years and all graduated from MCS indicating they had spent the majority of middle childhood/pre-adolescence (ages 9-13) in this school environment.

Ethics and Safeguards

To begin the process, I asked all participants to sign an informed consent (see Appendix D) that I have since secured in a locked storage box. The informed consent outlined the possible benefits and risks to participation.

I outlined several risks to participation in this study. I imagined that taking time out of one's day to discuss personal material about identity and memories of elementary school may have been mildly stressful or uncomfortable. If some participants had not delved into their own identity, or were currently struggling with identity issues, this may have exposed them to unwelcome or unexperienced emotions and memories. This was one excellent reason to supply participants with mental health referrals (see Appendix E). I was particularly sensitive to alumni that were caretakers for children or relatives and took special care to be aware of their needs.

There were also possible benefits to involvement in this study. Participants may have found that through this study they gained a new understanding of the role their elementary school played in their lives and as an extension, the choices they made for their families and children. Looking retrospectively at their childhood education and how it may have impacted their current life could have been very eye opening. This process may have brought a new outlook and appreciation for the choice one's parents made in sending their child to MCS and for the school itself. Alumni may have also appreciated knowing that their responses were helpful to MCS's curriculum development, staffing, parental involvement, future parents' consideration of the school, and overall

programming for current students. In addition, the study may be of interest to educators

and administrators at large which alumni may appreciate.

I transcribed the audio recordings myself so there is no concern about

confidentiality being compromised. In the transcriptions, I used each participant's initials

to differentiate the interviewees. I conducted interviews on the phone or met them at their

homes or a public space like a café. No financial compensation was offered for their

participation.

I purchased a lockable file cabinet to house all pertinent information. Each

category of information (such as signed informed consents, tape recordings, and

transcriptions) was kept in separate drawers in the locked cabinet. At the completion of

data analysis all computer files of transcriptions and device recordings were erased so

that only a portable copy of these files exist in the locked cabinet. As per federal

regulations, this data will be securely stored for three years and after that time will be

destroyed when I no longer need them.

I ensured participants that while their demographic data may be used in the study,

no identifiable information will be released and any names or otherwise identifiable

information were blacked out of any written documents. When I presented or wrote about

a participant, I mentioned their demographic information (for example, African American

female) but I disguised their name, age and year of graduation. Since the school is so

small, knowing someone's race and gender along with their year of graduation may have

compromised the confidentiality of their identity. When I was writing about a particular

person named in an interview that was not a study participant, I changed their name so as

not to reveal their identity so a teacher named Carl became Mr. F. I was clear with the

participants that while their personal information (such as names) was kept in confidence

the answers to their questions and their demographics were included in the study.

Data Collection Instrument

The data collection instrument (see Appendix A) was provided to the participants

before we began the interviews. I used it as a guide during the interviews. The questions

were designed to cover the various educational and social aspects of the school to

evaluate which aspects were most significant to the alumni's racial identity development.

After asking the central question "do you believe attending MCS contributed to your

racial identity development?," the questions proceeded to ask how the curriculum, the

faculty, parental involvement, student body demographics, the Farm (an outdoor

education and community building component of the school) may have contributed to

their racial identity development and whether or not the participants currently had a

racially diverse group of friends.

Data Collection

The interviews took place between February 6th, 2010 and March 21st, 2010. Five

were on the phone through Skype and seven were in person at various locations in New

York City. Participants asked if they could be supplied a copy of the Data Collection

Instrument (see Appendix A) before the interviews and one was emailed to each. The

alumni I interviewed over the phone were mailed an informed consent to sign and return

to me before the interview commenced. The people I met in person signed the form in my

presence. Prior to the interviews, the instrument was approved by both my advisor and

the HSR Committee and from the reactions of the participants, they were grateful to

receive the questions beforehand and they commented on the thought provoking nature of

the instrument.

I digitally recorded each interview with an Olympus digital voice recorder and

then saved the interviews on my computer, an external flash drive and on the recorder.

Five of these interviews I did over the phone using the digital recorder and the internet

phone service called Skype; I placed the recorder on top of the lap top while we spoke on

Skype and the recording quality was more than sufficient. I started the recording once we

were settled and began each one with stating the date and participants name. To be on the

safe side, I tested each tape recording beforehand by choosing a folder on the recorder

that was unused. I used a semi-structured interview format and asked the participants

each question. The interview times ranged from thirty eight minutes to one and a half

hours and all interviews were conducted in one session. However, two participants asked

to add more once the recorder was switched off and I turned it back on so they could

provide additional thoughts. Otherwise, no participants added information after their

interviews.

Data Analysis

In order to transcribe the interviews, I saved each one on my computer as an audio

file using Dell Jukebox by Musicmatch software. Then I replayed each interview with the

Musicmatch software, transcribed them verbatim on my laptop and saved them as

Microsoft Word documents. All of the interviews were audible except portions of one.

For that interview I transcribed the inaudible parts to the best of my ability and then used the context of the answer to understand to the best of my ability.

Once the interviews were transcribed, I created a separate document for each question. Then I cut and paste all of the corresponding interview answers into the appropriate documents. By the end of this process all of the answers to each question were housed in separate documents, one per question. In addition, at the beginning of each answer I inserted an identifying code to help me distinguish between the participants based on race and gender.

In order to analyze the data, I followed the data analysis procedures as outlined in Rubin and Babbie (2008). First open-coding was used to "develop categories through close examination of the qualitative data" (Rubin & Babbie, 2008, p. 463). Memoing was also used, specifically theoretical notes and sorting memos, as a technique to help organize and stimulate my thought process and ideas for writing the findings and conclusion chapters. The data was analyzed thematically and coded into themes based on the information provided by the participants. For example, many alumni referred to the curriculum as an impactful factor in the racial identity thus curriculum became a theme for further analysis.

During the data analysis, certain themes emerged that explained the relationship between the school and participants' racial identity development. The data is categorized into said themes and appropriate sub-themes. Each theme had both negative and positive impacts depending on the participant. For the purposes of this study, negative is defined

as hindering alumni racial identity development and positive is defined as promoting alumni racial identity development.

Next, I coded each answer based on the relevant themes I found. For example, an answer that spoke about the diversity of the student body being an affirming aspect of the participant's racial identity development was coded under the question about the student demographics as "affirming." Then I created a two column table, one per question, to further organize the data. On the top left hand column I placed the word "themes" and the top right hand column I placed the word "answers." Then I inserted all of the themes into left column for that particular question. In some cases I found sub-themes and inserted them into the table as well. Then I transported each answer into the row that corresponded to the answer's theme. This way it was much easier to view the data broken down by question, theme (or sub-theme) and the person's demographic identifiers (race and gender.)

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This study endeavored to explore the experience of twelve alumni who attended a

multiracial elementary/middle school and the relationship the educational setting had to

their racial identity development. The sample of twelve alumni all graduated from

Manhattan Country School between 1980 and 1996. The function of this chapter is to

present the results of the data collected from the twelve interviews where we explored their racial identity development.

First, this chapter looks at the participant's demographics as listed below. Then I explore why the demographic data is relevant to the study. Next an examination into the emergent themes is conducted.

Characteristics of the Sample

The participants had to meet four demographic criteria having to do with year of graduation, number of years in attendance at the school, racial and gender composition.

The study participants all graduated from Manhattan Country School between 1980 and 1996. The school began in 1966 and was still in its fledging state (in terms of reaching its goal of a fully integrated school where no ethnic or racial group was in the majority) until 1988 which is why I chose the decades of the 1980's and 1990's. I chose an end graduation date of 1999 to ensure participants are far enough removed from elementary school to be able to reflect on their experience. The eligible alumni were required to have been students for a minimum of four years to ensure that they were sufficiently immersed in the ethos, culture and curriculum of the school.

The participant's racial and gender composition is important to get as wide yet balanced sample as possible. The sample was gender balanced, comprised of six men, and six women, composing no limitations to this study. It does, however, pose strengths because the opinions gathered represent an even number of males and females, which improves the validity and realism of the study.

The racial breakdown was less balanced: there were two men of color and four European American men and three European American women and three women of

color. There is no simple explanation for the racial make-up of the respondents. However, I conjecture that more European American alumni than alumni of color may have wanted to reflect on their experience at MCS. One explanation for this discrepancy is provided by French et al., (2006). They argue that adolescents of color are more likely to explore their racial identity than European American youth, therefore more European American alumni may have responded due to a lack of exploration up until this study. Smith (1991) also argues that racial identity has more importance for minority groups than majority groups. In addition, people of color living in the United States generally have to confront race and racism on a more regular basis than European Americans who have less forums and expectations for exploring their racial identity. It is possible that the European American alumni were grateful to have this project as a vehicle for racial self-exploration. It is also possible that the school's alumni database is comprised of more European American alumni than alumni of color.

Themes

As the data was analyzed, two major topics emerged that contributed to their racial identity development: 1) the culture of MCS and 2) the transition to high school. All participants mentioned elements of the school culture as the integral factor in their racial identity development. Eleven of the twelve pinpointed the transition to high school as a component of their racial identity growth. Despite the fact that the project was focused on racial identity development during their time at MCS, the emergence of this second topic necessitated a reframing of the data. Due to the prevalence of this topic in the answers, I decided to spotlight the transition to high school since eleven of twelve respondents initiated the theme.

Within these two main topics listed above, six themes emerged. The school culture topic is comprised of three themes: 1) curriculum, 2) student demographic and 3) faculty. The transition to high school topic is also comprised of three themes: 1) lack of preparation for the racial complexities of high school, 2) high school racial segregation and homogeneity, and 3) a forced re-examination of one's racial identity. See Table 1 below for the complete list of the themes and sub-themes.

Table 1.

Summary of school culture and transition to high school themes as related to racial identity development

School Culture

1. Curriculum

    1.1. Social Justice Perspective/Civil Rights History
    1.2. Inter-Religious Holiday Celebrations

2. Student demographic

    2.1. Socio-economic class-race divide
    2.2. Student demographic affirms racial identity development
    2.3. Student diversity broadens racial identity

3. Faculty

Figure 1. Concept map of school culture and transition to high school themes.

School Culture

Transition to High School

Curriculum

Faculty

Student Demographic

Faculty

Ill-Prepared for Racial Complexities of High School

High School Racial Segregation and Homogeneity

Forced Re-Examination of One's Racial Identity
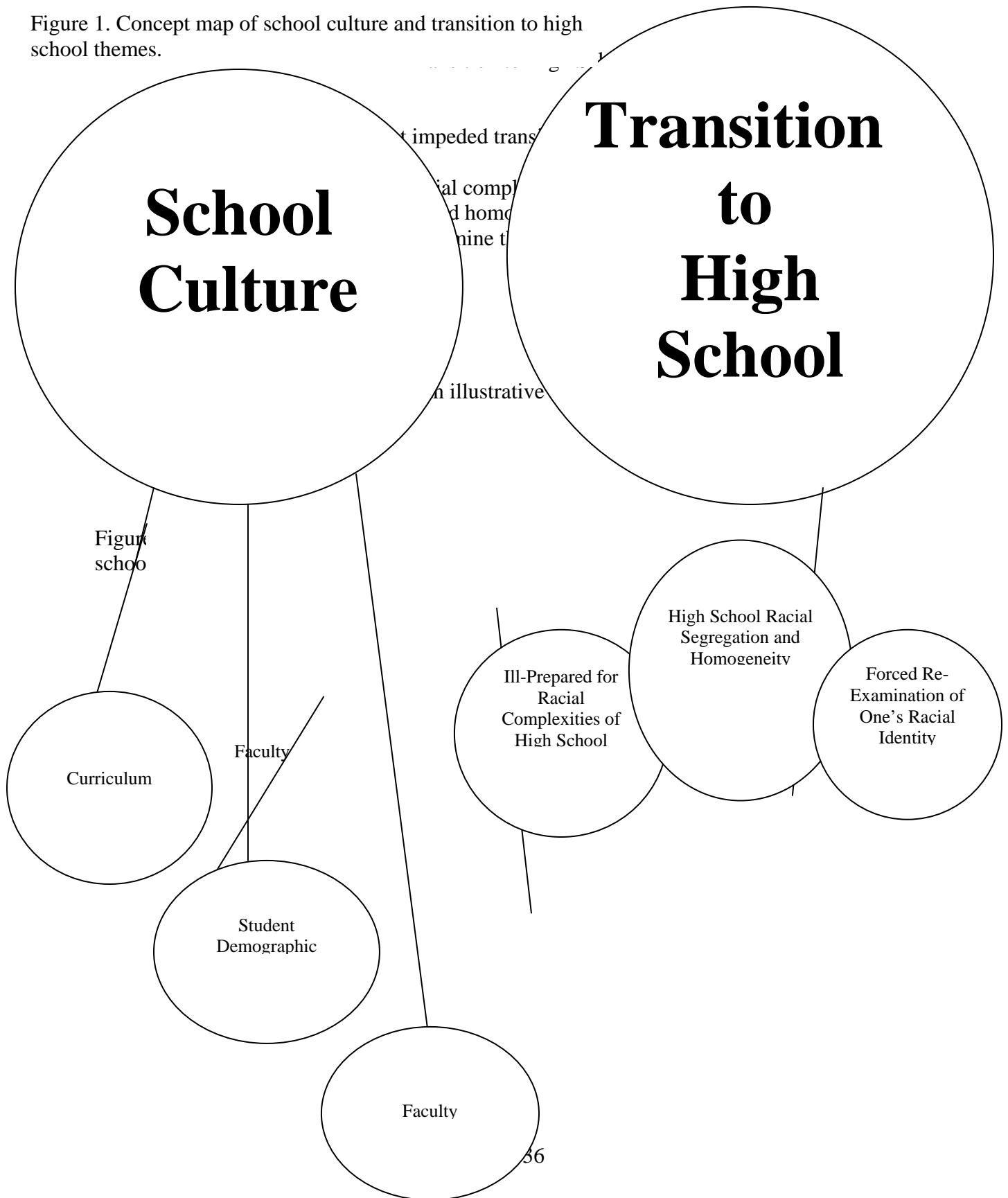
School Culture

The majority of the alumni mentioned the culture of MCS as an important factor in their racial identity development. When asked what school culture meant for them, they highlighted three themes: the curriculum, the student demographic and faculty's influence.

School culture theme 1: curriculum. When the alumni were asked whether the curriculum contributed to their racial identity development, nine of the twelve observed it contributed to their racial identity development in both negative and positive ways. The alumni mentioned two main areas of the curriculum that related to their racial identity development: the social justice teachings and a sense of inclusion through inter-religious holiday celebrations, both of which are discussed below.

Sub-theme 1.1 Social Justice Perspective/Civil Rights History

The majority of the respondents recalled that the social justice emphasis with a focus on the Civil Rights Movement positively contributed to their racial identity development. For European American students, the social justice perspective contributed to their sense of self as European American people by making them aware of their whiteness in a positive way. Because the teachings of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement are integral to the curriculum, these students felt that their race joined them to a broader social justice movement. One of the alums noted "They must have, within the curriculum they must have included white people who rallied alongside MLK or helped people in the Underground Railroad, because when we were marching we were part of a cause together as a school…" Another alumnus reflected the feelings of this cohort:

I guess the curriculum is like an extension of the Civil Rights movement so I think I felt like I was a participant in the movement. So I felt my race as connected to this broader movement to bring social justice and equity for African Americans. Made me feel like I had a place within that movement and that was an important thing to be involved in.

Another European American student commented that the immigration course, taught from a social justice perspective, made her "… think explicitly about me being a person who was white and what kind of white person I was." This alum recalled this as a positive experience because not only did the nature of the curriculum force her to think about her racial identity, it also encouraged her to explore family roots and her immigration status when they came from Europe to the United States. This perspective of our country's history opened this alum's mind to white people's role in immigration from the majority viewpoint, but also from the minority because her father came to the U.S. as a very ashamed German-Jewish man, worried that people would think he was a Nazi sympathizer, thus compelling him to Anglicize his last name.

Alumni of color also noted a positive relationship between the civil rights/social justice perspective and their racial identity development. One stated "The make-up of classes, activities, marches, songs in chorus, books we read…felt that it was affirming in many areas of curriculum as well as the school philosophy." And a male student recalled how his sense of racial identity was promoted in the class on immigration. The teacher, a Japanese man, included a unit about Samurai warriors and discussed Akira Kurosawa (a famous Japanese filmmaker) films. The alum recalls feeling proud, as a Japanese/African American man, that other classmates were experiencing positive messages of his family's history.

Likewise, the way teachers dealt with communication and curriculum helped promote the student's racial identity development. Teachers kept the lines of communication open by fostering the student's questions about difference. One white male noted "Ms. C. was especially good about me asking questions and she would want me to ask more questions." Similarly, faculty also encouraged the alumni's growth by teaching subject matters that either promoted discussion or chose topics that celebrated people of color.

> In middle school it all changed…my English teacher, Ms. C, focused on making sure we read books about racial identity development like Shubanu. I remember in that class we had to read a biography and write a report and I was intent on reading about someone who was Jewish. I did not think of myself about someone who was very religious or strict Jewish person. It was my way of separating at the time.

Another student recalls her identity promoted by "…exposing us to many different backgrounds, I am thinking of Mr. I and how we read Hiroshima and saw Seven Samurai. Exposing us to historical contacts that made you look outside of yourself." The curriculum choice to teach about Samurai warriors was mentioned by another student and had the effect of opening up the students to the racial identity development that their peers experienced as well which contributed to their own development.

In contrast to the sense of inclusion, several European American students observed that studying the history of injustice towards people of color perpetuated by European Americans made them uncomfortable, to the point of not wanting to listen. These alumni were among the group that saw themselves as part of a larger social justice cause. They noted that being aware, at such a young age, of how horrific European

American people could be to people of color was disheartening. This discomfort

challenged their racial identity in a negative way and was a contributing factor to feelings

of "white guilt" as one alumnus recalled. One alumnus summed up their collective

experience:

> As I was growing at MCS, I was there from beginning to end, I wrestled a
> lot with my sense of identity because even though I identify as Caucasian,
> my heritage is North African. So I remember hitting 5th grade…hitting a
> wall trying to indentify myself because I was learning all these awful
> things that happened in history. I did not want to identify as white I just
> thought it was the most awful thing that you could claim because of the
> history. As soon as I found out my parents were not from US I was off the
> hook. So I started to identify as Jewish which both parents are. Got a
> strong sense of who I am and open sense of how I identify. Because I was
> scared. They don't really sugar coat it for you. They get to the point. I
> remember reading "To Be a Slave" and Frederick Douglass's biography.
> Then poetry of Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston... Terrifying for
> kids to know there is hate in the world to that magnitude. I dealt with my
> own race because of that. Learned to accept things that scared me.
> Grappled with it. Tried to get away from having to identify as someone
> who had hate in them.

On the opposite end, a sole alumnus commented on how his racial identity

development was thwarted by the curriculum's social justice/civil rights perspective. He

felt excluded by not seeing more of himself reflected in the curriculum. He recalled

learning extensively about U.S. history as it relates to African Americans, but very little

of that history included the role of European Americans in a positive light.

> Feels like it (the curriculum) was missing a little something for white kids
> to learn how to figure out their own way without trying to imitate other
> people. The school's founder was probably heavily influenced by Emerson
> and Thoreau but I never heard about them.

Sub-theme 1.2 Inter-Religious Holiday Celebrations

Several alumni noted that one aspect of the curriculum related to their racial identity development was holiday celebrations. Starting with the youngest class (the 4/5's) through the 8th grade, all students enrolled in MCS participate in school wide celebrations for Christmas, Kwanzaa and Chanukah. Both male and female, alumni of color and European American alumni, included the holiday celebration in their assessment of why MCS made them feel comfortable with their own (and others) racial identities. One alumnus, when asked if the curriculum affected his sense of racial identity said, "Yes. Everything from all the holidays and learned different cultures. Yes, it was beautiful. And it came out through what we were doing and to share that and express that in some way." Another recalls that the religious inclusiveness gave her a greater understanding of race in general and ethnicity and religion in particular; it also made her appreciate the various diversities that New York City had to offer because she was able to interact with people that celebrated different holidays.

School culture theme 2: student demographic. All twelve alumni responded that the school culture, through the student demographic, was a critical contributor to their racial identity development. Specifically, they focused on the racial/ethnic and socio-economic student composition and saw these factors as both harming and empowering their racial identity development. The three sub-themes reflected upon were the socio-economic class-race divide, affirmation of one's racial identity through diversity and how diversity expanded cross-cultural understanding.

Sub-theme 2.1 Socio-Economic Class-Race Divide

Interestingly, two participants representing both genders and racial categories saw the class-race issues as a hindrance to their racial identity development. One alumnus struggled with the disconnect she felt between herself, as a lower-income student living in a housing project, and the more affluent African American students. This particular student felt "alienated and isolated" by the culture of MCS in part due to class and all of its trappings and in part to being mistaken for European American by her fellow students. The perceived class divide between herself and other students of color was another way in which she felt othered. She noted that "there were some Hispanics, one or two, who I was friends with and one good friend lived in the projects and we related, culturally we knew the same language." She observed that her isolation increased when she could not find other students of color and African Americans in particular with whom she could connect. For her, the class divide was a chasm too wide to bridge.

Another alumnus reported receiving the message that being affluent and European American were negative attributes at MCS. He saw poverty and "Blackness" as being attributes that were extolled and "the principles as they trickle down, in terms of the class dynamics where coolness and richness is not cool. Not cool to be rich and white." For him as an adolescent white boy, being "cool" was defined by the students of color, who tended to be less affluent than the white students. This "cool" factor damaged his sense of self because he did not feel empowered to be or express his full self, with all of his identities honored. He felt he had to try to hide his "Whiteness" in order to be accepted.

Because he could not disguise his physical characteristics, he started rapping as a way to find a place within the school culture where he felt accepted.

Sub-theme 2.2 Student Demographic Affirms Racial Identity Development

Five participants of varying racial categorizations recognized the diverse student body as an affirming factor in their racial identity development. The normative nature of a racially diverse student body made the alumni, especially the alumni of color, feel included and comfortable. They felt they had a place in the school and that was very affirming in a city and country where minority children's experience of "otherness" is common. The diversity reminded them that they were normal. One participant noted that she was one of four bi-racial students in her class of eighteen and that had a vital and positive impact on her racial identity. Her affirmation was seen in something as specific as the actual make up of the classes. She remarked that this diversity-as-normative environment informed her personal reality as a bi-racial girl and also her more global reality of the complexities of race.

Finally, the African American female alumni had a more extreme affirmation experience with racial diversity. She became more determined and adamant to identify as a Black person because of the diversity: she did not want people to mistake her attendance at a mixed-race school for "whiteness" (she is very light-skinned). The diverse student demographic inspired her to "…put my stake in the ground, declare that there is no mistake I am Black."

One alumnus responded "Good question. Something about feeling comfortable, I totally felt comfortable with my background and the mix of nationalities helped" (his

43

racial identity). European American alumni felt validated in the diversity because they

saw many of the students of color embrace their own backgrounds and they saw a role for

themselves within the diversity. For example, one respondent stated:

> My friend Aaron turned me more seriously onto rap. I always liked their
> style and how they dressed and I dressed like them… and their music…
> and talked more like them. It is great. I felt more comfortable.

Another alumnus noted that the race-based bonding he saw among the African

American male students made him more aware of his European American heritage in a

positive way.

One alumnus recalled that affirmation of her racial identity came in the form of

less teasing than she had experienced at her former school for being different. She states:

> …and more open discussions about race at school which did not exist
> when I left MCS. I think I was the only East Asian in the class from the
> 8/9's on and in other ways I would bring things up and it was very easy to
> do that. I could focus on something that related to me because of that.
> Comfort.

Sub-theme 2.3 Student Diversity Broadens Racial Identity

Three alumni labeled the diverse student body as an "important" factor in their

racial identity development because it broadened their racial sense of self. One alumnus

admitted she entered MCS with many stereotypes against other racial and ethnic groups.

The diverse student body helped challenge her own stereotypes and thus advance her

development. She shared a story from elementary school when an item of hers

disappeared one day. As she recalled, due to her stereotypes, she assumed an African

American student was the thief. In the end, the girl she suspected was not at fault and in fact the thief was not even a classmate. This advanced the alum's racial identity development by challenging her preconceived notions based on race and making her rethink the false attributes she assigned to people. She admits about her own belief system that she "had not made that racial connection." Her close proximity to African American students forced her to re-examine her own and others racial identities.

The other two alumni saw the diversity as important because it promoted their understanding of the unique experience of people of color living as minorities within a majority and challenged their privilege as European Americans. Through friendships with students of color, both alumni learned how people of color learn to navigate and function in a different world from European American people. For example, one alumnus told the story of walking her dog in Central Park with her African American classmate and being called a "nigger lover" by a white neighbor. The reaction of the European American alumnus was very different than that of her friend: the story teller was shocked and wanted to follow the woman to get retribution. But her friend said "She is a crazy old lady and you just have to let it go." The European American alumnus concluded her friend must have dealt with overt racism before because she acted less enraged and was better able to ignore the situation.

The other European American alumnus became friends with a mixed-race boy when they began MCS in the 4/5's class. This alum remembers going home to ask his parents about his friend and what it means to be mixed. "So when I was four I figured that out. So already that was pretty sophisticated starting point to have a friend that was mixed. They (the MCS students) are dealing with a set of issues that is a little more

nuanced." The student demographic broadened their perception of difference and allowed them to step into other's shoes and see situations from another's point of view.

School culture theme 3: faculty. Nearly half of the participants observed that the faculty played a critical role in their racial identity development. The support came in two areas: teachers forming special relationships with students and the racial/ethnic composition of the faculty.

Sub-Theme 3.1 Faculty Support Student's Racial Identity Development

Two African American alumni recalled a special relationship with one faculty member as crucial to their racial identity development. They felt this African American teacher took it upon himself to give special attention to them because they were African American and he saw them struggling to fit in. The male alumnus sums up their shared experience:

> Even though the entire faculty was very much as caring as all of us, Mr. I saw this Black child needing help to get into this world where he would need an education to succeed. More his general attitude and time and patience and extra care. Left an impression. A deep one. That I would find that kind of support and camaraderie in my own racial circles.

Sub-Theme 3.2 Faculty Demographic

The alumni expressed appreciation that the school's mission was reflected in the make-up of the teachers and this shored up the racial identity of both the European American students and the students of color. Having teachers that mirrored alumni's racial identity was a positive force in their lives and not only made the school's mission

more plausible in their eyes, but also helped the alumni feel normal and even encouraged regardless of their background. For example, one alumni believes

> I would say the faculty demographic (as the most important factor that contributed to his racial identity development.) Being able to bounce from having a White teacher one year and an Asian teacher another year and Black the next… Or a mix of those with the teaching assistants who would come in. That helped me to have a good mix of heroes in my teachers.

A European American alumnus reflected "Having people of authority, some who are black and white… I did not think about it. It seemed natural." This speaks to the normative power of having a mixed-race faculty: from an early age this alumnus saw examples of people of color in powerful positions, helping to prevent, decrease and/or challenge any racial stereotypes he may have developed.

Another alumnus noted that the diversity of faculty made the school philosophy of racial equality a living element of the school versus something artificial.

> One thing is that we were on the 5th floor and Ms. K who was white and Mr. I who was black, modeling of cooperation…going back and forth b/w people and backgrounds and style… if they had the same philosophy and if all the faculty was white that was a problem. But not how it was. An important reflection of living out the philosophy. Absolutely…if only of one background, if going with the majority, everything we have learned about respect and advocacy would have been odd if the faculty had all been from the dominant group.

Several alumni mentioned the positive effect of alternating teachers each year: in one year having a Puerto Rican teacher and the next a European American teacher. Not only was this normative for the school culture but also allowed students to see themselves (and others) reflected in an authority figure. One alumnus stated:

> Miss L. was the bomb. This year's teacher is White this one is Black, every year. Art class by a Puerto Rican, art class by a White South African and kids would be like, what, but you're African? I don't know in another

47

environment if this would be welcomed. In that work you end up breaking those barriers down.

Clearly the school's choice of faculty as a reflection of the student body played a significant part in the racial identity development of the participants. The alumni of color connected with the teachers of color in special and empowering ways; and the faculty demographic further inspired the European American students by aligning the faculty racial and ethnic composition with the school's mission and purpose.

Transition to High School

One question asked to each participant was whether, as adults, they currently had racially diverse friends. Their answers created a need for an additional category centered on the transition to life after MCS and how interaction with the "real world" of high school and beyond challenged their racial identity. The participants spoke passionately about the difficult transition to high school. Clearly they felt a strong need to report on this developmental stage in their lives as attested to by the commonality of their responses and the fact that they all answered an unasked question.

All of the alumni reported that because of the unique culture at MCS, the transition to high school was very complex and shocking. They all recall life at MCS as living in a "bubble" as one student termed the environment, a special world where racial issues were regularly discussed and addressed and minority students felt normalized in many ways.

Three sub-themes emerged related to the challenging transition: the lack of preparation for the racial complexities of high school, high school community segregation and homogeneity, and a forced re-examination of their racial identity.

Sub- theme 1.1 Lack of Preparation for Racial Complexities of High

School

Six alumni noted that they felt ill-prepared for the racial complexities of high

school and this negatively affected their sense of racial identity. While they valued and

appreciated the unique, family-like environment that MCS created, they quickly realized

that the rest of the world was not like that. The words "shock" and "not well prepared"

were used often to describe their transition to the high school environment. The shift

from MCS to high school was challenging at times resulting in anger and frustration. One

African American male observed

> Even beyond high school, realizing the complexity of racial interactions, I
> was not well prepared. Only in that my boarding school experience… that
> very utopian environment (at MCS) did not prepare me at all for a world
> where that was not the case. I did not have enough fortitude to be
> confident in who I was racially and culturally. It manifested itself in anger
> when I was at boarding school.

Another female explained:

> Had this dream in 7th grade that MCS would start a high school and we
> could never leave the bubble. I don't know how the school could do this
> but to prepare the students that life outside of MCS is not like life inside of
> MCS. It was a shock that was not expected. I spent my entire life since the
> 4-5's at MCS and that was a very different environment than MCS's. And
> that was tough. I know racism existed but in terms of my own identity.
> Being ¼ in class of 18 and for someone to say it is not going to be like this
> wherever you are going. Some tools, for an 8th grader may be hard but to
> somehow prepare us.

Another alumnus also speaks about the bubble's impact when she recalls

I moved right after 8th grade MCS to Westchester to Larchmont and went to a big public HS in Mamaroneck which was really segregated. I was really blown away and I felt like they lived in a make believe world and I have come to realize the world is more like that then what they created at MCS. A forced world, contrived. I don't feel like MCS prepared me for what I would face in the real world.

This lack of preparation and real world experience left many of the alumni disoriented once they entered high school. The feeling of shock was seen in various ways. For example, one female remembers "I was uncomfortable with walking in the cafeteria and seeing a part that the Black kids sat in and I was not going to sit with them because I am not Black and I was uncomfortable with it and I could not change it but I thought about it a lot." This type of scene would not have happened at MCS, in part due to its size but also because integration was a natural and expected component of life at MCS. Feeling discomfort in approaching African American students was rare for this alumnus and fostered an internal and external confusion she did not experience at MCS. A male alumnus recalls the experience that he and his MCS classmates lived through when he says "All of my friends went to high school and got their mind blown wherever they go. I think it takes a major adjustment. I don't know if there is a way to do a proper adjustment. But it is hard for people."

Lastly, one female participant was shocked by the lack of opportunity to replicate the kind of environment she experienced at MCS: "When I went to high school there were huge differences and it was harder to have the experience of being in a multiracial social scene because no one was making a point of having that happen." This quote also

reflects how ill-prepared she felt, as did many other alumni, for the complexities and realities of race relations outside of the MCS culture.

Sub-theme 1.2 Student Body Segregation and Homogeneity

The majority of participants, regardless of gender or racial categorization, recalled another shocking encounter faced in high school: segregation and student body homogeneity. These alumni believe that MCS may have impeded the progress of their racial identity development by not preparing them well for the segregation and homogeneity of their high schools. Clearly these realities did not mirror life at MCS and alumni spoke despondently about their shock in various ways. Several alumni despaired that they had little contact with people of color in their new settings, one stating "There were literally two Black people in my class in high school." Another remembered that her high school was "super segregated." And a third recalls that despite attending an integrated high school, the various racial/ethnic groups remained isolated from one another. One male alumnus remarked that at MCS the students learned a unique language: a way to communicate with a diverse group of people in a comfortable, safe way. But this language had no place at his high school because of racial segregation and dearth of students of color. He believed this experience may be true for the alumni of color also: they developed a level of comfort with European American youth but may have had to stifle that way of relating in their new school culture.

These experiences in high school were radically different from the racially diverse and open environment at MCS. The alumni all reported feeling ill-equipped to navigate this new world especially when they were educated to interact and communicate directly about issues of race and ethnicity within a very diverse environment.

Sub-theme 1.3 Alumni Challenged to Re-Examine their Racial Identity

Five alumni noted how the racially confusing high school environment challenged their racial identity they had constructed at MCS. The alumni found the new high school milieu an unwelcome place for the identities and world view they had begun to form while at MCS. They talked about being forced out of their comfort zone of racial openness and community and compelled to scrutinize their racial identity. All the lessons learned about living and communicating openly in a diverse community were challenged because their new schools did not have the same mission or purpose as MCS. One male student recalled "I remember when I went from MCS to Riverdale, which was predominantly White and Jewish it was really only then when I thought 'hey I'm White.' Because it was never an issue at MCS it was just the way it was." Another student had a more direct experience of being identity-challenged by his fellow middle-class, European American classmates:

> Yes, I had to re-think everything when I went to high school and dealing
> with him (his rich white friend) was a major part of that. I was kind of like
> "you guys just don't understand me" (at my high school) and they were
> like "shut up." I was like "I am from Harlem" and they were like "No
> you're not, you're from 110th street." And I was like "yeah….shit…ok,
> well, but you don't get it." Confusing. We construct these whole identities

during this pivotal part of our lives and they are not functional identity in high school.

By hearing overtly racist remarks, two alumni were challenged to re-examine their racial identities when they entered high school. A European American participant noted how racist epithets were common in his predominantly European American high school which drove him to view his new setting as "terribly racist" whereas MCS was striving to be the opposite. An African American male struggled in his new high school but the painful conflict actually made him form a stronger racial identity:

> It was interesting… when I left MCS and went to a boarding school in Pennsylvania… Old school traditional jacket and tie, forms instead of grades. Like "Dead Poets Society" or "Class." To say it was culture shock would be an understatement. Not thinking about race to having it thrust into my face on a daily basis. Hearing epithets for race that I did not even know HAD epithets. Made me realize how unique, for better or worse, MCS was. Kids would think nothing of calling me nigger to my face. No, I was not invited back for my senior year. I was a bit of a firebrand, a rebel, because of my ideology coming out of MCS. I railed against that boarding school. I wrote anti-racist poetry for the newspaper. Articles for the paper. Got me into trouble. I would not let it go. The anger of how are you separate races or talk about races. Felt so much that we were all people and should have been a non-issue. Reacted to the shock with anger.

Another participant, also challenged to re-think her identity, deepened her European American voice within the confines of a more racially homogenous high school in the Westchester suburbs when she stated:

> And you know they had yacht clubs and stuff I became mentally rebellious. They should have swastikas on the launches. Jews were not involved in these places and I did not see any Blacks either. Even today when I go to my friend's houses in the Hampton and I never see any black people and I ask my friends "why aren't there any Black people here?" Drives my friends crazy.

Finally, another participant alluded to finding a deepened sense of racial identity when she was challenged by a racist version of her people's history in a high school play:

> One experience in high school… I auditioned for the school play and I did not know about this until after I got the part. (It was) written in 1954 and focused on post WWII Japan and I complained to the theatre teacher and he did not take me seriously and I made a big to do about it and may have been as a result of my experience at MCS.

Summary

During this study, two major topics and related themes emerged from the interviews regarding the alumni's racial identity development: the influence of school culture and the challenging transition to high school after experiencing the MCS culture. The participants noted that these were the most salient topics that promoted and hindered their racial identity development both at MCS and in their subsequent life as adults.

It is interesting to note that one of the topics surfaced at the initiation of the participants not the researcher. All of the participants admitted to experiencing a surprisingly difficult transition to life after MCS, specifically when they encountered the high school community. This is relevant because participants report the process of racial identity development was hindered or thwarted by less welcoming educational environments where issues of racism, difference, prejudice were not tended to in an open fashion.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This chapter provides an analysis of the reviewed literature related to the two major topics from the previous chapter: how MCS school culture's contributed to alumni racial identity development and the alumni's unique transition to high school. The work of several theorists will help to illuminate the alumni's experiences with racial identity development while at MCS and during the transition to high school. I also examine MCS's role in the racial identity development using two stage models previously discussed: one for alumni of color and one for European American alumni. Along with the two major topics, I will suggest ways in which MCS can continue to foster racial identity development. The limitations to this study and areas that warrant further research will also be addressed.

Major Topic One: MCS School Culture

All of the alumni noted one salient topic that contributed to their racial identity development: school culture as seen in the curriculum, the faculty and student demographic. Although the majority of literature reviewed examines racial identity development in adolescence, it can still help illuminate why this theme was significant for the participants reflecting on their pre-adolescence and early adolescence at MCS.

Tatum (1997), Davies (2004), Quintana (2007), Phinney & Tarver (1988) agree that racial identity awareness is a focus of adolescence. The school culture at MCS, particularly in the curriculum and the faculty, was designed so racial identity awareness was an important aspect of the school's ethos and purpose. The alumni's experiences are congruent with the research into this developmental phase in that they could all point to the school culture as the most critical element of their racial identity development at the adolescent stage.

Derman-Sparks, Higa and Sparks (1980) argue that one determining factor in racial identity development is the type of community of which the adolescent is a member. The community, depending on its level of awareness, can send messages to the youth that determines how they feel about themselves and others' racial categorization. The majority of the alumni report that the community of MCS, namely the students and faculty, aided their racial identity awareness and development in a positive and thoughtful way. Those alumni report MCS as an affirming environment that allowed discussions of difference to occur naturally although sometimes not without tension. They also report that having friends of a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds has very much informed and influenced the perspective through which they view the world. Several alumni said MCS showed them that difference is natural, and it adds richness and

vibrancy to their lives. Having an ethnic/racial range of faculty members also gave a sense of normalcy and affirmation to the students. Several European American alumni commented that having a person of color in a leadership position is normal to them. The alumni also repeatedly returned to the special curriculum MCS has designed. A focus on social justice as a whole and various racial and ethnic histories and the Civil Rights Movement in particular, was an invaluable and unique education. Finally, the sense of community MCS was able to create gave the alumni a sense of family and belonging.

While the community message was essentially that racial and social equality and diversity are the norm, several European American alumni reported that despite an overall positive experience, the message they heard from the MCS community was that they were not "cool," and several experienced "white guilt" while at MCS. This message came both from the curriculum, with its focus on injustice perpetrated by their ancestors, and from their classmates of color. This phenomenon also speaks to Sadler's (1994) thesis that European American adolescents' level of comfort with their racial identity can be determined by their contact with youth of color. It seems that the increased level of contact the MCS European American alumni had with people of color had two outcomes, as reported by the alumni. One was an appreciation for the history and present day struggles of people of color and the second was that as European Americans, they shoulder some of the burden for these hardships.

Davies (2004) argues about one interesting facet of racial identity development for minority adolescents that did not hold true for the alumni of color in this study. He believes minority adolescents "…can be subject to social rejection based on categorical rather than personal basis" (Davies, 2004, p. 384) because their first taste of prejudice

often happens in elementary school. But at MCS no instances of prejudice or discrimination were recalled except for one student who was bullied and wondered if there was latent prejudice involved.

I believe that this absence of an encounter for the alumni of color during elementary school is due to the school culture, in particular the ethos that racism or discrimination will not be tolerated at MCS and furthermore, that students of color should feel comfortable and affirmed by the faculty, the curriculum and other students. Even though Davies (2004) espouses that an adolescent encounter can prompt a feeling of social rejection based on one's racial category, the vast majority of the alumni, regardless of their race, did not experience racial encounters until high school in the school environment.

Tatum (2004) asserts that African American adolescent's self-concept correlates, in part, with a curriculum that honors the accomplishments of their ancestors. All of the alumni, not solely those of color, remember MCS's curriculum as weighted heavily towards exploring the important roles that African Americans (and other people of color) played in the history of the United States, particularly during the Civil Rights Movement. But the alumni of color specifically recall the curriculum being useful for affirming their sense of self. The school curriculum follows Tatum's reasoning about how to help adolescent's of color develop a healthy sense of self.

Major Topic Two: Transition to High School

The second major topic that contributed to the alumni's racial identity development was the transition to high school. This transition was experienced as

58

difficult and shocking for the vast majority of the alumni; all note the challenge was due

to the abrupt shift from a multicultural setting to homogenous and segregated institutions.

A review of theories about transitions to high school sheds some light on the alumni's

experiences. It is important to note that one student purposefully chose a homogenous

setting because she felt it would advance her own racial identity development and thus

her transition to high school was predictable and relatively smooth.

Because this was an unanticipated topic that emerged during the interviews, it is

worthwhile exploring why the transition was a difficult. Ruble & Seidman (1996)

hypothesize that one reason why the participants struggled in their new environment can

be attributed to the developmental phase of their lives. They assert adolescents can

experience negative psychological effects during the transition to high school. They

attribute this to two elements of the transition: the timing (adolescence) and the

substantive nature of the change. The various new aspects of high school such as a larger

school, more demanding academics, social pressures, new teachers, and less or more

racially diverse environment can, according to Ruble & Seidman (1996), negatively

affect any student including the MCS alumni. The alumni's transitional issues centered

around the racial homogeneity and segregation of their new schools. This novelty was

accompanied by feelings of discomfort and shock. Their specific adjustment challenges

deserve further theoretical examination.

Research shows that all adolescents can experience psychological trials due to a

variety of aspects of their new school, but this study's participants noted their challenges

in relation to racial issues. Racial identity development theories help to explain the

particular experience of students, regardless of their racial categorization, transitioning

from a racially diverse elementary school to a homogenous and segregated high school. French et al., (2000) agree with "McGuire and McGuire's (1982) distinctiveness postulate, which predicts that in racially homogeneous schools, race and ethnicity will not be as salient as in racially heterogeneous schools" (French et al., 2000, p. 596). Based on the distinctiveness postulate, it is logical that the participants would receive a shock moving into their new high school since racial diversity and equity are at the core of the MCS's mission. The alumni, regardless of their racial categorization, report high school as a homogenous and segregated school culture where race did not hold as critical position as it did at MCS. This issue is at the crux of their struggle. It is because MCS was racially diverse and addressed the matter that the students were shocked when they entered an environment where homogeneity was the norm and a discussion of race the exception. The alumni felt unprepared to enter a world where one salient aspect of their elementary school experience was absent, but as McGuire & McGuire (1982) assert, this was predictable: a more racially homogenous school is less likely to focus on racial identity development as an institution like MCS.

Several participants reported hearing or being the target of racial slurs in their new high school environment which was another shock to their racial identities. Katz (1976) found that in racially diverse settings, prejudicial instances are unlikely when equality is the culture of that setting. Based on the alumni's interviews, the culture at MCS was generally open and welcoming to a diverse group of races and ethnicities and fostered an environment where people of color were affirmed. When the participants entered high school, the culture of equality and affirmation MCS promoted was reportedly absent and new experiences like racial slurs occurred.

French et al., (2000) argue that for adolescents the shift to high school "…may function as a race/ethnicity consciousness-raising event for both European American and Black students" (French et al., p. 598). Reports from the alumni bear this out: the majority commented despairingly about how homogenous and segregated their high schools were, how students from other races would isolate themselves and not appear open to cross-cultural friendships and how homogenous the faculty were (mainly European American). As a result of this encounter, the majority of the alumni commented that once they entered the high school milieu, they were forced to retreat and re-examine their racial identity and that of others. They report that this process was painful and shocking. This may be what is meant by Ruble & Seidman's (1996) "psychological adjustment." According to Phinney (1989) the alumni were on a normative racial identity developmental path: she argues that "…with age, students exhibit greater ethnic search" (French et al., 2000, p. 598) except these students had to re-examine an identity forged from a community steeped in racial openness and inquiry; they report being different from their classmates in this regard. The new, less welcoming environment may have been particularly harsh for the students of color who were the targets of prejudice since none reported hearing prejudicial remarks while at MCS.

Alumni of Color

Three students of color went to predominantly European American high schools. They may have experienced a unique transition because their racial identity was challenged by the lack of racial density in their majority European American high school. They mention various forms of discomfort from overt racism to generalized feelings of uneasiness and anxiety with a significantly smaller population of people of color. French

61

et al., (2000) mention work done by Garcia and Lega (1979) where they "…found that the ethnic density of the neighborhood was positively related to racial/ethnic identity" (French et al., 2000, p. 589). I argue this "density" can extend to one's school because for children, school is a significant aspect of their overall community. According to the authors, a very diverse school correlates to a positive racial identity.

Likewise, work by French et al., (2000) on "racial congruence" also explains the alumni of color's high school transition. "Racial/ethnic congruence is the extent to which an individual is racially similar to the aggregate of people residing within his or her residential neighborhood or school" (French et al., 2000, p. 589). They believe that being in a setting where one experiences low racial congruence negatively effects their racial identity development. This theory is concordant with the alumni reports of their uncomfortable experience transitioning from MCS to a racially homogenous high school.

French et al., (2000) note one potentially positive outcome that was evident in this study. Their research shows that students of color entering racially homogenous settings experience encounters (a racially consciousness-raising event) and as a result, become more comfortable in their racial identity. "…if the school transition serves as a race/ethnicity conscious-raising experience, both group esteem and exploration should increase. Unlike self-esteem, which should be negatively affected by a decrease in congruence, group esteem and exploration should be stimulated by a decrease in congruence" (French et al., 2000, p. 590). Several alumni of color expressed either overt racism or discomfort in their high school and as a result, choose to become more engaged and exploratory in their racial identity, maybe even more so than at MCS. They had a myriad of reactions to the less diverse setting from writing anti-racist prose for the school

paper to educating a teacher about prejudice in the curriculum. These examples correlate to the researcher's theory that group esteem and exploration can increase when students of color faced with a consciousness-raising experience.

Despite MCS's goals of racial and ethnic unity and finding comfort in diversity, all of the alumni interviewed experienced shock and anguish related to their racial identity development when they entered the very different world of high school. They suggested that MCS find ways to better prepare their students, especially those in 7th and 8th grade, for the harsh realities of racial identity issues faced outside of the MCS culture. In this way, the discordance between their identity development at MCS and life in high school would not seem so jarring.

MCS's Role in Alumni Racial Identity Stage Progression

MCS contributed to the alumni achieving various stages of the racial identity development models previously discussed. Because there are no racial identity development models specifically for middle childhood or adolescence, I am going to examine the contributions by using models by Cross (1995) (see Appendix F) for the alumni of color and Helms (1990) (see Appendix G) for the European American alumni. It is clear from the interviews that as adolescents, the alumni experienced various stages just as adults would. It is worth noting that Cross's model was originally designed for African Americans, however, I agree with French et al., (2000) who assert that the ethnic/ racial identity development models share many commonalities such as people beginning at a stage of racial unawareness or assimilation and progressing through to a positive sense of group membership. Thus for the purposes of this study, his model will be used for all alumni of color.

63

Cross asserted that most people of color begin at the "pre-encounter" stage which is classified by assimilating into European American culture and disparaging one's racial identity while elevating European American culture. If this is a common starting point, MCS aided the alumni of color by providing them with an environment where they received affirmation for their racial identity. This was accomplished by having diverse student and faculty bodies, openly talking about issues of difference and designing a curriculum that positively reflected their ancestries.

Cross's second stage is called "encounter." Usually this encounter is a negative experience with prejudice or racism resulting in an increased sense of self as a person of color. The alumni of color did not report these experiences happening at the school; it is possible that the affirming school environment, along with family support, bolstered them for any encounters faced outside of the school community.

Cross's third stage that is applicable to the alumni's experience is the "internalization stage." This stage is marked by a positive racial identity and pride in one's heritage which the alumni report experiencing while at MCS. Again, this was achieved by the alumni of color seeing reflections of themselves in the student body and the faculty and a curriculum designed to honor the accomplishments of people of color in the history of the U.S. and abroad. Cross's model is comprised of additional stages but the alumni interviews did not specifically speak to them. It is possible that the alumni of color are advancing through the remaining stages in their adult lives.

Janet Helms (1990) designed a similar status model for European Americans. Using her model, we can examine how MCS contributed to the racial identity development of the European American alumni. Her first status, like Cross's, is a

common starting point for European Americans. The "contact" status can be described as one in which European Americans are unaware of their racial categorization and its meaning in society. One of MCS's goals was to create a racially integrated and unified school. The alumni report that an integrated environment helped the European American students be more aware of their race because they were involved in classes and discussions where issues of difference were the focus. The curriculum centered around social justice and in part, the role that European Americans have played in the history of the U.S. This educational spotlight allowed the European Americans to become more aware of their racial heritage and the complex meaning it holds in the history of our country.

Helm's second status, "disintegration", occurs when European Americans begin to experience confusion about their racial group membership and the accompanying moral dilemmas; some alumni called this "white guilt." European American alumni at MCS did note experiences congruent with this stage. MCS attempted to alleviate this natural tendency by reminding the alumni that they are not responsible for the historical decisions of other European Americans and empowering them to contribute to social justice for all oppressed. In addition, an attempt was made to spotlight European Americans who contributed to the social justice movements in our country. Helms' model contains three more statuses but the alumni's experience did not speak to those. It is possible that they are in the process of moving through the remaining statuses as adults.

How MCS Can Further Help to Facilitate Racial Identity Development

The study's findings show that MCS promotes racial identity in their students in a variety of ways. All of the alumni reported on three salient methods to support their racial

identity development: the faculty, the curriculum, and student demographic. MCS should continue to recruit faculty and instructors from diverse backgrounds and maximize student's exposure to diverse authority figures as this increases student's positive racial identity through having successful mentors of similar racial backgrounds as well as dismantling stereotypes.

Furthermore, MCS should continue to promote a curriculum centered on social justice. Alumni reported this gave them a unique sense of their roles in the world as people who could use their intellect and power to help those less fortunate. The curriculum helps students to be aware of the historical power imbalances and empowers them to work to eradicate these differences. Several alumni suggested expanding the curriculum beyond the Civil Rights Movement as the main social justice focus to include more contemporary topics such as racial profiling. MCS could consider implementing a broadened curriculum to reflect more current event issues but still maintain the social justice focus.

Finally, MCS should maintain its focus on student diversity in all forms. Elements of the school, like the sliding scale fee, assist in maintaining the diverse student demographic which is a salient factor in the racial identity development of both the students of color and the European American students. For the students of color is can be an affirming aspect of the school and for the European Americans it broadens their social community to include people who might otherwise be excluded. Like the faculty and curriculum, the student demographic also fulfills the missions of the school to be an educational institution whose purpose is unity and racial/ethnic integration.

There are two additional areas in which MCS can make improvements to better serve their students and alumni. The first area for attention is around socio-economic class. The majority of alumni reported this issue was present in their MCS experience but meaningful exploration of class led by the faculty or instructors was absent. Because the focus of the school centers on racial identity and social justice discussions concerning class inequalities both within the MCS community and without are needed to provide a more complete experience for the students and one where more of their identities are examined. Attention to class inequalities can be discussed within the context of the curriculum and social relationships between students and faculty and among students. Either way, the school could broaden the students' understanding of economic inequalities by highlighting the issue in a more intentional way.

The second area the alumni noted as faulty was in how the school prepared them for the racial complexities of the "real world" as many alumni referred to life outside of MCS. They reported that MCS created a bubble-like atmosphere in their quest for diversity and racial parity. And while all of the participants were immensely grateful for MCS's mission and dedication to promote racial justice and equality, they all wish they were more prepared for how different life in high school (and beyond) was going to be. One alumnus suggested the 7th and 8th graders be exposed to graduates who return to the school for an information session about some of the challenges faced by students who attend MCS where the messages on the inside are not the same ones relayed in the external world. At the same time, however, it is clear that MCS is contributing to fostering a more sophisticated set of tools and racial identities among its alumni that prepares them for being leaders in challenging racism, stereotypes and social injustice in

67

our society. Finding mechanisms for students to express these tools could be a goal of the school and could be accomplished in many ways: alumni events that focus on confronting racism, guidance towards schools and youth organizations with strong roots to social justice and multi-ethnic compositions, and more connections fostered between the students and adult members of the school community to discuss racism and social justice on a personal and societal level. Due to the uniqueness of the MCS mission, over the years MCS has developed relationships with supporters and benefactors, many of whom are connected to the school but not directly as parents. The school could host a series of discussions with these adults to discuss the real world racism, prejudice and discrimination faced that they have faced. This could be in addition to the gatherings with more recent alumni and would add another layer of real world education for the current students.

Limitations of the Study

This study had several limitations. One was the small sample size. MCS is a small institution but in future research, a larger sample size may add more validity to the findings. The larger sample if taken solely from MCS, could help the school understand how better to help their students transition to high school. Another limitation was socio-economic class as a demographic factor. Several alumni mention the intersection of class and race as a salient factor in their identity.

The study is also limited because it focuses solely on an independent school in a major metropolitan area. Further research could examine the same topic but in public schools in a variety of settings: suburban, rural and urban. Even though MCS has a

sliding scale tuition program based on income, attending independent school is still seen as a privilege for most Americans.

Suggestions for Further Research

One area for further research is what mechanisms can be put into place to help students of all races better weather the rocky transition to high school. In addition, how can we help students of color transition into racially homogenous settings? Likewise, are racially homogenous and segregated school settings the best for students of color? I am curious if their forced examination of their racial identity can be had in a less traumatizing way. Additional research could also be done to discover if various racial/ethnic groups have similar experiences entering racially homogenous high schools depending on the demographic of their elementary school. As previously mentioned, exploring the intersection of how socio-economic class and race contribute to one's racial identity is another area of future research.

Finally, research about the racial identity development of middle school is lacking, specifically related to the stage models. Additional research could be conducted that includes designing stage models for the racial identity development of middle school students just as we have for adults of various races and ethnicities.

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Appendix A

Data Collection Instrument

1. How did attendance at MCS impact your racial identity development (RID)?

    a. How did it help you become more aware of your race?

    b. Did it make you more comfortable or uncomfortable with your race?

    c. Did it make you more comfortable interacting with people of varying

        races both inside and outside of the MCS environment?

2. What aspects of MCS contributed to your RID?

    a. Faculty and staff demographics

    b. Student demographics

    c. Parental involvement

    d. Curriculum (content of the subjects taught)

  e. The Farm

3. What aspects of MCS inhibited your RID?

  a. Faculty and staff demographics

  b. Student demographics

  c. Parental involvement

  d. Curriculum (content of subjects taught)

  e. The Farm

4. How did MCS influence the development of your RID in terms of how the school addressed issues of racism, prejudice, discrimination, and name calling?

5. Was the process of RID experienced similarly or different across races?

6. Do you currently have friends outside of your racial group?

Appendix B

Smith HSR Approval Letter

December 28, 2009

Dear Malikkah,

Your second set of revisions has been reviewed and all is now fine. We are glad to give final approval to your study. The reason you don't ask demographic questions early on is that you're not supposed to get any information from people beyond what you need for screening until they have signed a Consent.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Maintaining Data: You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Good luck with your project. I'm glad you asked that last question. It's one of the most interesting and revealing, I would think.

Sincerely,

Ann Hartman, D.S.W.
Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Kate Didden, Research Advisor

Appendix C

MCS Alumni Recruitment Letter

Dear MCS alumni,

From time to time, MCS is approached by someone interested in conducting research about the impact of the school. These requests are reviewed carefully and are supported only when they have the potential to benefit the researcher and the school, and to expand our knowledge in general. It is a rare pleasure to have such a request come from a graduate.

I am writing to introduce you to a research project proposed by Malikkah Rollins (Class of 1981). She has designed research that will produce a thesis for her Master's in Social Work at Smith College on a topic of mutual interest. It will take place in early 2010. She proposes to explore the impact MCS has had on the racial identity of its alumni. She will interview 12-15 of alumni of color and White alumni using a series of questions designed to learn more about the variety of experiences our graduates have had over the years. We are asked about this topic repeatedly, especially as the United States seeks to understand a transforming identity as "Post-Racial" America. As a result, we have given the study our institutional backing.

Malikkah's contact information is below. If you would like to participate, please contact her directly by email or phone. She tells me the time commitment from alumni will be minimal: a one hour interview (at your convenience either in person or on the phone), and possibly some follow-up questions on the phone.

Please support her research so we can better learn how our mission, our long held practice of enrolling racial diversity, and curriculum that engages questions about identity affect our alumni.

Please Reply By: February 1, 2010

Sincerely,

Michele Sola, Director

Appendix D

Informed Consent Letter

Dear Participant,

My name is Malikkah Rollins and I am a graduate student at the Smith College School for Social Work in Massachusetts. I also attended MCS, having graduated in 1981 after eight years at the school.

I am writing to request your voluntary help with a research project I am doing for my Smith Master's thesis. I hope to interview MCS alumni to gather their views about how attending MCS, a multicultural independent school, affected alumni racial identity. The research findings may be used for presentations and publications.

The interviews will last approximately 1-1.5 hours and can be scheduled at your convenience in terms of time, date and location (one likely option is at MCS) or they can be conducted over the phone; there is a chance I may need to ask follow-up questions which we can also schedule at your convenience and would likely be conducted over the telephone. I plan to conduct the interviews between January and March, 2010. For purposes of accuracy, I am requesting that the conversations be tape recorded. Within the thesis or for future articles or presentations, confidentiality will be maintained. I will store all signed consent forms and addresses in a locked cabinet during the course of the research project. The contents of the conversations (and of the tapes) will only be heard by me (or a professional transcriber, who will sign a confidentiality pledge). I promise to ensure confidentiality concerning participant's identity. Per federal guidelines, all data will be kept in a secure location for 3 years, after which time it will be destroyed. Participation in this project is voluntary and you can withdraw at any point and refuse to answer any questions. If you choose to withdraw, all material related to your participation will be destroyed and you must withdraw in a written form to me either via email or to my home address. If they choose to withdraw, written notice must be received by April 30th, 2010.

The MCS administration is very supportive of this project and hopes to learn more about the possible value the school culture has on graduates of all races. Potential benefits for participants are a greater sense of how being educated in a multicultural environment helped to shape your sense of self in regards to race; this project may clarify the choices

some alum have made in their lives based on an early experiences with racial and ethnic diversity.

Possible risks associated with participation are possible emotional discomfort as you reflect on your sense of racial identity in relation to MCS. I will provide participants with a list of referral sources to utilize if you would like to further explore any topics that emerged through our conversation.

No financial compensation will be involved except I will provide Metro cards for transportation purposes and (depending on location) I will provide beverages and snacks. If the location is at the school, I will be able to provide childcare at no expense to the participant.

If you have questions or concerns about your participation in the project, feel free to contact me via email me at or the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee at 413-584-7974.

Your signature indicates that you have read and understand the above information and that you have had the opportunity to ask questions and the study, your participation, and your rights and that you agree to participate in the study.

_____   _____

Your signature   Date

_____   _____

Researcher signature   Date

Thanks for your participation in this project. Feel free to keep a copy of this form for your records.

Malikkah Rollins

Appendix E

List of mental health referrals for study participants

The following websites have links to licensed clinicians who can be of service if you feel the need to speak to someone about issues that have arisen as a result of participating in this study:

1. National Association of Social Workers: http://www.socialworkers.org/

2. The American Psychological Association: http://www.apa.org

3. Association of Black Psychologists: www.abpsi.org

4. Black Psychiatrists of America: www.blackpsychiatristsofamerica.com

5. National Psychiatric Association: http://www.psych.org/ (this site has links to numerous national mental health resources).

6. Many states also have a department or division of mental health. Contact your state or local government office.

7. This U.S. Department of Health and Human Services site has links to mental health resources specific to Latinos/Latinas: http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/cre/resource3.asp

8. This U.S. Department of Health and Human Services site has links to mental health resources specific to Asians: http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/cre/resource2.asp

Appendix F

William Cross's Model of Black Identity Development (1995)

1. <u>Pre-encounter</u>   Assimilation into Euro-American culture, a devaluing of being African American or valuing of being White.

2. <u>Encounter</u>   Marked by an experience (encounter) that shocks individuals into new awareness of being African American. Motivation to seek an African American identity.

3. <u>Immersion/Emersion</u>   Withdrawal from dominant White culture, immersion in African American culture, pride in being African American, anti-White views. Eventual leveling off of anti-white views and ability to interact with white community.

4. <u>Internalization</u>   Characterized by inner security and positive sense of being African American, confidence and pride in racial identity.

5. <u>Internalization/
Commitment</u>   Individuals have increased their commitment to social justice for the African American community.

Appendix G

Janet Helm's Status's of White Racial Identity Development (1990)

1. <u>Contact:</u>   Obliviousness or denial of their whiteness as

meaningful.

2. <u>Disintegration:</u>   Confusion from consciously acknowledging one's White membership and moral dilemmas occur as a result of that acknowledgement.

3. <u>Reintegration:</u>   A belief in the innate superiority of white people and oneself as a member of that group.

4. <u>Pseudo-independence:</u>   The intellectual awareness of the privileges of being white.

5. <u>Immersion/Emersion:</u>   White individuals begin to deliberately explore what it means to be white and help others redefine

their whiteness.

6. <u>Autonomy:</u>   Internalized non-racist identification with white group based on a realistic analysis of strengths and weaknesses of white culture and group membership.