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# Everyday Racial Interactions for Whites and College Students of Color

Leslie H. Picca

It is popularly believed that we are in a postracial society, highlighted by the election of a black U.S. President. The generation of young college students today is often characterized as celebrating diversity, for whom colorblindness is the norm (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Gallagher, 2003). Legal segregation is ancient history for them (and even for some of their parents), and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream that we "will not be judged by the color of [our] skin but by the content of [our] character" appears to be a reality. They can rattle off successful people of color and role models in numerous facets of social life, from Tiger Woods to Condoleezza Rice to Oprah Winfrey.

On the surface, it seems that young adults today are in a better position to address issues of racial relations than past generations. Young adults are better equipped at dealing with public conversations: They have been raised with multicultural programming in schools and diverse images in the media, and they know how to not appear racist. Especially during President Barack Obama's first presidential campaign, he achieved "celebrity status" (often used against him by the opposing camps) among many white young adult supporters. Clearly this indicates the level of acceptance among young people today that we would not have seen decades ago.

While in the recent past overtly racist comments were tolerated and expected, now social pressures exist to avoid such racist statements (Feagin, 2006). However, subtle measures and tests in psychology and social psychology suggest a nonracist mask is covering an intact racist core, and that whites regularly underestimate the extent of their prejudice (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000; Kawakami, Dunn, Karmali, & Dovidio, 2009). There is much social science literature on modern racism or colorblind racism: negative racial

attitudes that haven't disappeared, they've just gone underground (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Carr, 1997; Dovidio & Gaertner, 1991). Specifically, many argue that racism is hidden, subtle, and invisible, even if its consequences are not.

In order to further investigate this underground or subtle racism, Joe Feagin and I asked over 1,000 college students of all racial backgrounds across the U.S. to keep a journal or diary detailing their everyday racial interactions. We sought to examine if and how race impacts college students' daily lives. We published a book, *Two-Faced Racism: Whites in the Backstage and Frontstage* (Picca & Feagin, 2007) that examines the accounts of the 626 white college students; we're currently writing a second book on the experiences of the more than 400 students of color. The college students were recruited from across the United States, oversampling in the southeast and midwest, and the majority of the students were in the traditional age range (18 to 25).

Numerous white students in the sample said that racism was less of a problem among their generation, who were more accepting. Many white students wrote, "Racism will die when Grandpa dies," indicating that their generation is remarkably different than previous generations. However, analyzing the journals reveals that this is far from true. Grandpa's racism is still alive and well—it just looks different for young adults today.

We utilize the dramaturgical theoretical framework of the *backstage* and *frontstage* to illustrate how racial relations are impacted by what Erving Goffman would refer to as "the audience" (Goffman, 1959). Goffman states that in dramaturgy (dramatic composition for the theater) people use impression management and employ certain techniques in order to sustain a performance as actors on a stage. There are two structural features in dramaturgy: the frontstage and the backstage. In the frontstage, individuals or performance teams will perform a role that is appropriate for the audience to see. A classroom is likely a frontstage setting where the students (and faculty), are projecting an image that is appropriate for the setting (such as that of a good student who is paying attention and writing notes as the instructor speaks—even if the student is actually writing down a grocery list). The backstage is more informal; it is where performers can violate their expected norms, and also prepare for future frontstage interactions. Readers who have experience working in retail or service occupations have often experienced the differences between the frontstage interactions with the customers compared to the (often more relaxed) backstage among just coworkers. In this research project, we can examine how this frontstage and backstage setting can be applied to racial interactions.

## JOURNALS BY WHITE COLLEGE STUDENTS

We found striking differences between interactions among whites only (family and friends, but also coworkers, employers, and strangers), compared to interactions involving people of color. Most young whites know it is not acceptable to be racist. In their student journals, when whites were around people of color (what we refer to as the frontstage), their interactions were characterized by a colorblind, nonracist appearance. White students would perform to prove they weren't racist, such as by acting extra polite, and avoiding anything that could be connected to race. However, when whites were in the company of other whites (the backstage), these frontstage pleasantries could be relaxed and openly contradicted. Racial and racist interactions were not only tolerated, but often sustained and encouraged.

The following account written by Becky, a white college student, illustrates the conflicting frontstage and backstage dimensions. Becky describes an interaction with some of her former high school friends who are all white:

[My friend] Todd asked how school was going and then asked when I was going to let them come down and visit. I said, "I don't know guys, one of my suitemates is black, you would have to be nice to her." All the guys said, "Black!?!!" Like they were shocked that I could actually live with someone of another color. Then David said, "Now why would you go and do that for?" Then they agreed that nothing would be said if they came to visit and then started to talk about some fight they had gotten into with some black kids in town. The conversation was short lived and I wasn't surprised by their comments or their reactions to Lisa (my suitemate). They are all really nice guys and I think if they came to visit that they would be respectful of Lisa. I know, however, that they would talk and make fun later about me living with a black girl. I know this summer I'm going to get shit from them about it. (Becky)

Becky's white friends openly admitted that they would be polite to the black woman to her face in the frontstage, fulfilling the expectations of a nonracist white public identity. However, in the all-white backstage, the men can behave very differently. In a secure all-white setting, the men can mock Becky and give her a hard time. The men clearly possess a level of awareness that their backstage interactions are inappropriate for the frontstage since they agree not to say anything.

In our data sample of white college students' journals, the most frequent theme that emerged was whites using racial joking in the backstage. Hundreds of whites reported regularly telling or hearing racist jokes in white-only groups. Consider the following journal entry written by Debbie, who was watching a movie with her four white friends when one of the white males made an aggressively racist joke:

When we heard the joke, my one roommate Lillian said she thought that joke was "terrible." My other roommate Mike said, "It's true though." We all yelled at him and said he was the worst, etc., etc. However, none of us was really mad or really offended by what he said and we probably should have been. Instances like this make me realize that people have gotten too used of people making jokes about minorities. We are too willing to accept people making inappropriate comments about minorities. I feel like I'm so used to people saying jokes like that, that I don't even take them seriously anymore. The strange thing is that I don't think any of my friends are actually racist, they just sometimes say inconsiderate things that they don't really mean. (Debbie)

Like hundreds of whites in our sample, Debbie comments on the normalization of hearing racist jokes by her white friends. Many of the jokes are said in white-only social networks, and in private conversations away from people of color. Due to spatial racial segregation (notably in neighborhoods and schools), most whites said they largely interacted only with people who looked like them. They didn't have to worry about getting caught telling racist jokes. For many whites, using racist epithets is not a problem; it only becomes a problem if it is said in the wrong context. This tells us that there are acceptable contexts for using racist epithets, such as when the target is not around.

Debbie clearly recognizes that such racist humor is wrong, yet, no white person here gets offended by the jokes. There are no negative consequences for their actions—racism is just part of the fun. Examining the media context that young people are immersed in illustrates the supposedly light-hearted nature of racism. They listen to comedians who joke about racism. The hip-hop music that whites listen to regularly

features racist epithets (Hurt, 2006). Comedy and music are powerful tools to subvert the racial hierarchy; however, with an uninformed audience, it can be a dangerous method of perpetuating the same old stereotypes. For example, comedians like Dave Chappelle often utilize racial stereotypes and racist epithets in order to dismantle their power. However in the white student journals, whites would often argue, "If Dave Chappelle can say the word nigger, why can't I?" without recognizing that the social context matters. The meaning changes if a racist epithet is used to perpetuate the racial hierarchy versus to subvert the racial hierarchy.

Everything around today's youth is digital, immediate, and appearance-oriented. Like the quick tap of a smartphone or computer tablet, there is a limited depth of processing that dominates the media world. This lack of reflection translates into racial interactions and stereotypes, where jokes are supposedly just jokes. In the backstage, there never has to be any deeper acknowledgement or questioning why making fun of people of color is normalized. There is no consciousness about the meaning or consequences of their fun. We can blame the whitewashed education that children receive, where they have minimal understanding of our racial pasts, and certainly no comprehension of how this legacy still has immediate effects today (Lewis, 2003). However, they understand enough as evident in the behavior change when they are around people of color. Like previous generations, young people today still largely interact in racially segregated spaces (Massey, Rothwell, & Domina, 2009). Many whites commented they didn't have to practice frontstage pleasantries but could remain in their comfortable backstage settings.

Debbie, like most whites in our sample, claims that her friends who tell racist jokes are not actually racist. For many whites, it isn't viewed as a racial slur if it isn't said directly to a person of color. For many young whites, real racists are the Klansmen who wear white robes and burn crosses; these white college students are just having fun. Of course, we know the subtle and hidden forms of racism behind the scenes can be just as damaging (some argue more) compared to the overt and in-your-face forms (Yamato, 1987). Racism is often reduced to the individual actions of a few bigots, rather than as systemic and institutionalized into every social institution. Racial relations impact every major decision a person makes—and how you're treated: where you live, what schools you attend, where you work and shop, the quality of health care and well-being, interactions with the police (Blank, 2009). Part of white racial privilege is the luxury to take their advantageous experiences as the norm, and deny that racial injustices (beyond those perpetrated by racial extremists like the Klan) still exist today (Johnson, 2006).

Certainly, white college students are not inventing racial stereotypes or racist jokes. They rely on stereotypes that have been passed down through generations, and stereotypes that were created (by whites) to legitimize slavery, legal segregation, lynchings, and other atrocities. There is an intergenerational component that has been inherited by young people, even if they claim to celebrate diversity. What young whites call fun in a private backstage has real and serious consequences that preserves and perpetuates old racist stereotypes, contributing to and maintaining larger racial hierarchies (as evident in higher education, health care, the legal system, housing) that whites have the privilege to ignore (Collins, 2000). There never has to be any acknowledgement of how their everyday micro-interactions sustain the macro-interactions of institutional racism.

On the whole, the accounts from the white college students focused on backstage interactions that could relax frontstage expectation. Backstage joking was the most prevalent and common theme reported in the tens of thousands of journal narratives we collected from white college students. Some white students speculated in their journals that “it must go both ways” where they suspected that students of color sit around telling racist jokes against whites. A white student, Samuel, notes in his journal after hearing racist jokes in an all-white context:

One of my buddies just told us [a joke] with a racial punch line. It was odd to look at such a normal occurrence as a sociologist, but I realized that everyone was laughing. It was then that I realized how much we take our whiteness for granted. Then I got thinking whether people of color tell white jokes, and concluded that they must, but that they’re probably about specific white people, like southerners, etc. When I asked my friends what they thought, one said sarcastically, “I’m sure they do; we did oppress them for 150 years<sup>1</sup> [sic]!”

In addition to collecting the narratives of over 600 white students across the country, we also collected over 400 journals written by students of color. The next section describes some of the prevalent themes written by these students, which are strikingly different than the journals written by their white peers.

## JOURNALS BY COLLEGE STUDENTS OF COLOR

While it’s true that there are some accounts of students of color making antiwhite comments as Samuel (above) suggests, the nature of the comments is vastly different as they are not nearly as common, vicious, or damaging. First, the comments are not nearly as frequent as the antiblack, anti-Latino, anti-Arab American, and anti-Asian comments we see in the white student journals. Many of the white students who kept a journal reported their surprise at how often they heard racist comments that often slip under the radar of consciousness unless they are asked to pay attention. For the students of color, there was no parallel reaction, as very few of them proportionally wrote about antiwhite, or anti-other-racial-group comments.

Second, the overwhelming majority of antiwhite comments are based on a reaction to a specific event. For example, one black woman reported seeing a white woman leave a public bathroom without washing her hands, and made a comment to her friends that “white people are dirty.” Although generalizing negative comments to an entire group is never a good thing, there is a difference when the comment initiates from direct experiences (as is the case with many students of color) compared to common stereotypes and a lack of direct interaction (as is the case with many white students) (Hraba, Brinkman, & Gray-Ray, 1996; Pettigrew, 1985).

Finally, the comments made by students of color lack the institutional support to have any real negative consequences. The pejorative words used against whites are not equal to the pejorative words used against people of color. The stereotypes we have for whites (such as white people cannot dance, or play certain sports) do not have nearly as many negative consequences as the stereotypes we have for people of color

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<sup>1</sup>Samuel’s friend either illustrates a lack of knowledge on racial history or a tendency to minimize it. Oppression under the American slave trade and enforced legal segregation lasted 360 years, not 150 years.

(such as blacks are criminal and lazy, and Latinos are all illegal immigrant Mexicans), which have very real damaging consequences, such as on the job market or in securing housing (Lipsitz, 1995). For example, a number of white students wrote in their journals about instructions they received at work from their white bosses and managers to discriminate against people of color (see Picca & Feagin, 2007, chapter 4), such as not accepting their employment applications or monitoring them for possible shoplifting. In the journals we received from students of color, none of them discussed discriminating against whites, which is not surprising as people of color often lack the institutional support to enact it.

The everyday journals collected by students of color were vastly different because the accounts focused on differential treatment that they (or their racial minority friends) experienced. Especially true for students of color attending a predominately white institution, the students wrote about their interactions with campus police, with white professors and students (at social gatherings, in the classroom, in public campus spaces), and around the campus community such as at work. In our sample, white students regularly interacted in white-only social spaces away from people of color in a secure backstage. This was not true for students of color who had fewer opportunities in the backstage away from whites (Feagin, 1991). A black male wrote about his experiences attending a party during their university's parents weekend (which often involves parents socializing and drinking with the college students):

I went to a house party with my white roommate to link up with my other white roommate and some friends (all white). We arrived at the party and there were about 100 people of all ages drinking and enjoying each other's company. I didn't feel out of place at all until this somewhat random person, which was talking to our group of parents and friends, stopped mid-conversation and asked "are you the token black person." I was shocked and had no clue as to how to positively respond. I thought to myself that I can't be a token black person because I was there on my own free will. I thought that regardless of me being there, the party would be the same. Even though I was telling myself that I wasn't the token black person, I jokingly told them that I was because I didn't know what else to say that wouldn't take from or negatively add to the party. I just internalized my feelings and eventually went home. (Len)

Students of color attending non-HBCUs (historically black colleges and universities) often remarked upon being the only or one of a few racial minorities in their college classes or at parties. Their presence at the university and achievements such as scholarships and selection into prestigious positions, were often attributed to fulfilling a racial quota rather than to individual merit and hard work (Wise, 2005). Additionally, there is typically an added layer of surveillance placed upon students of color compared to white students (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; McIntosh, 1998). For example, students of color often remarked that whenever the topic of race is mentioned in class, the other students will immediately turn to look at their reaction.

As noted previously, white students often made racial jokes in private backstage settings, but it was not uncommon for whites to "slip" and say it in the company of people of color (see chapter 5 of *Two-Faced Racism* [Picca & Feagin, 2007]). The reaction of students of color, who likely did not ask to be placed in an awkward situation, can have serious consequences for future interactions. Consider Len's account of being referred to as the "token black person" above. Len could have reacted in anger, by laughing it off, educating the white person, or simply walking away. Len was put on

the spot. He mentioned that he was in such disbelief of the comment that he did not pursue the conversation further. Whatever Len decided might have had consequences for how white students treated him in the future: confronting a comment might make him seem too sensitive about racial issues, yet ignoring the comment or laughing it off might be perceived as accepting that hurtful comments were no big deal (Frye, 1998). Len also noted that he did not want to disrupt the social situation so he internalized his feelings and left. Many scholars have documented the impact of the additional stress and negative health consequences in dealing with racist interactions (Feagin & McKinney, 2003; Randall, 2006).

While many white college students believe racism is not a significant issue at their campus or nationwide (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996), many students of color in our sample detailed painful narratives of hostile racial interactions. Alex, a biracial man, begins one of his journal entries, describing the frequency which he is referred to as a racist epithet:

This is one of those sad and angry nights for me. Tonight marks the third time since the beginning of the school year that I've been called a nigger by a bunch of white students on a Saturday night, or weekend more in general. At first I used to wonder where they actually take the time in their heads to separate me from everyone else by the color of my skin. I used to just blame alcohol consumption for their obvious ignorance and racist attitudes, but I have since stopped trying to make excuses for them. . . . Sometimes it seems that if I am around all white people, then I become nothing more than a token Black "exhibit" for their amusement. . . . The saddest thing however, is that these people, these COLLEGE STUDENTS are supposed to be the supposed *crème de la crème*, the future business and political leaders. They are supposed to be the brightest of the brightest, but then again I guess ignorance can't be masked by book smarts. (Alex)

The pain and sadness are especially apparent in Alex's narrative, which has a very different feeling than the lighthearted nature of many of the white students' journal entries. In their journals, most whites reported reserving racial comments for the backstage, away from the presence of people of color. However, Alex reminds us that even in the frontstage, people of color may still be confronted with racist comments, which may increase at certain times of the day or week. Alex notes that at evenings and weekends, the frequency of racist comments increases, which are also the times when college students are more likely to consume alcohol excessively. Indeed, in the white students' journal entries, many pointed at alcohol use as an excuse for racist comments and interactions. Alcohol is frequently used as an excuse by whites to downplay racist activity. In our book, Joe Feagin and I discuss "two-beers racism" (Picca & Feagin, 2007, p. 72), where consuming significant amounts of alcohol can relax the social pressures against openly expressing racist ideas. While alcohol can loosen inhibitions, it cannot create racist sentiments that are not already there.

Alex refers to the social construction of racial categories when he wonders why he is separated from his peers based just on his skin color. In the social construction of race and ethnicity, race is not a fixed biological fact, but is a social agreement. While biology determines our physical phenotypes, it is society that determines the meanings we give to arbitrary traits like skin color, eye shape, and hair texture. Earlier in his journal, Alex notes that he has one black parent and one white parent. He identifies himself as biracial, even though he writes that he is often identified as just a "token Black exhibit." Alex is also referred to as one of the harshest of racist epithets,



a term with a long and violent history that is usually reserved for blacks (Kennedy, 2003). Racial categorizations depend on not only what an individual identifies for him or herself, but also depend upon what identities other people impose upon the individual as well.

Racist individuals who use the n-word often conjure up the image of a neo-Nazi skinhead or uneducated working-class person (the latter type best characterized by the 1970s television character, Archie Bunker). Alex emphasizes that the persons instigating racial insults are educated, college students who make up the next generation of our nation's leaders. While education is believed to be the great equalizer of racial relations, many scholars suggest that our nation's schools maintain and perpetuate racial inequalities both in structure and in content (Lewis, 2003; Loewen, 1995).

In their journals, students of color in our sample reported that they were often assumed to fit the stereotype of their racial group. Asian students were asked by classmates they did not know to help with math homework. Latinos were asked if they were in this country legally. Students of Middle Eastern descent were referred to as terrorists. Many black men wrote about their interactions with campus police, where they were assumed to have engaged in violent crimes, or presumed by other students to be untrustworthy. For example, Brian wrote about whites, especially white women, who openly avoid interacting with him on their university campus:

This morning I was walking to my 10:30 class. I was running a few minutes late and I saw another student, a white female, walking toward me. She was about 50 yards down the street from me on [Main Street]. I saw her look up at me, then she crossed the street and walked on the other side. She walked for about another 20 yards then crossed back to the side she was originally on. Now, I don't know if that was really that racist but the implication to me was that she was afraid of me. (Brian)

Brian gives this white female the benefit of the doubt that she was not behaving in a racially motivated manner, but he senses that she fears him. Other black male college students in our sample detailed the hurt they felt when their fellow students do not feel comfortable walking along the university streets next to them. After detailing a similar experience to Brian's journal entry above, Todd, a black man, wrote, "I tried to come up with other possible reasons for her actions [crossing the street to avoid him then crossing back after they passed], but the only logical conclusion I can come up with is that she encountered a black male, a threat she felt required quick evasive action." Brian and Todd are reminded that they are not equal in the minds of their fellow students, but are someone to be viewed with suspicion and caution.

A common theme in the white student journals, particularly written by white women, was fearing violence from people of color (most often black and Latino men), yet very few of the white journal writers wrote about experiencing violence at the hands of people of color. The opposite was true for the journals written by students of color. Regarding interracial violence, fewer students of color wrote in their journals about fearing violence from whites. However, proportionately more wrote about experiencing violence at the hands of white people. For example, Kris, a Latino college student wrote in his journal:

Freshman year I lived in [the residence hall] with Eduardo. We went to high school together. It was a cold Friday night, and I remember we were at this party [on-campus]. I left early because I was tired, and then later on that night, Eduardo comes into our dorm

room bleeding in his hands and face. I asked what the hell had happened to him. He told me the story of how he got beat up by three white males on his way back to the dorm. The reason why he got beat up was because he was fighting on the phone with his girlfriend of the moment, screaming out in Spanish while he walked back. The white guys that beat him up told him that, "This is America, and we speak English only" and beat him up. I think that this experience was ridiculous. It's absurd to beat someone up because he was speaking in another language. I had a similar experience on my freshman year, too, where I was called a "Spic." I almost lost it and I'm glad I was with a friend of mine that just pushed me in the other direction because if not I would have tried to fight the guy. (Kris)

This account of Eduardo and Kris's experiences with racialized violence evokes the same pain and sadness that we see in Alex's journal entry, which is a much more common feeling in the journals written by students of color compared to the white student journals. Similar to Alex's entry, Kris's journal reveals that this incident of racial violence occurs on a weekend evening, and the perpetrators were college students. Kris's journal entry cannot be dismissed as a mere isolated event: College and university settings are the third most common place for hate crimes to occur (following residences and on streets), and anti-Latino hate crimes are on the rise (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2008).

Students of color wrote that when they confronted their peers about racial stereotypes, they were labeled as being too sensitive about race or playing the race card. Jordan wrote in her journal about a recent shopping trip where a stranger commented about her appearance:

I was buying windshield wipers at Walmart today and this man told me I reminded him of Lucy Liu. It's been the hundredth time that someone has told me that I look like Lucy Liu. I look nothing like Lucy Liu. [My friend] says I should take it as a compliment because Lucy Liu is hot, but that's not the damned point. The only reason why they think I look like her is because I'm Asian and have long black hair. . . . How is it a compliment when it has nothing to do with your "self" and everything to do with your race? I'm sick of being told I look like Connie Chung, Zhang Ziyi, Kaity Tong and . . . Lucy Liu. What sucks is that every time I go off on a tirade about it I get pissed on for having a bad attitude. The same question pops up, "why can't you take a compliment?" I try to explain that it is not a compliment but people don't understand why not. (Jordan)

From the tone of Jordan's narrative, we get a sense of the frustration she feels. Jordan resists the assumption that she should see her comparison with an attractive actress as a compliment. We can speculate that she may be referencing the stereotype of Asian American women as being docile and submissive, when she says she gets "pissed on for having a bad attitude" and not agreeing with the supposed compliment. Jordan's comparison to the "hot" Lucy Liu references another stereotype of the exotic, erotic sexualization of Asian women (Chou & Feagin, 2008; Feng Sun, 2003). She recognizes that the comparison has less to do with her appearance, and more with her being lumped into the category of an Asian woman, where her individuality is ignored. People of color often all look alike to people outside their race, referred to as the *other-race effect* in psychology. The homogenous view of individuals in other-races has been attributed to having more experience looking at faces of one own's race (Chiroro & Valentine, 1995). However, studies also suggest that it relates to prejudice, because prejudiced individuals are focused on racial stereotypes and ignore individual differences (Ferguson, Rhodes, & Lee, 2001).

## Conclusion

Many students of color at predominately white campuses endure added layers of complexity in their everyday interactions, compared to their white peers. Most white students do not have to contend with negative racial stereotypes.<sup>2</sup> White students' admission to the university and their subsequent successes and failures are not viewed through the lens of their racial identity. When a white student receives a scholarship, it is perceived to be based on hard work and the effort of an individual's accomplishment. The parallel is not true for students of color, who are often presumed to receive preferential treatment at the expense of white students, even when there is no evidence to suggest this is true (Wise, 2005). Students of color, especially on predominately white campuses, are all too often reminded that their actions impact, for better or worse, racial stereotypes. White students can be just individuals and their race is largely ignored. For these students, using racial stereotypes and racist humor, especially in the backstage, is just fun without any negative consequences.

Although we can celebrate the racial progress we've made in the early 21st century, we still have a lot of work to do. I offer two starting points: First, we need to increase the awareness of how racial interactions impact everyone, and bring these conversations into an open dialogue. This can start with something as simple as asking students to pay attention to their interactions. To account for the normalization of racist interactions, many whites commented in their journals that they never paid attention to it until they were asked to keep a daily journal. Numerous whites said they were shocked by how often negative comments slipped under the radar of consciousness, indicating that part of white racial

transparency is the privilege to ignore it. The good news is that when the white journal writers noted persisting racism, many of them felt called to challenge it in their lives. Consider the narrative written by Kyle, a white male, who ended his journal on this note:

As my last entry in this journal, I would like to express what I have gained out of this assignment. I watched my friends and companions with open eyes. I was seeing things that I didn't realize were actually there. By having a reason to pick out of the racial comments and actions I was made aware of what is really out there. Although I noticed that I wasn't partaking in any of the racist actions or comments, I did notice that I wasn't stopping them either. I am now in a position to where I can take a stand and try to intervene in many of the situations. (Kyle)

Kyle discusses how invisible and normal racist actions and comments can seem, and that now that he is able to recognize this, he can move on to actively resisting the racial hierarchy.

Second, as seen in Kyle's journal, we need to encourage whites to hold other whites accountable. Too often, the burden of responsibility rests with people of color to educate whites about racism. Whites need to recognize that racist comments made in private settings directly contribute to racial hostilities in the larger society. There are numerous tools whites can use to diffuse racist comments, such as using humor (sarcastically saying, "Gee, I didn't know you were a racist."), or pleading ignorance ("Can you please explain that comment to me? I don't understand what you mean."). Even to the most ignorant person, racist jokes are not funny if you have to explain them.

Substantially improving our cultural racial climate, particularly on college campuses, is critical for many reasons. Racial and ethnic

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<sup>2</sup> Researchers suggest that racism from the myth of the model minority leads to increased academic and social pressure on Asian American college students, who are more likely to commit suicide compared to their white peers (Leong, Leach, Yeh, & Chou, 2007).

diversity can create an intellectually stimulating environment that can be used as an educational tool to promote the learning and development of all students (Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005). A core characteristic is not simply to add people of color and stir or just to increase the numbers of racially diverse individuals. Students accrue the educational benefits of diversity (benefits ranging from enhanced self-confidence, deeper critical thinking, and educational aspirations to greater cultural awareness) by being exposed to a wider range of perspectives on issues which improves the quality of intellectual advancement (Chang, 1999; Milem, 2003).

In addition to benefiting the broader campus climate, a commitment to improving the racial climate benefits individuals of all racial

groups. Taking an other-oriented approach, it is the decent and fair thing to do. Even from a self-interested standpoint, given the competitive global economy that today's college students will likely enter, and the demographic shifts in the United States, it is critical for students to be prepared to work with people who are not like them. Indeed, one national study indicates that employers' highest priority in hiring college graduates is their ability to collaborate with others in diverse group settings (Peter D. Hart Research Associates, 2006).

Regardless if students utilize the other or the self-benefit position, it is clear that racial issues and racial diversity are critically important, and that we still have much work to do. We need your student voices in the dialogue.

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