WHITE FACE, BLACK SPACE:
MY JOURNEY AS A CHIEF DIVERSITY OFFICER AT AN HBCU

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Abstract

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My Journey as a Chief Diversity Officer at an HBCU

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Anthropology

Considerable attention has been paid to the matter of diversity in higher education in recent years. Yet, the discourse around this critically important phenomenon has typically failed to include experiences regarding the diversity agenda at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), serving as yet another example of how these historic institutions continue

to be underappreciated in mainstream society. It is argued here that HBCUs provide a dynamic context for implementing this work, including serving as fertile territory for non-Blacks to grow in their understanding of racial issues as "temporary minorities." In addition, while the chief diversity officer (CDO) position has become increasingly popular, little attention has been paid to the possibility that serving in this capacity can shape CDO's own sense of the racial self.

This dissertation incorporates the phenomenological tradition to deliver an autoethnographic account of the author's own journey as the first and only White CDO at an HBCU institution. I present stories and reflections that explore how my status as a White male profoundly impacted my work as a CDO at an HBCU and the responses to it, and ultimately, the way in which these encounters reciprocally influenced my own sense of the racial self. Through this reflexive account, I endeavor to demonstrate the challenges and possibilities inherent in diversity efforts at HBCUs, the dimensions of "racial being" exploration, and the complex needs and realities of the CDO position. Implications for policy and practice are also discussed.

DEDICATION

To all those who struggle valiantly against the odds to be heard, valued, and respected…

To all those who are committed to advancing the spirit of diversity, inclusion, and equity…

To all those ancestors who sacrificed so that we could have more…

Thank you.

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Most of us who navigate the doctoral process reference the notion of the long and rigorous journey to completion. Indeed, this idea definitely applies to my situation, considering that I started the Individual PhD program at the University of Washington in September 2001 while serving as a full-time sociology instructor at Highline College. Despite a series of starts and stops, ups and downs, and professional and personal twists and turns, I am humbled, relieved, and excited to finally complete this last stage in the marathon.

My late father, Jerry Greenfield, always pushed me to finish this degree, and I made a pledge to him in his final days that I would walk the stage. For his passionate support of his children and celebration of the power of education, I make the first dedication of this dissertation to my father. My mother, Maxene Greenfield, has never wavered in her encouragement of a son who marches to a slightly different beat. She was present when I received my first doctoral degree from Cape Peninsula University of Technology in South Africa, and I cannot wait to see her face after I receive the doctoral hood. Thank you for being great parents and role models. My brothers, David Greenfield and Jeffrey Greenfield, as well as their spouses, Susan Greenfield and Johanna Greenfield, have continued to offer support and guidance.

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CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

HBCUs have played an important role in enriching the lives of
not just African Americans, but our entire country.
- Ric Keller

I recall a conversation with the President at Cedar State University* when he offered me the position as chief diversity officer (CDO). Sitting in his work office which contained walls and shelves full of awards and plaques, I felt a combination of excitement and anxiety; after all, I was about to take on the task of serving as the first CDO at this historically Black institution buried deep in the woods of a notoriously racist state. With a spot on the senior leadership team, I would be reporting directly to the president, a rising superstar in the higher education world who himself had published widely on issues of diversity at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). After reminding me that the position was groundbreaking especially in the state, President Smith looked directly in my eyes and stated: "Now, remember, there has never been a White person in a senior-level position around here. If you fuck it up, there will never be another one."

The encounter stayed with me for a long time. On one hand, his words signaled the reality that, while HBCU schools have always been racially open, more focused and intentional diversity work at these institutions is still an emerging phenomenon. Having perused the rosters of member schools for NADOHE (National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher

Education), the largest organization supporting CDOs, I noticed that not a single HBCU was represented. Indeed, from the moment that I announced my intention to accept the post even up until the present, I have frequently fielded somewhat hesitant questions from outsiders whose words coalesce around a similar theme: "I hate to sound ignorant or offensive, but what exactly does diversity mean at an historically Black college?" Interestingly, while such inquiries were never raised when people learned about my similar work at majority institutions, simply the thought of this focus at HBCUs seems counterintuitive to so many others.

But more personally, the remark signaled a rare reality for most White persons in this country: the responsibility to serve as the representative of the race. Since I had previously spent the bulk of my professional career in multicultural settings as well as two other HBCUs, I had certainly engaged in reflection of how my race was constructed by others. After all, my experiences and skills had apparently led the president to personally recruit me for this position. Yet, for the first time, it had been explicitly laid out to me as a potential liability and forced me to immediately question myself and my readiness to tackle such a daunting task. Since Whites in this country typically do not immerse themselves within milieus that directly challenge them to interrogate their racial identities, it sparked in me a greater desire to consider the dynamics through which being a "majority minority" could produce heightened consciousness around the self and awareness of broader racial issues. "White privilege" and "whiteness studies" as abstract constructs might be generally familiar to many Whites in higher education, but the vacuum effect of still being located in predominantly White settings limits the ability to meaningfully apply the concepts for deeper understanding. Perhaps only through this type of de-

centered position demographically and culturally at places such as HBCUs can Whites undergo a more rigorous exploration of the impact of race on self and other.

Overall, engaging in diversity work can serve as a driver of both institutional and individual transformation in a variety of important ways. As the CDO role grows in popularity as well as purpose, the need for scholarly research into its multifaceted dimensions and possibilities must similarly be advanced. This dissertation therefore attempts to address several shortcomings in the existing literature in order to better inform policy, practice, and personal development.

Statement of the Problems

In response to the growing multicultural demographic make-up in this country and the global influence in the broader society, higher education institutions have generally placed increased emphasis on implementing policies and practices designed to "celebrate diversity." However, as a Chronicle of Higher Education special report (Chronicle 2013) claimed, "colleges are still trying to figure out how to do diversity," with writers suggesting that schools have focused too much on admissions numbers (Shaiko 2013) and struggled to identify meaningful metrics for measuring "the return on diversity" (Gose 2013). Furthermore, greater appreciation of the multiplicity of approaches to diversity work as well as the possible disparate agendas and impact found at different institutional types is still needed.

The realities facing particular populations and the experiences that can be generative of more sophisticated understanding of the racial self demand further exploration as well. As institutions advance their efforts in this arena, critical attention to the impact of this work on

individuals assuming responsibility for it has vital importance. These intersecting phenomena will now be addressed in terms of their contributions to shaping this dissertation.

The Need to Address HBCU Invisibility in the Higher Education Diversity Landscape

It will be argued here that, in the contemporary context, the transcendent diversity narrative embodies a hegemonic approach to understanding diversity in postsecondary education. In particular, this narrative conceptualizes diversity work primarily in terms of the recruitment and campus-based experiences of students of color entering into predominantly White institutions (PWIs). While the notion of creating and sustaining culturally inclusive spaces for these students is certainly laudable, this limited focus ends up privileging assimilationist thinking regarding the supposed benefits of "minority" students gaining access to majority schools. Little consideration is granted to the construction and production of diversity at HBCUs (Closson & Henry 2008). Indeed, using content analysis, I found that only two out of the first 79 articles published in the Journal of Diversity in Higher Education since its inception in 2008 explicitly incorporated a focus on HBCUs. A new edited volume on "college students' experiences of power and marginality" ironically marginalizes HBCUs by failing to include any essays addressing dynamics of "sharing spaces and negotiating differences" at these institutions (Lee & LaDousa 2015). No studies have yet been produced on the development of diversity offices or chief diversity officers at HBCUs.

I suggest that this problem also emanates from broader institutional practice. To offer an illustrative example, the Board of Higher Education (BHE) to which Cedar State reports serves as the regulatory agency for colleges and universities in the state. Following decades of

discriminatory practices and a court settlement that recognized historic disparities between the state's PWI and HBCU schools by mandating financial redress, the BHE has worked more deliberately to support efforts to engage with issues of diversity. In its official published "Diversity Statement" (2005), the BHE asserts that diversity represents a "strength" in the state that "enriches higher education." Yet, in the same paragraph, it is written that "dealing with this diversity continues to be a challenge," with this phrase insinuating a more problematic outlook. I contend that diversity is not an entity to be merely *dealt with* (emphasis mine), but rather, presents an exciting and critical opportunity for active engagement to generate significant growth and transformation of schools and students.

Later, the Diversity Statement is presented to apply only to "citizens or lawful residents of the United States who are: African American, Hispanic, Asian American, American Indian, Alaskan Native, and Female." One can appreciate the direction of the policy in its intention to promote greater opportunities for populations that have long experienced disenfranchisement in education. The document, however, has broader implications than policy alone, as a "diversity statement" also suggests a philosophical stance and a reference point for overall institutional standards and expectations. Thus, while the BHE values the need for students to develop skills for "living in a multicultural and interdependent world," the linguistic framing of the application of the diversity statement suggests that the work of achieving these goals applies solely to particular marginalized populations.

The statement further outlines the four diversity goals for all institutions in the state:

- To increase the enrollment and graduation rate of minorities
- To increase the employment of minorities in administrative, faculty and staff positions

- To enhance the overall curriculum by infusion of content that enhances multicultural awareness and understanding
- To increase the use of minority professionals, contractors, and other vendors

With regards to the three "increase" statements, the state's public HBCUs are seemingly rendered invisible. Certainly, HBCUs already engage significant numbers of "minority" students, faculty, staff, administrators, and contractors – and yet, little consideration is made for the multiple benefits potentially realized through enrollment of White students at these schools; of course, other students of color would qualify under these criteria as they comprise minority groups at all types of state institutions.

Furthermore, while HBCUs have historically been more racially desegregated than PWIs with a valuable legacy of employing and educating students of all racial backgrounds (Gasman, Lundy-Wagner, & Ransom 2010; Brown & Ricard 2007), there is a dearth of research exploring the realities of diversity at HBCUs and, in particular for the purposes of this study, the experiences of Whites who exist in these spaces (Closson & Henry 2008). In addition, while scholarship on White faculty is relatively limited (Dawson-Smith 2006), there do not appear to be any studies explicitly focusing on White administrators at HBCUs. Even the debate over the role and relevance of diversity at HBCUs continues to simmer, with Gasman (2013) suggesting that "some people worry that the changing composition of HBCUs endangers the very aspect of these institutions that makes them unique; others argue that diversity makes these institutions stronger, by fostering mutual respect and an appreciation for Black culture among a broader population" (6).

Contrary to popular discourse that essentializes the Black community as a monolithic entity, it is critical to also acknowledge the vast ranges of experiences and identities found among African Americans (Cross 1971). Indeed, this aspect of diversity at HBCUs has been underappreciated in the literature as well. Not only do individuals diverge in terms of their own definition of racial identity, but the multiplicity of additional identity markers also serves to disrupt any assumptions of a singular Black identity. While both might be Black, the gay middle-income student from the suburbs typically brings a far different set of needs, interests, and experiences than the heterosexual, inner-city, first-generation student-athlete – and the intersections of identities produce unique constellations of racial identity salience for both individuals. Collins (2015) suggests that intraracial tensions — based on elements such as colorism or classism, for example — do exist on HBCU campuses. To further complicate this issue, the presence of African students as well as students from Latin American and Central American countries with more fluid constructions of "Blackness" has the potential for fostering more nuanced discussions of racial identity and the politics of racial formation on HBCU campuses. One could argue that, as a result of internalizing the dominant narrative, many educators at HBCUs have likely failed to thoroughly appreciate these forms of diversity or utilized this knowledge to foster greater understanding and identity development among all of their students.

Thus, it is important to critically evaluate research into diversity within higher education to ensure that the focus, interpretive frames, and epistemological foundations of this work fully incorporate the richness of perspectives found at different types of institutions. As stated earlier, while viewed as seemingly progressive, the master narrative on diversity typically affirms forms

of White supremacy by ignoring the realities and possibilities of HBCU institutions in contributing to promoting the cause of diversity and inclusion. Either because these schools are interestingly perceived as "already being diverse" (because of the predominance of students of color) or viewed as being "not diverse at all" because they are incorrectly thought to be demographically monolithic, the scholarly community has failed to fully explore the problems and potential of diversity work in the HBCU context. Reflecting Espino's (2012) call within the critical race theory tradition to engage in "counter-storytelling," this study seeks to disrupt existing discourse by identifying the problematic nature of this framework and advancing a refocused lens acknowledging institutions and practices too often marginalized in the higher education community.

The Need for Rethinking on Whiteness

In a time of profound racial tensions following the tragedies in Ferguson and elsewhere, social scientists continue to find significant racial disparities on attitudes ranging from police conduct to education (Pew Research Center 2014). It is suggested that the relative segregation of Whites limits their understanding of the realities faced by people of color, inevitably reifying dominant meritocratic narratives that "blame the victim" (Ryan 1973) for their plight. Considering that Whites' social networks are 91% White and 75% of Whites report no people of color in their social networks (Jones 2014), the likelihood of experiencing an alternate worldview that can challenge the hegemonic belief systems through which they have been socialized is almost non existent.

As an epistemological framework, critical race theory has been used to challenge dominant "colorblind" paradigms in education, asserting that racism is a fundamental factor shaping educational thought and practice (Feagin 2006; Ladson-Billings & Tate 1995). Building from Bonilla-Silva's (2006) "racism without racists" thesis, Harper (2012) suggests that practitioners and researchers in the field typically lack full appreciation of the deeply embedded yet often subtle nature of racism in education. As Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) propose, the very notion of ignoring how racism is imbued within institutional structures results in practices that affirm White supremacy and perpetuate the educational oppression of marginalized groups. Thus, critical race theorists intentionally seek to identify and expose the complex and dynamic mechanisms through which race operates, to privilege the subjective and personal narrative as evidence in the understanding of the effects of these phenomena, and to proactively pursue mechanisms for eliminating institutional discrimination in order to achieve true social justice (Delgado & Stefancic 2001).

Critical race theory offers a useful lens for evaluating the racial implications of the frameworks specifically applied to educational phenomena. Indeed, as Varene and McDermott (1998) suggest, even our definitions of "school success" and "school failure" represent socially constructed categories, with racial ideologies impinging on these perceptions and the responses to them. From this perspective, the debate surrounding the "achievement gap" becomes understood as again embracing a majoritarian perspective (Love 2004) – as if White children represent the educational standard needed to be attained by students of color – and reinforces popular stereotypes by suggesting that these children, not the institutions that fail them, need to be fixed (Noguera, Hurtado, & Fergus 2011; Lewis et al 2008).

Central to these ideas is the notion that Whiteness functions in ideological fashion as the implicit normative standard in society. As DiAngelo (2012: 1984) suggests, "Whiteness is both 'empty,' in that it is normalized and thus typically unmarked, and content laden, or 'full,' in that it generates norms and reference points." Ahmed captures this point in a 2004 online essay when writing, "It has become commonplace for whiteness to be represented as invisible, as the unseen or the unmarked, as non-colour, the absent presence or hidden referent…." Operating as this silent category, the effects of Whiteness become even more salient, as ideology is most powerful when its presence and influence are obscured from conscious recognition. According to Lipsitz (1995: 369), "As the unmarked category against which difference is constructed, whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its rule as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations." To illustrate, the typical busing practices in school districts that move students of color into majority institutions and rarely the reverse stands as yet another example of a hidden ideological position that encodes Whiteness as the standard and the ideal (Wells et al 2009).

In her analysis of the colorblind philosophy operative in public education, Lewis (2003) contends that this approach ultimately functions to reinscribe Whiteness in normative fashion. In general, Whites are not taught to consider Whiteness as a mechanism for identity, instead viewing race as something belonging to others (Bush 2011). For example, many multicultural centers at majority schools report difficulty recruiting White students to attend events, since their "multicultural" spaces are often perceived as belonging solely to students of color (Lee & LaDousa 2015). These realities maintain the "othering" of people of color through normative Whiteness. Paralleling this reality with other identity markers, Bricknell (2000) discusses how

the popular framing of gay pride parades casts these events as “invasions” on public heteronormative space through claims of the “flaunting” of sexuality, failing to see similar displays in the heterosexual community as equivalent or problematic.

Harris (2014) argues that the “rise in respectability politics” has produced the belief that as long as Blacks conform to hegemonic standards of behavior, everything will turn out fine. This concept seems not only patently false in the era of repeated acts of police brutality as well as research attesting to the persistence and strength of implicit bias (Ayres 2015), but indeed quite dangerous by ignoring the structural forces at play that continue to limit opportunity structures for oppressed individuals. Dominant Whiteness remains unquestioned and reified yet again.

Without critical self-examination of their own racial identity, Whites become more likely to internalize attitudes that work against progressive thought and action towards equity outcomes. McKinney (2005) analyzed white students’ autobiographical reflections where they typically failed to conceptualize themselves and their experiences as relating to being White — or, if acknowledging race, even suggested that they had now become the more frequent targets of discrimination. These findings paralleled results from work by Norton and Sommers (2011) finding an emerging pattern of belief among Whites that bias against them constitutes a more serious societal ill than traditional racism. The discourse of supposed postracialism surrounding the election of President Obama, combined with perhaps a genuine interest in seeing the end of racism, in essence has operated to problematically encourage Whites to not think critically about race and their place in the social hierarchy.

Certainly, plenty of scholars and practitioners have long advocated for deeper understanding of Whiteness and White privilege. From books by Roedinger (1999) and Painter (2010) documenting the historical and social construction of the category of White persons to McIntosh's (1998) classic work on White privilege to the development of White racial identity models (Helms 1995), many scholars have demonstrated commitment to examining these critical issues and utilizing their insights to advance the call for individuals and institutions to interrogate the meanings of Whiteness. Furthermore, the annual White Privilege Conference continues to attract thousands of participants interested in fostering richer appreciation of strategies for dismantling privilege at both the individual and institutional levels, and even K-12 institutions are implementing curricula to tackle privilege (Spencer 2015).

Yet, as I will argue more thoroughly in the next chapter, there are considerable limitations to this work that will be addressed in this research study. First, prominent White racial identity models have focused mostly on identity as defined by attitudes towards the racialized other rather than an exploration of one's own embodied self; in a similar vein, Whiteness studies has, by emphasizing the ultimate sociopolitical deconstruction of Whiteness, ironically elided some aspects of encouraging Whites to more carefully define the self. As a result, the notion of White as a racial "being" — the noun form referencing interpersonal understanding of the self and the concomitant verb form referencing interpersonal performative aspects of the self — will therefore be highlighted as a richer approach to this work.

In addition, the considerable heterogeneity within this socially constructed category of "White" must be acknowledged and examined more carefully. While Whites generally share the

common realities of privilege, they ought not be defined solely by this privilege. For example, as Alba (1990) suggests, ethnic identity among Whites is a salient dynamic, producing divergent life experiences particularly based on social class. The inclusion of other intersectional identities leads to a wide range of ideological outcomes, such as the fact that only 34% of White Protestants voted for Barack Obama in the 2008 presidential election while 78% of Jewish individuals (largely White) supported him (Pew Research Center 2008). Therefore, just as essentializing people of color can be problematic, it is limiting theoretically and pragmatically for social justice purposes to apply a similarly narrow framework to White persons.

Most specifically, it will be argued in this dissertation that the HBCU context offers members of dominant groups a unique and powerful opportunity to more critically explore their own racial selves. It seems interesting to note that most Whiteness studies work occurs in majority White contexts, with little if any consideration of how historically Black institutions can contribute to this racial project. Yancy (2012) attempts to "flip the script" by exploring Whiteness from a Black lens, ultimately challenging Whites to adopt a parallel form of the DuBoisian (1903) notion of double consciousness by becoming more sophisticated thinkers about the complexity of the racial identity. Indeed, immersion within the HBCU milieu removes the convenience of White normativity and delivers a particularly rich possibility for participants to engage in serious interrogation of what it means to be White.

The Need for Understanding the Role of Race and the Chief Diversity Officer

Following the lead of the business community, the concept of the chief diversity officer position has grown tremendously in popularity within higher education over the past decade

(Williams & Wade-Golden 2013; Wilson 2013). While plenty of institutions have formally addressed diversity issues through various policies and programs for years (typically in a "minority affairs" type office), the notion of assigning a particular individual to assume responsibility for coordinating a comprehensive diversity agenda is still in the emergence phase — with continuing discussion of whether CDOs are granted the authority and leverage to do real change work (Gose 2006). In addition, for a great many CDOs who are often first at their institutions to hold the position or relatively new to the specific role, "the pioneering nature of their work has made for some inconsistency in their backgrounds and how they do the job" (Flaherty 2014).

As Worthington (2007) notes, the portfolio of the typical CDO encompasses a wide territory of social identities, core areas of responsibility, and focal groups of constituents. Through interviews with 110 CDOs and survey data recorded from over 700 CDOs nationwide, Williams and Wade-Golden (2008) found that since most institutional leaders have not clearly defined the diversity agenda — including coherent roles and responsibilities for the individuals assigned to oversee this work — most CDOs have to rely on their own charisma and relational abilities to attain success. In response to the need for greater uniformity and professionals in the field, NADOHE (Worthington, Stanley, & Lewis 2014) recently published a document proposing standards of professional practice for CDOs. The recommendations include extensive knowledge base in diversity and equity, communication and management skills, understanding of programming and curricular issues, and ability to implement and evaluate diversity change efforts.

While these moves to standardize and clarify the CDO position are critical for its professional development, I contend that greater emphasis must also placed on understanding the personal implications associated with the role and identifying strategies to best support individuals in this capacity. It will be argued in this dissertation that CDOs generally occupy a uniquely challenging interstitial space on most campuses that complicates their work while often generating a strong sense of alienation. In particular, I find it problematic that almost no scholarly work on the dialectical relationship between the racial identity of CDOs and their performance in their roles has been produced, especially since race occupies a central place in the diversity and inclusion movement. While CDOs are often at the forefront of fostering conversations around racial identity, the plausibility of their own sense of self being impacted by their work has yet to be explored.

Scope and Purpose of the Study

From August 2011-May 2014, I served as the first-ever chief diversity officer at Cedar State University, an HBCU in the rural South, creating a new office for the institution and implementing a wide range of programs designed to promote a more inclusive campus climate. As a result of our collective work, the university garnered a number of awards and national recognition for promoting diversity, including a feature article in the Huffington Post lauding the school as "leading the charge" among HBCUs. Yet, considerable challenges were also encountered by me personally and professionally, and all aspects of this dynamic journey provided enlightening lessons for myself and potentially for others interested in diversity work in higher education.

With regards to the purpose of the study, this dissertation represents an autoethnographic account of my tenure at Cedar State, using these experiences to explore how my status as a White male profoundly impacted my work at an HBCU and the responses to it, and ultimately, the way in which these encounters reciprocally influenced my own sense of the racial self. To be certain, as the first (and, to date, only) White person to serve as a CDO at an HBCU school, there could be no other way to conduct this study besides autoethnography. Using reflective analysis of both my positionality and my perceptions of the construction of my identity, I wish to provide insight into the complexity of engaging in diversity work at an HBCU as well as the importance of an individual's experience as a "temporary minority" (Hall & Closson 2005) in delivering the level of awareness needed to advance one's understanding of race.

It is hoped that the experiences described and analyzed in the dissertation can prove helpful in a variety of ways. First, HBCUs need to be better appreciated for their current contributions to the diversity agenda in higher education as well as for their tremendous potential to assist the broader society in more meaningfully understanding the dynamics of race and racial identity. Considering the unfair but persistent questioning of the utility of HBCUs in the 21st Century (Goode 2011), these kinds of contributions to the literature about the incredible value that these institutions provide seem to be necessary in the hopes of reshaping public discourse.

Second, with the continuing social chasm between racial groups in this country, opportunities for immersion within "othering" cultural contexts and ensuing deep self-reflective work (particularly among Whites) around racial identity can be useful for encouraging richer awareness and interest in cross-cultural understanding (Katz 2003). The autoethnographic

approach, with its focus on the honest exploration of personal experiences, offers a model for the kind of labor required for successful navigation of this journey. Truly knowing ourselves is definitely a liberatory act. By establishing the context for freeing oneself of destructive biases and habits, we become more open to honoring others and their differences. Yet, critical self-examination with regards to race can certainly be uncomfortable, and considering that few guides exist to truly support those individuals willing to assume these existential risks, perhaps this dissertation will fill the void by providing insights regarding the benefits of staying the course.

Finally, as the CDO role becomes even more prevalent in higher education, deeper understanding of the personal dynamics involved can generate insights for CDOs traveling through this terrain as well as for presidents and other senior-level administrators who endeavor to support them. Hopefully, this heightened level of awareness can also ultimately serve as the impetus for identifying promising practices for institutions and their CDOs. Greater understanding of similarities and differences between institutional types can also be obtained as a result.

Limitations of the Study

While autoethnography has tremendous value in leading to understanding related to the construction of knowledge (Allen-Collinson & Hockey 2008; Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993), there can be no assumption that the results of my study have generalizability to all HBCUs, the wide array of educational settings that exist, or others who hold my occupational title. It is clear that the views, experiences, and analysis contained in this dissertation are reflective of my own personal journey in a particular context. Since I am both the subject and

object of inquiry, I also recognize that my own positionality and psychological makeup provide a certain lens from which to observe and make meaning of the world — inevitably leaving out some salient areas that might require investigation and explication. However, I would hope that the deeply personal descriptions as well as detailed discussions in the following pages can offer meaningful insights for consideration as individuals and institutions commit to advancing diversity work in the effort to build a more egalitarian and inclusive society.

Summary and Overview

This autoethnography will deliver an in-depth look at my experiences as a White male serving in the capacity of the chief diversity officer at an historically Black university in the rural South. Through presentation of a series of seminal events that took place as well as my own reflections at that time and afterwards, I investigate the ways in which my positionality shaped and was shaped by the contours of my work. The dissertation is ultimately intended to share insights that can ideally lead to greater appreciation of the possibilities and potential of diversity agendas at HBCUs, new approaches for Whites to better understand the racial self, and acknowledgement of the personal racial journeys of CDOs.

In Chapter 2, I write about the theoretical models that guide the inquiry and analysis for the research. While critical race theory was identified in this first chapter as a foundational model, the contributions of symbolic interactionism and Anzaldua's (1987) borderlands concept will be highlighted. The chapter also contains a thorough review of the literature related to the issues of diversity work at HBCUs, White racial identity, and the position of CDO in higher education.

Chapter 3 addresses the autoethnographic method employed in this dissertation — both as a necessary tool for this study but also as a valuable approach to broaden understanding within the social sciences. I will share information about the data collection and interpretation processes as well as the personal implications involved in all aspects of the research and writing. As a lead-in to the actual presentation of findings, I close the chapter with an autobiographical look at my own journey to the CDO role at Cedar State, with special attention to the centrality of race plus the critical considerations attached to my temporary and voluntary minority status in my position.

The presentation of experiences and reflections from my time at Cedar State comprise the agenda for Chapter 4. I will offer both general feelings and processes that occurred in the building of a diversity office as well as more detailed description of major moments that encapsulated many of the broader issues examined in this dissertation. Through moving back and forth from "then to now" reflexive thinking, I hope to demonstrate the importance of perspective in meaning making.

Finally, in Chapter 5, I close by delivering my conclusions from the study as well as the anticipated outcomes and implications. Most specifically, I more fully present my notion of White "racial being" as a useful framework for advancing understanding. The limitations from the present study as well as considerations for future research in these domains are addressed. Finally, drawing from the autoethnographic tradition, I share more about the impact that the actual writing of the dissertation had on me personally, with a focus on suggestions for others wishing to similarly embark on these kinds of introspective expeditions.

CHAPTER TWO:

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I will review the literature surrounding the three identified areas for the scope of the research plus the theoretical foundations utilized to support this work. First, I discuss the contributions of HBCUs in the diversity agenda and some of the research conducted on White populations at these institutions. In addition, the idea that the HBCU context as particularly fertile terrain for encouraging greater exploration of the racial self is explored. Second, I critique dominant approaches to understanding Whiteness and the White racial identity model, suggesting that the phenomenological tradition presents a more relevant and robust approach for the purposes of this study. After reviewing the scholarship related to the "temporary minority" condition which connects with my autoethnographic experience, relevant studies pertaining to the CDO position will be highlighted, with particular emphasis on contributions connected to identity and race. Next, I delve into a number of theoretical constructs related to the grand theory of symbolic interactionism as well as Anzaldua's borderlands theory. The chapter closes with a discussion of the overall framework that guides the study, leading to the subsequent methodology section of the dissertation.

HBCUs as Critical Context for Enriched Diversity Work

Originally established for the education of freed slaves and their Black descendants, HBCUs have continued to succeed against great odds in delivering opportunity and hope for a wide range of students as well as in shaping the broader culture and society (Lovett 2011). The

HBCU federal designation applies to institutions established before 1964 that have expressly purposed themselves for the education of Black students (Jackson & Nunn 2003). In addition to enrolling approximately 324,000 students (National Center for Education Statistics 2013), HBCUs are responsible for preparing a disproportionately high percentage of Black professionals (Goode 2011) and leading innovation opportunities in a range of fields such as technology and STEM (Adhikari et al 2014).

Clearly, part of the HBCU allure for so many people is the notion of what it is not — namely, a space where Black students will not be expected to encounter routine marginalization or forced to assimilate to dominant cultural standards. Indeed, one feature of group formation is positive self-identification especially through comparison with a disparate other (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje 2002). Thus, in contrast with their Black peers at PWIs, Black HBCU students often take to social media to comment on their ability to walk around on campus everyday feeling validated for their cultural identities and not worrying about being the only Black student in an advanced class or hearing racist language from uninformed peers (jaymcshorty 2015). At PWIs, Black students certainly have, as individuals, recorded tremendous accomplishments — but at an HBCU, almost all of the achievers in the panoply of activities (honor roll, student government, athletics, etc.) are Black. HBCUs can therefore be seen as the historical epitome of Black resistance and a contemporary exemplar of Black excellence and self-determination (Kim & Conrad 2006).

Considerable research has delivered solid evidence that highlights the success that HBCUs have achieved historically and in contemporary times, especially in terms of providing

access to individuals who otherwise might not be able to pursue higher education (Brown & Freeman 2004). Studies have identified how Black students at HBCUs report incorporation of best practices in instruction (Arroyo, Palmer, & Maramba 2016; Seifert, Drummond, & Pascarella 2006) that encourage the pursuit of graduate education (Palmer, Hilton, & Fountaine 2012), satisfaction and engagement in the campus community (Harper, Carini, Bridges, & Hayek 2004), long-lasting deep mentoring relationships with faculty (Davis 2006), and a sense of empowerment and ownership (Willie 2003), especially in comparison with their peers at predominantly White institutions (Rankin & Reason 2005). Students at HBCUs are more likely to interact and collaborate on research with their professors and to engage in leadership activities on campus than their counterparts at other schools (Harper 2006). In particular, to address the needs of the often high percentage of academically underprepared students, HBCUs offer a range of support services and programs that have proven quite effective at achieving academic and social integration for these individuals (Palmer & Davis 2012).

As Palmer and Gasman (2008) discuss, the family-like atmosphere at HBCUs typically fosters the development of nurturing relationships that promote academic success, with other researchers suggesting that predominantly White institutions would benefit from adopting the kinds of meaningful habits found on HBCU campuses (Arroyo & Gasman 2014; Rodgers & Summers 2008). According to one student, "the teachers here just took me in and saw something in me, and said, 'I think you will be successful'" (Pope 2009). Indeed, in the midst of the racial turmoil plaguing the nation, increasing numbers of Black students are intentionally matriculating at HBCUs because of the perceived safe and welcoming campus climate (Kozlowski 2015).

Normore (2008) suggests that, as a result of their traditional mission for equity and the contemporary context for diversity, HBCUs represent ideal institutions for energizing the pursuit of social justice. According to Brown and Ricard (2007), HBCUs "practically invented the open door policy that welcomed all that applied… and literally reversed the tradition of social-class and academic exclusiveness that has always been characteristic of higher education" (118, 122). Part of the "Black college mystique" celebrated by Willie et al (2006) is its role in uniting and uplifting the various segments of the Black community, particularly those whose talents have not been properly appreciated elsewhere (Jewell 2002). Research by Perna et al (2006) documented that Southern public PWI colleges and universities persist in providing unequal educational opportunities for Black students, while the region's historically Black institutions achieve the greatest level of equity and access.

This inspired mission of social advancement and civic engagement uniquely distinguishes HBCUs (Gasman, Spencer, & Orphan 2015), and by historically bringing together various subgroups within the Black community, results in a dynamic opportunity for understanding and collaboration. The prevailing ethos at HBCUs of providing access for underserved populations resonated with this theme. McMickens (2012) contends that HBCUs offer a healthy climate for examining issues of race and meaningfully prepare students to live in a multiracial society; since students are immersed in a racially supportive context, they become more willing to examine and explore critical issues with regards to their own sense of self and place within society. Thus, this particular cultural milieu can deliver the necessary safe space for engaged and courageous work around diversity issues in general.

The Experiences of Whites at HBCUs

In their seminal book on the origins and legacy of HBCUs, Roebuck and Murty (1993) discuss the unique demographic history associated with these institutions. Many HBCUs were originally founded and managed by Whites, with the shift to more Black control emerging in the early 20th Century. Since that time, upper management has continued to be comprised mostly by Black administrators, with considerable diversity in the staff and faculty ranks; interestingly, the most recent data reports show that 44% of HBCU faculty are non-Black, while only 21% of PWI faculty are non-White (Morris 2015). As Gasman (2013) notes, HBCUs continue to enroll growing numbers of non-Black students (and a disproportionate share of first-generation and low-income students overall) and have demonstrated the tremendous ability to generate impressive student outcomes for all populations despite lagging behind their counterparts in terms of resources and the public image.

White Students

Indeed, non-Black students now represent 17% of the population at HBCUs, with White student enrollment growing 55% between 2000 and 2010 to reach 13% overall of HBCU students (Lee & Keys 2013). Whether due to racial population changes in the communities surrounding these institutions, more concerted efforts to attract diverse populations, the lower cost of attendance, or the recognized quality of the academic and social experience, many non-Black students are making HBCUs their first choice. Furthermore, with the dire economic conditions plaguing many colleges, several HBCUs have quite publicly expressed a desire to

recruit students from diverse racial backgrounds in order to maintain financial solvency (Wieder 2012).

The relatively limited research on Whites at HBCUs indicates that White students typically report positive experiences in terms of feeling a sense of acceptance and belonging at HBCU schools (Strayhorn 2010; Donald 2010; Closson & Henry 2008; Sum, Light, & Kim 2004), yet greater interest must be paid to understanding these students' HBCU journeys. As Closson and Henry (2005) assert, the notion of being a "temporary minority" can assist White students in developing greater awareness of racial issues and potentially build stronger commitment to dismantling oppression. Similarly, Peterson and Hamrick's (2009) study of White male undergraduates offered evidence that enrollment at an HBCU was correlated with enhancement of their sense of racial consciousness. Kupenda (2008) also outlines a number of psychosocial possible benefits to White students at HBCUs, from challenging their belief systems to interrogating Whiteness to helping eliminate lingering feelings of subtle superiority, or conversely, guilt and shame.

A plethora of popular press stories has documented the fact that many White students at HBCUs report the incredible learning opportunity of being the "minority" with the concomitant celebration of the acceptance they have encountered (e.g. Shalash 2010). During a recent MSNBC (2014) panel discussion, one White male graduate of an HBCU expressed tremendous appreciation for the chance to learn more about racial issues and challenge his own belief systems. In reflecting on his "beautiful experience" at an HBCU, one White student commented, "Not only did I get an academic education, I got a cultural education… I don't believe I would

have gotten that anywhere else (Thomas-Lester 2004). Lipman's (2011) account of a Jewish athlete at an HBCU included statements from the student and other community leaders about the chance to debunk stereotypes and build bridges between different populations. Joshua Packwood, the first White valedictorian from Morehouse College, rejected a full scholarship to Columbia University, with his assertion that he would benefit more from attending Morehouse being validated in his Commencement address (Rosenblatt & Lemon 2008).

It is argued here that, by matriculating at HBCUs, White students not only can obtain a high quality, affordable education, but they also potentially both become more engaged in exploring matters of cultural identity and committed to serving as allies in the mission for social justice (Henry & Closson 2010). It may be reasonably argued that a significant portion of these White students have likely not been immersed within environments where they live for long periods of time as the minority numerically and culturally. White students at HBCUs therefore encounter the possibility of engaging in rich academic and sociocultural experiences that may de-center their normative position and challenge them to reflectively interrogate their own racial identity and the meaning of Whiteness. The potential for consciousness raising as well as the sociopolitical gains of individuals bringing home this new found awareness to share with their families and peers is substantial – especially considering the fact that the majority of HBCUs are located in Southern states (many within rural communities) with long-standing histories of racial intolerance. Back in 1994, Willie expressed optimism for the role of Whites at HBCUs, contending that they could also gain a parallel double consciousness as a result of their matriculation: "The addition of White students to predominantly Black colleges and universities

will strengthen, not weaken, them. The institutions that pursue this policy will not lose students but will gain new allies and friends" (158).

The diversity of experiences within White populations at certain HBCU institutional types could play a role in influencing the impact of racial identity development. Interestingly, in an empirical study of racial salience among White students at PWIs and one HBCU, Steck, Heckert, and Heckert (2003) found that, contrary to assumptions presented here, those attending the HBCU reported a lower level of racial identity salience. It should be noted, however, that the dynamics of particular schools may lead to divergent results. For example, conversations that I have held with senior-level executives at two HBCUs revealed that their schools "looked very different at night than during the day." One of the institutions enrolled the majority of its White students in the popular and academically acclaimed nursing and education programs which held classes in the evenings, paralleling research that suggests that White students at HBCUs are more likely to be found in more specialized technical fields (Conrad, Brier, & Braxton 1997). The other school was located in a predominantly White community, and as a result, most White students elected to live at home, while the residence halls were populated mostly by Black students from other areas in the state. These declarations support research that indicates that geography and financial issues significantly drive White enrollment at HBCUs (Daniels 2008). Thus, at certain institutions (and for particular programs), cadres of White students might be less likely to engage with the broader campus community or operate within contexts that encourage explicit exploration of racial identity.

Similarly, at many HBCUs, a noticeable segment of the non-Black enrollment can be found on the school's athletics teams (Walters 2014), in essence paralleling how the vast majority of enrolled African-American students at some PWIs are recruited for sports. To illustrate, the women's bowling team at the University of Maryland-Eastern Shore, winners of several national championships, does not have a single Black participant. As one would find at most campuses, student-athletes tend to spend the bulk of their social time with their teammates, limiting the degree of social engagement with other students (Bowen & Levin 2005) — and therefore, profoundly restricting the opportunities for the richest possible examination of racial identity issues.

Further research is clearly needed to more fully investigate the impact on racial identity for White students as well as how the presence of White students potentially influences the contours of the racial discourse on campus (Closson & Henry 2008). Carter and Fountaine (2012) focused attention on factors influencing White student engagement at HBCUs, suggesting that intentional institutional efforts can be beneficial in creating inclusive environments for diverse student populations as well as facilitating greater self-awareness and appreciation of diversity. Furthermore, it should be noted that the scholarly work on Latino, Asian, Native American, and international students at HBCUs is particularly scarce, despite the reality that many schools have initiated aggressive efforts to recruit these students (Shalash 2010). Emerging research (Palmer & Maramba 2015) has explored the unique factors influencing Latino and Asian-American students in the selection of HBCUs and the experiences they encounter while enrolled, and greater understanding of the racial identity implications would be valuable. Since students are in frequent contact with their peers and family members outside of

school, positive encounters at HBCUs allow students of various racial and ethnic backgrounds to educate others and dismantle stereotypical assumptions about the Black community within the broader society.

White Faculty

Less attention in the literature has been paid to analyzing the experiences of White faculty at HBCUs. Dawson-Smith (2006) reports that White faculty have always been present in the institutions, specifically pointing to the prominent role that Jewish professors played during the 1930s and 1940s when anti-Semitism excluded them from full participation elsewhere and campus leaders believed that Jewish professors' own encounters facing oppression would lead them to more closely identify with their students who were dealing with the effects of Jim Crow segregation. Yet, some scholars have identified a history of suspicion of White faculty at HBCUs, with suggestions that their experiences and beliefs might not be compatible with empowering Black students or that they might not be completely dedicated to the mission of the universities and only there due to a tight employment market (Foster 2001; Smith & Borgstedt 1985).

Warnat (1976) suggests that White faculty entering HBCUs are typically classified into four categories that can profoundly impact their performance and their perceived image. Whether considered the "moron" whose low skills rendered them unable to land a position at a PWI, the "martyr" who assuages their White guilt and pursues a missionary agenda by teaching at an HBCU, the "messiah" with the savior mentality, or the "marginal man" [sic] who struggles

to find a place in either majority or minority spaces, the White faculty member is represented in mostly troubling terms.

Several studies have followed a similar theme by addressing the many challenges that White faculty may face in making the transition to teaching at an HBCU. Louis (2005) found that White professors at HBCUs in Texas were not able to make a healthy adjustment to their minority status at an HBCU. In a similar vein, qualitative research with White faculty members at an HBCU by Bias (2010) uncovered the significant degree to which these instructors were indeed struggling with the racial situations that they faced, leading her to suggest that the institutions consider proactively offering more training for individuals prior to starting to teach. These "contact zones" of the classroom do not merely constitute locations where differences are confronted, but rather, spaces where identity and power become negotiated and transacted. In the absence of rich information about racial identity/performance and the kinds of pedagogical approaches that could perhaps resonate more profoundly for their students, faculty members who encounter resistance may be more likely to make negative attributions to students and then internalize feelings of racial animosity. Bias illustrates how many of the instructors did ultimately experience "a turning point… moments of insight where faculty seem to understand the students at a deeper level" (), yet it is clear that more intentional training could assist faculty in achieving these transformations earlier.

However, other work has found much more positive experiences for these individuals (Smith & Borgstedt 2005). While not specifically addressing the variable of racial identity, Dawson-Smith's research revealed that the majority of White faculty enjoy a meaningful

socialization experience overall. Foster, Guyden, and Miller (1999) delivered a comprehensive volume featuring essays written by White instructors who suggest that their time teaching at an HBCU was profoundly positive and meaningful. For example, Redinger (1999) asserted that the opportunity to discover more about race and its implications for epistemology and pedagogy ultimately led him to be a "better professor… and a better man (36)." Henzy (1999) also contended that the enriched discussions in class featured a "two-way exchange of ideas between different cultural experiences, different ways of knowing… and I am grateful to these students for the ways they have pushed me" (22).

In a reflective essay encouraging White faculty at HBCUs to be "equal contributors for Black student success," Arroyo (2014) suggests that they need to more fully appreciate the HBCU history and context, shift away from a Eurocentric approach, engage the tension in the classroom based on difference, and avoid the positive feedback bias tendency. Most specifically, he offers the strongest challenge for White professors like himself to confront White privilege while still embracing their own Whiteness in the midst of simultaneously celebrating Blackness: "We White HBCU professors must re-locate ourselves to the proper non-Western center so we might make equally beneficial contributions to our students, while at the same time exploring and becoming more comfortable with what it means to be a socially and globally responsible White person in a diverse world today (6)." Yet, Arroyo keeps Whiteness "purposely vague" in his discussion and neither concretely explores strategies for White professors to achieve these internal outcomes nor presents examples of how the journey of being at an HBCU supported his own racial identity development per se.

Whether viewed in positive or negative terms, the realities confronting White faculty members suggest that greater attention to the role of race is needed. Certainly, the groundbreaking scholarly contributions of Hale-Benson (1986) and Kunjufu (1984), among others, identified the presence of differences in preferred learning styles among students based on race, with Banks (2001) and Ladson-Billings (1995) pioneering work in the area of culturally relevant pedagogical approaches. Not only have these racial learning differences been reflected among college students with regards to race (e.g. Roig 2008; Matthews 1996) and race based on institutional type (Fazarro & Stevens 2004), but interestingly, also between Black college students who attended PWIs and HBCUs (Rovai, Gallien, & Wighting 2008). Thus, it is plausible that even White faculty who may have successfully engaged with Black students in teaching situations at PWIs could still face some difficulties at HBCUs, since as Shaw et al (2012) suggest, professors at HBCUs are more likely to incorporate teaching approaches that more closely match the desired learning styles of their students. Also, since faculty members do not typically receive much training to be successful and reflective practitioners in graduate study (Bok 2013) — and are even less likely to have confronted matters of race, epistemology, and pedagogy — the importance of providing White faculty with opportunities to work through these issues and develop greater social and cultural capital before and during their teaching journeys seems critical.

It is important to mention the complete lack of research on White staff members or administrators at HBCUs. While Dawson-Smith points out how some faculty in her study who ascended to administrative roles faced stronger challenges on racial grounds from students than when in the classroom, little else appears to exist that investigates these types of experiences,

except for the occasional story of a White former employee suing on the grounds of perceived "reverse discrimination" (e.g. Eromosele 2015). The particular dynamics of various roles at an HBCU — and their potential correlation with the development of racial understanding — is worthy of serious exploration.

Temporary and Voluntary Minority Status

As Strayhorn (2010) notes, the predominant narrative around voluntary minorities in higher education has focused on the experiences of people of color at PWIs. Hall and Closson (2005) first shifted the lens to construct the notion of "temporary minority" as applicable to White graduate students enrolled at HBCUs, whose relatively positive experiences countered their initial expectations of a more hostile climate. Indeed, it is suggested that this temporary minority status allows for the possibility of Whites developing a critical White racial consciousness that can be liberatory (Henry & Closson 2010), since the "extent to which majority members can 'see' themselves as racialized actors is the extent to which they may begin to take assertive steps towards creating a more inclusive society" (Closson & Henry 2008: 17).

However, these authors do not provide a thorough discussion of the complex dynamics involved in being a temporary minority. For example, drawing from the work of Ogbu and Simons (1998) distinguishing between different types of minorities, Bonilla et al. (2011) add to our understanding of the temporary minority status in exploring the process by which White students in TRIO-funded programs learn to challenge their stereotypes and enhance their appreciation of diversity. For Ogbu and Simons, it is important to confront "how and why a group became a minority and the role of the dominant group in society in their acquisition of

minority status" (1998: 157), offering a clear distinction between voluntary and involuntary minorities.

Obgu (1993) advances the importance of the frame of reference typically attached to the voluntary and involuntary minority status condition. For voluntary minorities who essentially migrate to new locations out of a desire for a "better life," their positive dual frame of reference encourages them to appreciate the comparative benefits of their present condition and to therefore minimize the impact of acts of discrimination encountered. Conversely, involuntary minorities experience a negative dual frame of reference by comparing themselves and their condition to that of White middle-class Americans. Voluntary minorities are more likely to interpret negative experiences as temporal and simply part of the investment required to get ahead, unlike involuntary minorities who are convinced that oppressive conditions will be a permanent and powerful part of their lives.

While Ogbu's discussion of voluntary and involuntary minorities references people of color dealing with oppression from their status in a White-dominated society, the framework applies to my decision to be employed at an HBCU. Thus, I would argue that I occupied a temporary voluntary minority status. Depending on their perceived comfort level and assumed level of interest in being immersed in the context, temporary voluntary minorities may occupy a range of nodes on a continuum with reference to their willingness to invest in this identity status and potentially benefit from the encounter.

For instance, it is plausible that some White professors at HBCUs, by virtue of their relative transience based on interest in moving on to other positions, become less committed personally and emotionally in the present context. As a result, these temporary voluntary

minorities may not be as likely to make the extra effort to proactively engage with challenging issues and undergo the kind of serious reflective work that is discussed in this study. In addition, one could surmise that some CDOs at PWIs who are people of color, despite voluntarily accepting their positions and celebrating the opportunity to advance in their careers, could perceive the discrimination that they receive as evidence that they need to return to safer spaces; similarly, my decision to work at HBCUs is generally seen in positive terms (Whites typically applaud me for going there to "help," while Blacks often express appreciation for taking the risk to be an ally), while people of color may encounter greater identity struggles in choosing to be in majority spaces. Thus, the directionality of the minority "movement" (with regards to broader issues of social power and identity) can profoundly shape the response of the participant.

Borderlands Theory

Being a White person — and potentially even more so, as the CDO — at an HBCU can heighten awareness of multiple dimensions of the self operating simultaneously and potentially at odds with one another. Anzaldua (1987) regards this interstitial condition as constituting a "borderlands" condition, with individuals being compelled to manage competing social identities. However, Anzaldua's unique framework for the negotiation of this process serves as a critical launching point for a richer understanding of my experiences and plausibly those of other Whites in temporary voluntary minority situations. Rather than conceptualizing the borderlands as inexorably painful and problematic, Anzaldua contends that affirming and internalizing this intersectional reality offers a unique epistemological and ontological standpoint from which to better "re-cognize" the self and other.

To make sense of the multitude of experiences and requirements of vastly divergent cultural spaces, individuals may need to gain and lose, and blend and modify, and re-shape and re-create in order to establish an entirely new and authentic identity allowing for acceptance, success, and desire to operate in a wide range of milieus. While Bourdieu's notion of habitus (1984) presumes that the general mindset reflecting a group's way of understanding the world is comprised of taken-for-granted assumptions that are unexamined and treated as normative, Anzaldua suggests that individuals can achieve greater access to these inner spaces in shaping perspective and outlook. In essence, contrasting with other approaches which frame individuals in more passive terms, her model allows individuals to exercise considerably greater agency in constructing a meaningful and original blended identity. The following section reviews her contribution and connects it with the focus of this study.

This process of identity formation through crossing between identities occurs in four interwoven stages, according to Anzaldua, who draws from mythical Aztec female characters to establish the lexical genesis for the concepts. The first stage, nepantla, emerges as individuals begin to take residence in new spaces and confront alternate ways of being to discover the possibility that multiple epistemologies, cultural codes, and identities can (co-)exist. In direct contrast to living in the dominant and often rigid constructs found in homogeneous social contexts, the presence of entirely novel approaches for revealing and expressing identity produces a challenge to the often deeply embedded and normative definitions of the self. Since, as Reuman and Anzaldua (2000: 12) point out, "identity is relational, it exists in relation to some other," the nepantla stage obligates individuals to interrogate existing and new realities to gain a clearer view of how one has come to define the self through a particular socialization experience

rather than presume a monolithic, intrinsic, and static formation of identity.

My research is predicated on the notion that Whites can be brought to a heightened awareness of the White racial self when finally immersed within settings where they constitute the "other" and therefore encouraged to initiate internal conversations about the framing of Whiteness from their home communities. The encounter with different types of the "self" through interaction with "others" (both within and outside the perceived community) can plausibly produce a new set of lenses to understand their own realities and a broader set of possibilities for self-expression. As Anzaldua asserts:

> In nepantla, you are exposed, open to other perspectives, more readily able to access knowledge derived from inner feelings, imaginal states, and outer events, and to 'see through' them with a mindful, holistic awareness. Seeing through human acts both individual and collective allows you to examine the ways you construct knowledge, identity, and reality, and explore how some of your/others' constructions violate other people's ways of knowing and living (Anzaldua, as quoted in Keating, 2006: 10).

Missing from Anzaldua's treatment of this condition is a careful examination of the factors involved in either producing a more inquisitive, open response to this moment of questioning or instead a rejection of the new with a concomitant re-immersion within the original identity. For example, some Whites at an HBCU might experience racial alienation and seek to ensconce themselves with a subculture of similarly disaffected White colleagues at the school. Thus, they fail to navigate through this nepantla stage.

The next step entitled "coatlilcue" represents a typically emotionally distressing but potentially most liberating phase in the process. Building from the awareness generated in nepantla, individuals are now engaged in the process of battling through these often disparate sets of ideas and their implications for identity development. Indeed, to confront the self — in

the attempt to understand who and how we have been, as well as who we might want to be — is fraught with risk. In gaining awareness of the constraints that may have previously occupied earlier identity frames, as well as uncertainty and questions regarding the emerging modalities, individuals may experience myriad affective reactions including considerable anger, sadness, confusion, and possible exhilaration. Thus, Anzaldua notes that it takes a rich sense of emotional and cognitive strength to work through and meaningfully emerge from this phase, with many individuals remaining forever locked inside. For Whites in an "othering" environment, the notion of questioning aspects of the racial self and potentially needing to abandon previous conceptions of identity can be difficult, especially those aligned with normative privilege.

In the coyolxauqui stage, which metaphorically refers to assembling the disparate pieces together, individuals labor to make sense of all the disparate social identities they occupy in order to fuse them together into a meaningful collage. This approach suggests that it is impossible -- and plausibly unhealthy -- for us to solely claim a singular identity. Through this stage, we become more self-aware and conscious of the multiplicity of our identities, and thus, can more autonomously act to select the identities (and which versions) that we wish to claim and how we desire to manifest them. In nepantla, Whites might discover a wider assortment of identities that exist outside of their own original definition; in coatlilcue, they commit to the process of questioning how they selected their own view and performance of identity; in coyolxauqui, they (hopefully) gain strategies for managing the many identities available to and within them, allowing for an organic, evolving space that engenders continual healthy negotiation of the self.

By rejecting the forces seeking to marginalize us and re-casting marginalization as an

emergent position of strength and meaningful intellectual standpoint, our richly blended voices and identities gain power. White staff members at HBCUs who adopt a sophisticated perspective provide a more meaningful lens for understanding academic issues and celebrating personal creativity and resilience; they also learn that their viewpoints and sense of self expand through openness to new ideas and experiences. Furthermore, just as we are forever altered by interactions with the wide array of people and situations which confront us, we possess the ability to produce the same positive changes on others and the social world.

Anzaldua considers the final step la mestiza, or a borderlands consciousness, in which individuals proactively assert this new blended identity as a statement of resistance to hegemonic practice and establish an original epistemological framework. Through this consciousness, individuals are forever open to continued evolution of thought and identity, utilizing this new positionality as a vehicle for better understanding themselves, the multiplicity of others, and larger sociopolitical forces; indeed, it is ironic that a state of malleability finally delivers a firm platform for borderlands peoples to construct identity. According to Anzaldua (1987), "The new mestiza... [develops] a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity... learns to juggle cultures... operates in a pluralistic mode... is willing to share... is able to transform...." (79, 82-83). For Whites within HBCU milieus, the opportunity to de-center Whiteness and deconstruct White supremacy — and hopefully adopt habits of mind and practice that facilitate equitable engagement — can be quite liberating. The goal therefore would be an ability to more fluidly and fluently navigate within a wide range of cultural contexts and bring this spirit of inclusion to all of these spaces.

Understanding White(s) — Making the Case for Phenomenology

To potentially evaluate these kinds of realities just spotlighted, particular approaches to understanding are required. As suggested in the previous chapter, I contend that studies within the category of "White people" have largely moved from a focus on social identity by examining processes of racial identity development and towards the sociopolitical constructs of power and privilege. I suggest that this epistemological turn has a profound impact in terms of how we understand Whites as well as frame research to better appreciate vehicles for Whites to work through privilege and gain greater awareness of the self. As MacMullen (2005) argues, a new discourse within Whiteness studies is necessary to navigate more pragmatic approaches to achieving more liberatory outcomes in contesting privilege.

It is my contention that the phenomenological approach (Husserl 1913) offers an essential framework for moving beyond theoretical assumptions and moving towards deeper insight into how Whites understand their own sense of self. As Marshall and Rossman state (1999: 112), phenomenology as an epistemological and methodological tradition represents "the study of lived experiences and the way we understand those experiences to develop a worldview." Husserl speaks to the importance of orientation that reflects our starting point from which we can navigate the world, with Schutz and Luckmann asserting that "the place in which I find myself, my actual 'here,' is the starting point for my orientation in space" (1974: 36). In particular, Husserl identifies the location of the body as a tangible source from which we can know our selves as well as the possibilities and/or limitations for the production of meaning.

Thus, this dissertation will argue for the need to investigate the actual experiences of Whites as a mechanism for understanding of how one enacts and embodies the concept of race. Lee's (2014) writings from this tradition embrace this idea by examining "how people's racial embodiment affects their day-to-day lived experiences, the lived experiences of individuals marked by race interacting with and responding to others marked by race, and the tensions that arise between different spheres of a single person's identity." Race, therefore, emerges as an organic, transactional, and negotiated concept that continues to take shape and meaning. In her essay on the phenomenology of Whiteness, Ahmed (2007) critiques how Whiteness has been investigated as a static category, instead considering how "Whiteness is 'real,' material, and lived… and an ongoing and un-finished history, which orientates bodies in specific directions" (150).

In contrast, White racial identity models have attempted to create more fixed categories of defined reality for individuals supposedly moving forward in their understanding of the self. The most recognized approach comes from the work of Helms (1995), who discusses various status positions that Whites can hold as they travel from naiveté about racial issues ultimately to a more advanced position as an active ally in resisting hegemonic racist attitudes: "The issue for whites is abandonment of entitlement, whereas the general development issue for people of color is surmounting internalized racism" (184). This model offers valuable insight into the manner in which Whites must confront themselves, recognize the existence of privilege and racial disparities, and engage in interracial encounters in order to attain a kind of racial self-actualization.

While Helms' framework has been justly lauded for acknowledging the presence of White privilege/supremacy and advancing the need for this population to move away from racist frames, Chavez and Guido-DiBrito (1999) assert that the approach is still problematic in its "premise … that racial identity for whites is about their perceptions, feelings, and behaviors toward blacks rather than about the development and consciousness of an actual white racial identity (42)." Whiteness therefore is something only in relation to the other, and as such, Helms' account fails to deliver insight into how members of this group define and experience Whiteness. Similarly, Katz (1989) proposes a series of values and principles that may link U.S. Whites — from linear thinking to more rigid time orientation — yet the model fails to resolve the dilemma of how Whites partake in the racial identity journey and potentially grow in their understanding of the broader racial landscape.

Symbolic Interactionist Approaches

The symbolic interactionist tradition undergirds the analysis presented here, drawing from a number of different theories subsumed within this framework. According to Blumer (1969), individuals make meaning of the world through the definitions of reality created through interactions with others. Language functions as a critical symbolic mechanism through which we establish cognitive and psychological labels for the purposes of the creation of meaning (Philipsen 1992; Fasold 1984). Indeed, only through dialogic engagement can one generate these meanings and share them collectively with others — although these social reproductions are constantly fluid and evolving (Bakhtin 1981). Volosinov (1986) reminds us of the inherent power dynamics woven throughout the production of language forms. For instance, Purdie-

Vaughns and Walton (2011) interrogate and problematize the construct of "multiculturalism" as a popular guiding ideology in many organizations, suggesting that it may run counter to the actual strategies used by marginalized people to advance equity efforts.

Mead (1913) writes that through symbolic encounters with others and our own reflections of them, we come to develop a sense of self. With regards to race, it is the interactions with others within and outside our racial group which shape both how we assign meaning to our race-oriented experiences as well as our feelings about the manner in which these experiences influence how we define the self through the prism of race. Indeed, one can only ascertain what is expected of us based on race through engagement with others; therefore, by reflecting on our interpretations of their responses, we learn to know the self in comparison with those socially constructed definitions (Cooley 1902).

Stryker's (1980) thinking on identity salience broadens the discussion of symbolic interactionism by suggesting that individuals create their own internal hierarchies of identity based on the perceived relative importance to them. Yet, it is important to note that contextual factors can influence the salience of particular identities (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje 2001), both in terms of how individuals evaluate their own positionality relative to the environment as well as how others may respond in ways that highlight the centrality of certain identities. In terms of race, one's evaluation of the salience of that particular identity — and as a result, the relative commitment to it — shapes the degree to which the identity is invoked as a marker of behavior and self definition.

As certain identities gain salience through interaction with others, individuals typically seek to connect with others sharing that identity status, with the resulting collective space serving to strengthen and affirm commitment to preserving particular definitions of self. Kottak's (1999) discussion of ideational solidarity emphasizes how individuals tend to align themselves with others perceived to share similar experiences and/or social categorization, as the linkage with the group sharing one's values offers affirmation for the individual and reinforces collective ties. This theme, mirroring Mead's conception of seeing the self as an object and Foucault's principle of exteriority (1980), is applied by Hannerz (1969: 111) in his ethnographic study of working-class urban men who congregate regularly on the street corner to recount life stories: "An individual's vision of reality is often a precarious thing; we can find comfort in the knowledge that it is shared by others, thus acquiring social anchoring as an objective truth."

Tajfel and Turner (1979) suggest that part of social identity emerges from establishing contrasts with a perceived out-group in order to heighten solidarity and commitment to in-group ways of being. The four-step process of social categorization, social identification, social comparison, and psychological group distinctiveness concludes with a state of mind that reflects Bourdieu's proclamation that "social identity is defined and asserted through difference" (1984: 172). It is precisely the act of identifying and distancing from the "other" that strengthens group cohesion and meaning (Lindsley 1999).

The social elements attached to a particular milieu can influence the type of engagement that takes place plus the symbolic responses that lead to understanding of the self. I propose the notion of "racial context cueing" as a vehicle for viewing how certain situations produce various cues that stimulate more explicit thinking about race; clearly, one's positionality also influences

the specific "racial reading" of the context. For example, I recently attended the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, and based on the genres of music performed, I often felt prompted to reflect on the racial composition of the performers and audience.

At the broader societal level, a number of scholars have discussed how political actors may intentionally or unintentionally cue racial attitudes that impact participation in the voting booths among Whites. For instance, Mendelberg (2001) references incidents such as President George H.W Bush's manipulation of the Willie Horton story in order to produce a level of racial priming that motivated White voters to respond in his favor out of fear; it was found that the effect of this act became greater when individuals were not cognizant of its existence. Through a concept called the minimal cue hypothesis, Petrow (2010) shows how the very presence of a Black candidate can "provide the proper context to trigger Whites' racial identities, affects, and cognitions… increasing voters' motivation to participate in an election" (915).

As Steele's (1997) work has pointed out, marginalized populations who find themselves in environments as the minority often suffer from stereotype threat, producing anxiety that typically leads to lower performance outcomes. Conscious of the stereotypes surrounding their social group, these individuals experience stress about potentially confirming these assumptions as opposed to others who feel more comfortable representing the self. Yet, additional research suggests that more inclusive context cues can signal identity safety for the same individuals and more positively shape behavioral outcomes (Purdie-Vaughns et al 2008; Davies, Spencer, & Steele 2005). More focused attention to the nuanced characteristics that differentially define these contexts is needed.

In environments that invite more explicit racial cueing, Whites may become more likely to think through the experience of their own presentation of self. Noticing their difference — and in particular for individuals who are rarely placed in situations as the "other" — can invoke a sense of anxiety and even antipathy or alternately produce interest in conceiving the situation as a learning opportunity, depending on their perception of the context (Goff, Steele, & Davies 2008). While Sue and Sue (2008) have found that the less that Whites are aware of their own Whiteness, the more likely they are to manifest symptoms of racism, it is also plausible that greater awareness of Whiteness in a perceived hostile environment could generate heightened resistance to further engagement internally or externally. The unique dynamics of both the environment plus the individual's conception of race shape this response.

Indeed, the HBCU milieu for Whites likely constitutes a "race-making situation" (James 1994), or a condition that generates particularly powerful moments to define racial attitudes and belief systems. Referencing the HBCU environment, Smith and Borgstedt (1985) suggest that "Whites would be in a subordinate status overall" (14). By establishing Black cultural norms as the explicit standard of social arrangement, HBCUs invert hegemonic patterns of social power and cultural influence. As such, these contexts have the ability to reshape and influence the ways in which Whites gain awareness of how they define the Black experience and the Black community, and in reference to this dissertation, their own sense of self.

The Chief Diversity Officer

The concept and realities of the chief diversity officer position have become popular issues for academics to explore in recent years, essentially spearheaded by the publications of

Williams and Wade-Golden (2007, 2013). Building from extensive quantitative and qualitative research, these authors have offered tremendous insight into the meteoric rise in the existence of this position, the roles associated with it, and the different types of structures that exist with regards to organizing the work. Most recently, in an entire issue of the Journal of Diversity in Higher Education devoted to the topic of the CDO, Leon (2014) offered a qualitative study addressing the efficacy of different organizational models guiding the CDO's efforts, highlighting the importance of aligning the position to institutional values and arranging the CDO portfolio appropriately to "integrate a diversity infrastructure" (90). Other articles have documented the journeys taken by institutions to establish the CDO position (Arnold & Kowalski-Braun 2011; Cherenfant 2012), a process that inevitably helped each campus to more thoughtfully articulate its diversity values and build community around these issues.

A number of doctoral dissertations in the past decade have also focused attention on the chief diversity officer role in higher education (e.g. Woodard 2014; Davalos 2014; Nixon 2013; Lowery 2011; Pittard 2010; Johnson 2010). As the positioning of CDOs has changed over time with institutions embracing a more holistic approach to diversity, this scholarship has tackled a wide range of critical topics that elucidate the continuing promise and challenge of this work. From Woodard's (2014) presentation of how organizational structure and culture impacts CDO success to Lowery's (2011) discussion linking broader institutional and societal values to the framing of the CDO role and responsibility, these projects have been more concerned with addressing structural issues. Studies at the individual level have included Pittard's (2010) analysis of the "essence" of CDOs and their leadership experiences based on reflections of their life stories, institutional context, and career trajectory as well as identification by Davalos (2014)

of the strategies utilized by exemplary CDOs in successfully leading the charge to institutionalize diversity agendas.

Only three of these dissertations, however, position race as a prominent factor in the methodological and analytic approach. Pittard interviews five Black male CDOs, but while she elicits information about the early impact of race and class in shaping their educational journeys, the connection of these social identities to their CDO encounters is not explored. Johnson (2010) studies Black CDOs at three different PWI institutions, looking at how these positions have been constructed on their campuses over time and how these CDOs make meaning of their work. Critical race theory is employed as a means of highlighting the unique challenges these individuals face, but "instead of seeing themselves as in positions with limited authority, these black administrators realize the power they receive from helping members of their communities, lifting as they climb" (117). Yet, Johnson positions race mostly as a general social category and in fact neither ever utilizes the term "identity" in her interviews nor incorporates any racial identity theories to ground the analysis.

Nixon's (2013) study of Black female CDOs represents the most identity-centered work to date. While noting these leaders' status as "extreme tokens" (Turner, González, & Wong, 2011) based on the intersection of race and gender, Nixon uses a framework of agency and self-efficacy in illustrating how they utilize this positionality as sources of knowledge and resistance. Thus, they are able to make sense of the hostility encountered, understand how to operate as "outsiders within" to identify leverage points for successful work, and continue serving as "beacons of light" to others following in their footsteps as well as to institutional constituent groups valuing the work of diversity on their campuses. She identifies this "alterity as a key

component in [their] success… provid[ing] them with a perspective advantage that others in the institution may not have and contribut[ing] to their capacity to be effective change agents for diversity" (164). However, similar to Johnson's study, no specific mention of racial identity theories is made, with Nixon preferring to speak in broader terms about Black female positionality through the prism of the multiple marginalities perspective.

In a volume (Fashing-Varner at al 2015) dedicated to applying Smith's (2004) notion of "racial battle fatigue," Robinson (2015) discusses the unique challenges faced by CDOs who are constantly attempting to engage campus constituent groups in confronting difficult topics related to inclusion and equity. Since institutions are typically quite conservative in policy and practice, the CDO is intentionally bumping up against dominant norms that benefit those who have historically been in leadership positions. Thus, while successful CDOs honor the importance of relationships and alliance building (Williams and Wade-Golden 2007), the fact remains that their work often requires them to make people uncomfortable in order to effect necessary change. With the majority of CDOs being women and/or people of color (including many who did not rise through traditional academic lines), their outsider status makes them even more susceptible to being marginalized or even resented when they critique the record of diversity in various domains.

Yet, no scholarly work to date has specifically addressed the possibility that serving as the CDO could actually lead to greater awareness of one's own racial self. Perhaps it is presumed that these diversity experts are already racially conscious based on their training and/or life experiences. But like all individuals, CDOs continue to grow in their understanding of issues of race and their own personal identities — and particularly for these leaders who are asking

others to engage in deep reflective analysis, it is essential for them to model this process and continue to evolve. In addition, the manner in which CDOs conceptualize their own racial sense of self has profound implications for their work as well as how they handle the reactions to their performance. CDOs may adopt a critical race theory lens when examining how others engage with them, but the notion of turning the mirror on themselves more intentionally is less developed in the literature.

Indeed, the centrality of the self for CDOs seems particularly germane since role performance in this position is inextricably woven with personal characteristics. Their work emanates from an internal desire to ensure that all people can bring their whole selves into the world of work and school, typically using their personality and relational skills in order to effect change (Mero 2015). Since, as Hall (1997) asserts, identities are multiple, contested, and always in the process of "becoming," the notion of understanding the development of the self among CDOs has tremendous value in tracking their personal and professional progress.

Final Considerations

In order to meaningfully capture how the experience of being a White CDO at an HBCU profoundly shapes one's work which then refracts back onto one's definition of the self, I have included a range of theoretical constructs. This chapter has endeavored to present the prominent literature in various areas related to this study, adding that the phenomenological approach will be incorporated to identify how I experienced my time in the position. In the next chapter, I share the methodological issues pertaining to the research, ultimately supporting the use of autoethnography as the ideal (and in essence, the only) way for approaching these issues.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

To tackle the issues outlined in the previous chapter, it is necessary to employ research methods that allow for a more personal and reflexive mechanism to knowledge collection and production. I am indeed passionate about generating insights into the broader social dynamics involved in shaping the racial self among individuals who endeavor to promote diversity work at HBCUs. I also want to better understand myself and the racial journey that I have encountered. As mentioned earlier, being the first and only White CDO at an HBCU institution necessitates the use of autoethnography to conduct this study — and this chapter will highlight the epistemological benefit of this approach, its particular implementation in my case, and my own personal story leading me to this work.

Postmodern Approaches to Knowledge Construction

In response to the positivist mindset presuming the objectivity of scientific research, postmodern thinkers emphasize the subjective nature of all aspects of scholarly inquiry (Kuhn 1962). As Harding (1987) argues, the positionality of the researcher is intrinsically tied to issues of methodology and epistemology, and as a result, it is impossible to produce completely value-free, objective knowledge (Berger & Luckmann 1966). According to Gergen (2001: 806), "To do science is not to hold a mirror to nature but to participate actively in the interpretive conventions and practices of a particular culture."

In large part, women and people of color — as traditional outsiders to the academy — sparked an intellectual revolution around these issues, with an intent to produce scholarship that

intentionally grounded knowledge in their realities in order to affirm their importance and strengthen the ability for the findings to benefit marginalized populations (Ladner 1998). For example, in her book *What Can She Know?*, Code (1991) critiques mainstream epistemology for masking the power relations inherent in their arrangements, discussing how women's voices and interpretations have been ignored and discounted. She renders the traditional scientific paradigm of a detached knower as problematic, arguing that "who" is knowing and "what" is being known are deeply engaged in a dynamic and dialectical relationship that demonstrates the existence of "situated knowledges" (Haraway 1993). Without this awareness, research will continue to devalue women's perspectives under the presumption of objectivity.

Hill-Collins (2000) demonstrates the importance of Black feminist thought in advancing understanding of their lived experiences and contributing towards liberation and self-empowerment. Being "outsiders-within," Black women occupy a unique epistemological standpoint from which to understand the complex dynamics of race, gender, and social power arrangements and to challenge existing social scientific paradigms. Thus, for Collins, the centrality of one's story and voice must be appreciated in scholarly work.

In his essay "Walking in the City," de Certeau (1984), suggests that one's physical location — which is, of course, bound by power dynamics — influences the perception of the social context as well as the decisions one makes to define its meaning. The city planner working and viewing the city from the skyscraper understands the needs and organization of the world down below much differently than the residents who are subjected to these macro-level decisions in their everyday lives. Analogously, the physical presence, proximity, and

participation of the researcher with respect to the issues at hand profoundly shape the interpretive lens.

Autoethnography as Method/ology

As a response to concerns over the epistemological and ontological limitations of traditional research approaches, autoethnography has emerged as an increasingly popular method and discursive vehicle that disrupts canonic ways of knowing by intentionally engaging the interplay between researcher and topic (Ellis & Bochner 2000). While ethnographers have long appreciated the role that biography plays in their work, it is autoethnographers who ultimately placed positionality itself at the center of inquiry and knowledge construction (Coffey 1999). Autoethnography thus constitutes a "response to the alienating effects on both researchers and audiences of impersonal, passionless, abstract claims of truth generated by such research practices and clothed in exclusionary scientific discourse" (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008: 450).

Simply put, Marechal (2010: 43) contends that "autoethnography is a form or method of research that involves self-observation and reflexive investigation in the context of ethnographic field work and writing." Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011: 1) suggest that it is an "approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience." The researcher becomes both the subject and object of inquiry, as s/he attempts to use "data about self and its context to gain an understanding of the connectivity between self and others within the same context" (Ngunjiri, Hernandez, & Chang 2010). By linking the autobiographical to the cultural, autoethnography stands as "part auto or self and part ethno or culture" and "something different from both of them, greater than its parts"

(Ellis 2004: 31, 32). It is purposely self-reflexive research that allows for multiple layers of consciousness as the author navigates the larger social terrain using one's own positionality to make sense of the world and their own selves in honest, vulnerable ways (Denzin & Lincoln 2000).

To be certain, autoethnography is intensely personal, with the writer willing to find the nexus between their identities, perceptions, feelings, and ideas in order to establish meaning. Yet, the outcome of this exploration is typically the understanding of broader cultural phenomena through the lens of the researcher (Ellis 2004; Reed-Danahay 1997). An example comes from Woodard's (2015) dissertation where she explores being the leader of a multiethnic team of music therapists engaging with people in war-torn regions. As Woodard clearly invokes her own powerful and personal journey of learning about her strengths and limitations as a leader and the psychological complexities of the work, she is also keenly focused on examining the implications for others wishing to provide arts-based fieldwork practice in similar regions in addition to highlighting the overall politics of humanitarian aid missions.

While positivists reject the conceptualization of research as intentional political endeavor, autoethnographers typically view their scholarship as part of a proactive effort to use the personal as the political. Denzin (2000) asserts that the product of this approach ought to contain the possibility of benefiting the social world in some fashion. With reference to the academy, Clough (2000) argues that this method contains the potential to open up new paradigms of inquiry and theoretical models to understanding social phenomena. An autoethnography is also typically more evocative and accessible than traditional scholarly outputs, thus rendering the product more likely to be connected with personal and social change (Bochner 1997; Ellis 1995).

Autoethnography is thus seen as both process and product — shaping the way in which the study is conducted, interpreted, and shared. Indeed, the use of narrative as tool for inquiry, analysis and presentation stands as a powerful mechanism for fostering deeper thinking through interdisciplinarity (Kim 2015). Intensely personal and rendered in first-person account, an autoethnography allows for readers to become more intimately connected with the material and ultimately invited to consider their own biographies as part of the interpretive experience (Chang 2008). Rodriguez and Ryave (2002) state that reflections of self are a useful tool for autoethnographers because they open up the reader to "covert, elusive, and/or personal experiences like cognitive processes, emotions, motives, concealed actions, omitted actions, and socially restricted activities" (3). Through encountering rich descriptions and personal narratives from the writer, the reader has greater insight into the meaning-making process and becomes a co-constructor of knowledge by being encouraged to engage their own positionalities as they consume and process the text. As Stinson (2009) proposes, "readers of autoethnographical literature enter the inner workings of the social context studied and are invited to intermingle their experiences with the author's (34)." When autoethnographic works explore relationships between the self and very different others, the author's honesty in wrestling through these encounters offers a powerful example for readers to consider when challenged with similar situations (Chang 2008).

One of the unique aspects of the autoethnographic method is the ability to continue processing the experience and forming interpretations over time, appreciating the perspective gained from both immediate response as well as more measured reflection (Custer 2014). Autoethnographers certainly have intimate and easy access to the "data" at any moment (Chang

2008). In traditional ethnography, the researcher may not be able to access participants at a later point to work through emergent interpretations or reshaped narratives — and furthermore, the notion of suggesting an alternate framing to the participants' presentation could be viewed with suspicion or outright disdain.

Bochner (1984) also speaks to the evolving nature of reflexive work, referencing the "effects that linger—recollections, memories, images, feelings—long after a crucial incident is supposedly finished" (595). As an autoethnographer, one maintains the ability to continue the interpretive and analytic dialogue with the subject through time and context until reaching a space in which the meaning making feels most substantive and accurate. Ultimately, through these techniques, autoethnography can be considered a thoughtful response to what Denzin and Lincoln (2000) consider the "triple crisis of representation, legitimation, and praxis" (17) in qualitative research.

A number of articles and dissertations in recent years have employed autoethnography in the examination of racial issues, with clear benefits towards understanding both the self as well as broader patterns of social reality. With regards to methodological issues, Pompper (2010) analyzes her status as a White woman conducting focus groups with women of color to become more cognizant of underlying power dynamics plus the political and pragmatic implications of researching groups different from ourselves. Boyd (2008) reflects on his experiences as a White male within an interracial dialogue group not only to better identify what he learned from participation, but also to consider how the autoethnographic approach allowed for greater insights into the realities of White privilege. In Pathak's (2010) work, she addresses the possibilities inherent in postcolonial autoethnography, sharing her experiences as a South Asian

female in multiracial settings to illustrate the need for lifting up marginalized voices, problematizing the essentialized concept of people of color as a unifying framework of supposed collective understanding, and contesting traditional limiting binaries in scholarly production. Finally, Sykes (2014) draws from his experience as a Native American developer of a tribal learning community to argue for the power of transformative autoethnography to produce meaningful practices and affirming narratives that attest to the potential of the educational journey for marginalized persons.

According to Hinckley (2014: 101), "the act and process of autoethnography is completely consistent with core elements of phenomenology." Since "the task of phenomenology… is the reflective-descriptive explication, analysis, and assessment of the life of consciousness" (Zaner 1970: 122), it reflects the philosophical approach taken in this study. Autoethnography then represents a vehicle for engaging in a form of the phenomenology of the self.

The Centrality of Reflexivity

Before being able to successfully delve into and deliver autoethnography, a researcher must grapple with the issue of reflexivity. While Day (2012) acknowledges the multitude of definitions that exist surrounding the notion of reflexivity, I will be utilizing Bolton's (2010) statement that while reflection is "learning and developing through examining what we think happened on any occasion," reflexivity involves "finding strategies to question our own attitudes, thought processes, values, assumptions, prejudices and habitual actions, to strive to understand our complex roles in relation to others…" (13). Coghlan and Brannick suggest that it requires

"the constant analysis of your own lived experience as well as your own theoretical and methodological suppositions (2005: 62). In their call for reflexive sociology, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) propose that reflexive thinking can be emancipatory by engaging individuals in appreciating the power dynamics shaping one's habitus (belief systems and values) that are embodied within particular social structures.

Weigert and Gecas (2003) view reflexivity as the ability for the individual to be an object and subject to oneself, in essence constituting the mindset behind skilled autoethnographic work. While acknowledging the "normal strategy of reflective persons," Glaser & Strauss (1967: 227) contend that turning this practice into reflexive research requires intentional meta-thinking that often runs contrary to traditional epistemological leanings in the academy. Several scholars have noted that this move is needed in order to produce more valid and useful social scientific research (Burawoy 2005; Gouldner 1970).

I suggest that varying degrees of distance may be beneficial in helping autoethnographers to more richly appreciate how and why they responded in certain ways to social phenomena. For instance, the ability for the reflexive autoethnographer to appreciate sociocultural context can be heightened by being both "in place" and later "out of place" to engage multiple perspectives. Interestingly, it can be argued that when in the midst of particularly emotion-driven milieus, as much as one attempts to appreciate broader perspectives and dissonant voices, researchers can easily fall into the desire to accept our own interpretations to "save face" and preserve a personal sense of integrity and competence. Wisdom developed over time as well as changes in emotional connectedness over time can produce new knowledge. This dissertation will present this

reflexive approach prior to my encounter as CDO, all through the discussion of my actual work at Cedar State, and alongside the concluding analysis of the entire journey.

The Research Process

From the moment that I accepted the position, it was evident that my status as a White male CDO at an HBCU represented a bold step for the institution as well as for the general community of HBCU schools. Furthermore, I was well aware that I would likely face challenges to my identity and to the progressive agenda that I endeavored to pursue in a region of the country not accustomed to this line of thinking. And in turn, I envisioned that I would be personally changed in a profound way as a result of the confluence of these social forces at play. The decision to engage reflexively throughout my journey was definitely intentional and directed at ideally benefiting my performance in the position as well as my own personal understanding of self.

The process of data collection and meaning making occurred in two different phases. During my employment, I maintained written records — mostly through informal journals, notes, and emails — that documented the activities presented in the next chapter and allowed for concrete text to draw from in writing the entire dissertation. In addition, I was engaged in regular dialogue with a host of others that fostered richer introspection regarding my work and the response to it. For example, my regular meetings with the president offered the opportunity to collaboratively think through some of the challenges faced and to potentially gain perspective of the broader issues potentially present, including aspects of race and geography that perhaps I was lacking in understanding based on my positionality. Conversations with office team

members and staff meetings also delivered the chance to gain additional insights with individuals of various racial backgrounds and ages. Drawing from Marechal's (2010: 45) point that autoethnography has been critiqued for being "biased, navel-gazing, [and] self-absorbed," it was my hope that these consistent collaborative encounters, in conjunction with externally focused diversity work, could preserve a richer focus on productive meaning making.

During this first phase, I was still deeply immersed in the position, and therefore, perhaps more pragmatically than ontologically focused. I was often thinking as an autoethnographer, but primarily, I was a CDO with a job to do. While I know that aspects of this introspective labor did occur and generated greater understanding of the self, I contend that its reach was limited in part because of my primary interest in utilizing this process to enhance my performance in the role of CDO. Some deeper lessons about my racial identity might not have been fully explored at this juncture. In addition, I experienced considerable alienation and disappointment at times in the position, feelings that would make it difficult to process my journey in both the healthiest and most cognitively meaningful manner while in the position.

After leaving the institution, I honestly needed time away for a degree of healing and a focus on the next stage of my career as a full-time speaker and consultant. Certainly, I want to profoundly honor the incredible experiences that I participated in over the three years — as I gained tremendously in terms of professional knowledge and felt a great deal of pride for our collective accomplishments. While many of us outsiders to the area often jokingly complained about being "in the woods and back in time," I came to celebrate many aspects of "country life" and the Southern way of being. I learned to slow down, developed more patience, and matured as a person and professional. I came to appreciate how trips to the local barber shop were often

met with commentary about things that people in the community had heard I was doing on campus or in town. Reflecting the rural emphasis on "people over things," I still value the connections that I established and the manner in which so many students, employees, and alumni really touched my heart.

But the challenges of guiding a progressive ship in turbulent countervailing winds had taken a bit of a toll on me. As such, I created a degree of psychological distancing for several months. With the passage of time, I desired to mentally revisit the struggle to make sense of the experiences and believe that the physical and spiritual distancing allowed for space needed to gain additional perspective and the ability to employ "insider" and "outsider" knowledge in generating meaning. When returning to the analysis and writing of this dissertation, I felt refreshed and excited; my participation in a Kellogg leadership fellowship program and engagement as a diversity trainer across the country also presented to me new ideas to enrich my thinking. As Yang, Liao, and Huang (2008) assert, high identity salience facilitates memory. I know that I am acutely able to recall rich features of events from throughout my employment period for use in this dissertation and to compare my reactions from then up to the present. Indeed, paralleling the fluidity and evolving nature of understanding the racial self, my own understanding of the phenomena taking place during my tenure has changed over time. All aspects of this process will be shared in the next chapter

Thus, in addition to being cathartic and insightful for me to explore these experiences, I think that my story has utility in the academic arena. First, theorizing around the CDO position needs to better understand the personal implications for individuals occupying it. This dissertation also gives more personal testimony that confronts the issue of how diversity work

itself might affect the CDO's own sense of the racial self. As a White person, I am able to offer viewpoints that can perhaps speak clearly to other Whites and encourage them to confront the self more intentionally in the mission of advancing a larger racial project. This dissertation will therefore reflect the tenets of analytic autoethnography, which "focuses on developing theoretical explanations of broader social phenomena" (Ellingson & Ellis 2008: 445).

Finally, I wish to discuss the decision to not engage other members of the campus community in sharing their thoughts with me during the actual writing of the dissertation. Although the insights could plausibly prove helpful in addressing some of the internal questions that I wrestled with as well in affirming claims made in these pages, I believe that the expressed purpose of the study to reflexively understand my own perceptions must remain paramount. Yes, I could be wrong with my interpretations, but the research question compels me to focus attention on my own emerging sense of racial being as a filter for the events taking place during my tenure at the institution. To be clear, ethnographers rarely "fact check" the veracity of claims made by their research subjects regarding their own thoughts or feelings; these reactions represent "their truth" and comprise the target of investigation and analysis.

The Research Setting

Cedar State University is a masters-level regional institution in a remote rural area in the South. Located on the border between two areas considered to be the 4th and 8th poorest counties in the United States, the university stands approximately 40 miles away from the closest full-service restaurant or department store. As a result of its isolated location, Cedar State celebrates its close-knit atmosphere and the legacies of families who continue to send their

children and grandchildren to the institution. A significant number of staff members live right on the campus, with many individuals growing up, attending school, and continuing on to work there.

The university maintained a host of traditions, and according to many observers, had not changed much in years prior to the arrival of President Smith, who was a rare outsider to the institution and the state to occupy the position. In fact, he broke new ground when hiring the first female Vice President in Cedar State's history in 2011. By bringing in a number of new members to the senior leadership team from around the country, the president was making a statement about the need for the school to consider itself on the national landscape and to attract accomplished individuals who could bring fresh insights to the campus.

When I started at Cedar State, the university enrolled 4018 students, 7% of whom were classified as non-Black. The population of full-time employees overall was slightly more diverse, with 14% of staff members and 36% of faculty members being non-Black. Many years earlier, a previous president had placed significant emphasis on globalization by recruiting a large number of international students to Cedar State. But, since his passing, diversity as an intentional priority had become less salient. In the state, considerable litigation in the past and present-day emphasis from the Higher Education Board had made diversity a prominent issue, at least on paper. I was assigned by the President to take over the slot previously held by the Provost on the Higher Education Board's Diversity Committee, attending regular meetings with CDOs from the other state institutions. In addition, I became the Chair of the committee tasked with developing a five-year campus diversity plan. With the president's scholarly background in

diversity issues, I was excited to take on the challenge and pleased that he granted me considerable latitude in the direction that I wanted to pursue for building an inclusive campus culture.

Furthermore, as a direct report to the president, I met with him on a regular basis and served on both the President's Council (senior administration) and the President's Cabinet (senior administration plus next-level managers) which would meet on alternate Monday mornings. The president was relatively young, innovative, and committed to building close relationships with the leadership team. From the first weekend when the Council attended a weekend retreat out of town, it was evident that the entire team would be hands-on and have access to many of the inner workings of the institution.

The president also expected the new arrivals to the team — myself plus four others — to live on campus, and so I ended up being housed in the outdated faculty/staff apartments. As such, we could be readily available to the president, who regularly hosted events at his home or invited groups of us to join him on spontaneous excursions, especially during the first two years. Considering the remoteness of the campus, these activities created excitement for the team and generated tremendous access to the president for mentorship and feedback.

My Journey to the Position and the Research

To be fully transparent, it would have seemed unfathomable earlier in my life for me to be completing a dissertation about serving as a chief diversity officer at an HBCU institution. I grew up in the suburbs of Rochester, New York, in an upper-middle-class community without considerable diversity. While my parents were relatively liberal and did have a few friends

outside our identity group, I was not a particularly socially conscious individual. Indeed, I recall holding an allegiance to color-blind ideologies regarding racial issues and manifesting considerable sexism in my thinking during my adolescence. Although a female friend who like me wanted to pursue a career in sports journalism deeply challenged my patriarchal attitudes, the lack of diversity in thought or demographics within my friendship circle meant that my beliefs on race were largely unquestioned. Furthermore, there was no impetus for serious exploration of my own White racial identity.

I do recall one ironic moment during my senior year of high school connected to this work. When I completed a computer-based inquiry about which colleges would be best for my interests, a school named Howard University emerged at the top of the list. Bring ignorant of the school, I remember asking my mom about Howard and learning that it was an historically Black institution. While I held no negative attitudes about the school or an HBCU per se, I simply just "knew" that it would not be for me and immediately dismissed Howard as an option.

During my second academic term at Northwestern University, I attended a town-hall style event where a group of mostly African-American students presented skits depicting scenes apparently from one of their classes. Their intent was to spotlight actions in that class from the professor that they deemed as racist. While I cannot recall the specific behaviors, I clearly remember sensing that the scenarios came from my Sociology class the previous term with a professor that I had truly appreciated for opening my eyes to the intellectual gifts connected with the discipline. I approached the group, and after learning that they were referencing that class, mentioned that I had been enrolled in it. Someone in the group replied that they recognized me. I responded by stating unequivocally that what they had shown in the scenes had simply not

occurred, as I had attended every class session and would have remembered such a situation. After some back and forth discussion of I-say/You-say, one female student responded, "Just because you didn't hear it doesn't mean that it wasn't said." My entire perspective was disrupted at that pivotal moment.

Thus, years before learning about the concept of positionality in graduate school, I became intimately aware of how our own background shapes the cultural lenses through which we make sense of the world. In a clear example of White privilege, I had assumed that my interpretation of events stood as the official, unquestioned version. The experience actually led me to seek opportunities to learn about race, taking classes in African-American History, Racial and Ethnic Relations, and Development of the Black Child; but as I reflect now, these classes (and perhaps due to my own limited skills in self-reflection) tended to frame the issues as belonging to the "other," with me as academic observer and interpreter.

Certainly, I was also exposed to Peggy McIntosh's classic article on White privilege and passionately affirmed its central premise, yet I do not remember serious time being spent in interrogation of my own racial identity. And if the internal work occurred, it failed to stand out in comparison to the inquiries made externally. My interest became in understanding systems of inequality and the ways in which marginalized populations were negatively impacted by structural oppression; my status as a beneficiary in that system — as well as how I could best serve as an ally — was significantly less examined. I wanted to "help make a difference," and while perhaps not consciously adopting a "savior" mentality, elements of that approach likely had to be present in my thinking.

As a result of my emergent passion for social justice, I spent six years after graduation with my BA and MA in Sociology as a youth worker, mostly in underresourced communities of color in Chicago. In addition, I taught classes part time at a number of different higher education institutions. I was typically one of few White faces in those spaces, and I became more aware of the feelings of being watched and experiencing anxiety over not wanting to say the wrong thing. One night, when some of my colleagues invited me to a party on the West Side, I felt as if the entire club stopped and stared at me when I walked in the building. Yet, while race was a constant factor, it was not an issue that I elected to profoundly explore on a deeply personal level. So, we would examine White privilege in my classes, and I definitely began to attest to its profound impact on my life outcomes — yet, a more rigorous introspective racial examination did not occur. And while I ran youth programs with almost all Black and Latino participants, I think that I focused more on building relationships predicated on my personality rather than my positionality. Simply put, I knew race as a social and political construct.

From 1997-2005, I served on the faculty of a community college outside of Seattle. When I initially started there, the college was struggling to provide an inclusive climate and maintained a negative reputation in terms of its record of educating students of color. It was exciting to be a part of a cadre of colleagues who challenged the institution to grow and to establish new programs and policies that fostered the spirit of diversity and inclusion. (Interestingly enough, due to demographic shifts and hopefully our own efforts, the school is now the most diverse in the state of Washington.) I always volunteered or was asked to be involved in these meaningful initiatives and truly cherished these experiences. Yet again, much of my work was externally driven, and since I had internalized the appropriate social justice

education knowledge base and publicly practiced it, no one overtly pushed me to personally reflect on the racial self.

For the next five years, I served as a faculty member at two different HBCU schools in the South, earning awards for my teaching and service and being deeply engaged in working with students as a mentor and advisor. While the faculty ranks included significant numbers of non-Black members, I still was acknowledged for my "otherness," although as can happen in times when individuals from other social groups inhabit particular spaces, I received "credit" for my presence. I represented "the cool White guy" in the minds of many students who had never encountered a relatively young White male professor capable of integrating hip-hop into lesson plans and interested in spending considerable time outside of class supporting students in various capacities. These statements are not intended to be self-congratulatory — but rather, a recognition of how my racial identity on campus had been categorized slightly differently ("not like the other White people") and therefore ironically led to my own internalization of a feeling of "specialness" that kept me from deep explorations of my own White self. Perhaps other White faculty members were struggling with feelings of acceptance or the meanings of Whiteness, but I was not a regular participant in that enterprise.

I also began to establish a national reputation for my work as a diversity and inclusion trainer and consultant during those years. Thus, when I spent the year before arriving at Cedar State as a faculty member at a major research institution, I was assigned to teach multicultural education courses and advised the College of Education on matters of diversifying the curriculum and student population. To be clear, I feel very competent in my knowledge base and skilled in engaging others in meaningful ways to appreciate the centrality of diversity-related

issues in shaping individual habits and institutional practice. It was just that the more I became an "expert," the less that I pursued a more introspective and reflexive analysis of my own racial self.

Based upon the recommendation of a friend who was mentored by President Smith, I was personally recruited by him to be considered for the position of Director of Diversity and Equity Engagement. I remember receiving a phone call from him one evening inviting me to campus for a visit, which ultimately became more of a presentation ceremony than interview. My first stop on the itinerary was a lunch with the senior leadership team, where everyone joked and chatted with me as if I were already a member. The rest of the day involved meetings with various individuals with whom I would likely be collaborating, followed by a friendly gathering at the president's home. There, the Vice President of Institutional Advancement pulled me aside to ask my salary requirements for the position.

Honestly, I had no idea whether I would be hired until my final meeting with the president the next day when he handed me an envelope with a contract. It was all conducted with his typical dramatic flair. When asked about serving on the President's Council, he initially rejected the idea — but when I arrived on campus two weeks later to begin employment at the start of the new school year, I had become a member. In addition, President Smith felt that the state and the school were "not ready" for the actual title of "Chief Diversity Officer," but that my position would ostensibly constitute the same role.

Finally, this dissertation marks the culmination of a 14-year doctoral journey (although I completed a Doctor of Education degree from a South African university along the way). With regards to the research for this program, I had previously proposed two different topics which

interested me, but I wanted to examine matters directly pertaining to my own life. The notion of exploring the issues presented here not only captured my intellectual spirit, but also represented something that would empower and nourish me personally.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present a "thick description" (Geertz 1973) of major elements of my journey as CDO at Cedar State University over the course of three academic years. First, a series of encounters and reactions that speak to my generalized sense of being on the campus are offered. Next, I present what I consider the three most "seminal experiences" that took place, linking these events with the broader understanding of their implications for my own racial sense of self, diversity work at HBCUs, and the role of the CDO. Using first-person narrative, I alternate between personal feeling in situ with reflexive analysis following distancing from those moments. It is my intention to utilize the phenomenological presentation of experiences as a springboard to recognizing potential patterns and themes of substantive meaning for HBCUs and Whites who position themselves at these institutions.

The Initial Steps

I arrived on campus on a Sunday night, less than two weeks after being offered the job. After quickly packing up my house and placing most of my belongings on a moving truck that would not arrive for days, I hit the road with a few suitcases and mixed feelings of excitement and anxiety. When I performed a Google Earth search, I literally just found a whole bunch of Earth. In all seriousness, when conducting an online investigation for apartments in town, I did not find the existence of anything at all. The president's executive assistant had informed me that I would be temporarily housed in hotel-style rooms in the Student Union with other new staff members while more permanent arrangements were being developed.

I was leaving behind friends, family, my own home, a great working environment and teaching situation, and city life. I had never lived in rural America, and as I drove closer to campus, I could track the decline of businesses and activity and restaurants and everything else that I would likely miss. In the spirit of full disclosure, this state had been one that I always joked that I would never want to live in — with its historic legacy of brutal racism and conservative policies as well as perpetual ranking at the bottom of all of those lists regarding education and other social issues. What was I doing, and moreover, what was I thinking?

In addition, I wondered about whether I would be up for the professional challenge awaiting me. Certainly, I felt confident in my skills as a social justice educator and ability to perform well in the HBCU setting. But was I truly ready for this level of administrative responsibility? I did not even have any information about a budget, an office, staff, resources, or vision from the president. Literally, 12 hours after I arrived and settled in to my new place, I would find out — as the university started the new academic year with two days of orientation for all employees.

I remember walking inside the large ballroom with a wide range of questions and worries, and being new to an administrative role, my first challenge was figuring out where I was supposed to sit. Some of my colleagues on the President's Cabinet invited me to join them on the front rows, and I found myself being warmly greeted by other staff members who obviously recognized that I must be new. The place was extremely friendly, exuding that deep Southern rural charm that I had been expecting.

During his remarks, the President asked supervisors to introduce new employees in their units and to share a little information about them. He followed by welcoming those of us who

were joining his leadership team. When it was time for me to stand up and be acknowledged, President Smith made sure to mention my membership in Kappa Alpha Psi (a traditionally Black fraternity), my inclusion into Phi Beta Kappa from undergrad days, my Jewish faith (which we had never previously discussed), and jokingly, my race. No one else in these introductions had been so referenced by markers of social categories, and it felt a bit awkward. To be clear, I am not a particularly religious person, and especially in such a Bible Belt community, I wondered whether this initial framing of my identity would establish a distancing effect from others. Maybe some people held stereotypical images of Jewish folks or did not appreciate my outsider religion. I am legal guardian to a young Muslim man who spent considerable time in schools where others attempted to convert him or denigrate his religion — and as I began this position, I did not desire for anything similar to happen to me which could enact any more barriers for my work. After all, I was a White male who had no connection to the school or the state — and additional identity markers of "otherness" at the outset seemed problematic to me.

During my first few days, I made a huge misstep. In addition to my CDO title, I had asked the president for a joint faculty appointment to allow me to teach a class each semester. I truly enjoy being in the classroom, and I also believed that having access to a group of students in that first semester would be helpful for getting my name out there and promoting our Office. If students felt positively about me, perhaps they would spread the word and participate in our activities.

With my academic background, I was assigned to the Department of Social Science, and hearing whispers of a department meeting, I called and emailed the Chair for more information. Dr. Parker did not respond, and I subsequently received the cold shoulder from her at an event.

So, after discovering the time and location, I just showed up for the meeting. Clearly, I was not invited and not wanted there by Dr. Parker, who proceeded to tell everyone present that "I had nothing to do with his hiring, and I don't even know if he is qualified to teach." The disrespect was evident and continued throughout the meeting. Towards the end, I spoke up, but did so with a bit of defensiveness. In my eyes, it was relatively innocuous, but word quickly got back to the president and others that I had demonstrated blatant disrespect for an esteemed member of the campus community. Dr. Parker had attended Cedar State, taught there for over 40 years, and frequently commented how she bled (and regularly wore) the school colors.

Dr. Smith reprimanded me in an email also sent to the entire senior administration. Another older Dean with whom I had quickly established a positive relationship during my interview visit pulled me aside and shared the importance of showing deference at an HBCU in the rural South. Later, when meeting with the president, he mentioned that I would not want to be perceived as a "White guy who didn't appreciate how things work at places like this," calling on me to remember my training in cultural competence and ethnography. He said, "You probably didn't say anything really wrong, but you didn't appreciate the context — take the time to build relationships first so people get to really know you."

I needed to think more critically about context. First, unfamiliar to rural Southern environments, I had underestimated the power of relationships and deference to both tradition and elders. While I had previously appreciated and acted appropriately regarding these concepts in general at the two other HBCUs where I worked, I had to take this philosophy to a much deeper level, especially since judgments of my missteps might be attributed to my racial outsider status and potentially deemed antithetical to the entire cause of diversity and inclusion. Even

though I did teach courses in the department and Dr. Parker eventually seemed to respect my work, she always maintained a relatively distant relationship with me — and thus, I failed to secure her full support as an important ally.

As a result, I established my first goal for the Office to be an emphasis on celebrating community. While the approach represented a desire to foreground diversity work in the spirit of inclusion, I also felt that it would be particularly important for me to pursue this angle based on my status as a White male outsider. To be clear, I experienced that there were a lot of "nots" attached to me at first — not from the school, not from the state, not Southern, and not Black — which could make the pushing of a diversity agenda something that others would question at first. People loved their school, and the majority of employees grew up nearby and/or attended there. As mentioned earlier, the President's senior team had been infused with a number of outsiders in a short amount of time — and this rapid pace of change in a very traditional place had been met with plenty of skepticism. The "street committee" was talking about and trying to figure out all of the newcomers, I was told. My Whiteness was yet another layer to the pile of questions that seemingly swirled inside the heads of the long-time Cedar State crowd.

Thus, I had to demonstrate my allegiance to the place first and to develop programming that would embody the spirit of pride. Then, I would argue, if you/we love Cedar State and believe that being here has a profoundly positive effect on individuals' lives, let us all work together to make sure that everyone here can enjoy that same experience. The Office promoted a "We are Brave" campaign to highlight the goal of unity, and a number of events were designed to advance that agenda such as Diversity Dialogues for staff and Courageous Conversations for students. By bringing people together through interactive activities that fostered the spirit of

community, I was seeking to establish myself as someone dedicated to the school and not trying to push buttons too fast. With my reputation as an engaging speaker, I ended up receiving invitations to present at numerous events which further allowed me to manifest commitment to the institution. Perhaps people did not expect that I, as a White male outsider, could create connections with others as quickly as I had; thus, my ability to be a White male as CDO created an intrigue factor which may have benefitted me in terms of gaining supporters and entrenching our work in an inclusion frame.

The Complex Dimensions of Racial Visibility and Exceptionalism

While there was certainly no attempt to maintain my racial classification as a secret, I was surprised by how acknowledged it would become. The president routinely made reference to my race in private conversations and even public discussions. Others told me that the President had desired to hire a White person for the position; on multiple occasions, he would (perhaps not so jokingly) make the remark that "I just wanted someone who would spend their time counting the number of White kids around here." To him, the position was in part for publicity purposes, with several articles in the national press being written early on about his bold move to advance diversity at an HBCU. One online publication, for example, celebrated Dr. Smith as he "inaugurated one of the first HBCU offices of equity and inclusion and appointed Dr. Derek Greenfield, who is white and Jewish, to lead it."

Frequently, the President would position me as "Blacker" in my politics — and by extension, by identity — than he was. One time, he sent me the following message on Twitter: "My mother is looking for you. She asked did you celebrate Hanukkah or Christmas. I said

Kwanzaa." While the typically joking comments in public were largely intended to suggest a kind of racial exceptionalism, they were still frequently awkward and created a heightened sense of performance anxiety for me. I knew that I was White, and I would imagine that others in those settings were quite cognizant of my race as well; the unspoken became vocalized and therefore even more visible in those spaces. If we were in public space, I would be required to offer some kind of non-verbal acknowledgment of the statement — a smile, a feigned laugh, something; in private conversations, fellow interlocutors would usually glance my way, with the ensuing pause necessitating some type of verbalized response. To ignore these comments in the public gaze would appear dismissive of the president's attempt to engage race or even ignorant of the dynamics of race. I was, in essence, the token White administrator, the showpiece to affirm that the institution and president were committed to diversity. In addition, I recall him once pulling out a copy of a state board publication which included profiles of each institution. Dr. Smith turned to the page featuring photos of the senior staff members at each institution: "Look! No one has diversity like me. A White Jewish guy, an East Indian Buddhist, a White female! Those other schools can't even come close."

Throughout my time at Cedar State, I found myself frequently being the recipient of comments reflecting variations on the theme of my presentation of self as indicative of a symbolic transracial identity. In other words, by manifesting what were deemed to be "Black" cultural styles in an authentic manner, I was often publicly racially coded as "Black." From statements such as "You're just a light-skinned brother" to the remark from a well-known public personality on stage at an event that she "needed to check my DNA" after I delivered a speech, these words served as an ironic "othering" in the context of seeking to build community through

shared behavioral and linguistic practices. The statements are furthermore problematic to me in that they embrace an essentialized Black cultural code bound by particular ways of speaking and acting, which also suggests that Whites could not authentically possess those traits.

Every time someone would say, for example, "You're confused… you think you're White, but you're actually Black," they would inevitably pause and wait for my reaction. Depending on context, I learned to develop a range of responses. If the comment came from a friendly colleague, I would typically smile and offer a non-verbal expression of appreciation for what was clearly intended as a compliment; making a statement about actually being White might sound ungrateful or even as if I were seeking to reject Blackness itself. Yet, if I thought that the speaker or others in the audience were more racially conscious, I needed to assert that I knew my status as a White person with the social privileges attached to it, avoiding a possible negative reaction from others who might mistakenly believe that I was attempting to be a fraud.

In essence, I had become an example of racial exceptionalism, with implicit (and sometimes explicit) statements that I was "not like other White people." For this community, Whiteness was encoded with distance and coldness interpersonally as well as a disinterest in anything presumed to be culturally Black. People routinely stated that "you must have grown up around a lot of Black people." When I spoke at events, alumni members inevitably approached me afterwards to excitedly ask if I were also a preacher; at university social functions, colleagues would often mention to others something along the lines of, "You have to see Derek out there on the dance floor… he can really move!" These declarations of my "non-White" embodied identity pushed for me an even stronger consideration of what Whiteness actually represented. I

realized that identities often receive greater essentializing by outsiders, which can prompt group members to more intentionally reflect on the nuances and complexities of the self.

Interestingly, it was not until I moved to the South that I received frequent inquiries about my actual racial lineage. Perhaps being close to Louisiana where the Creole community exhibited physical features similar to mine influenced this reaction, as several individuals commented on how they had family members "much lighter than you." I even learned to recognize the confused look on people's faces and awkward initial phrasing as a predictor of the question to come. Having to explicitly mention my status as a full White person almost seemed to disappoint others.

During my second year, a major national online publication issued a request to interview me as well as our staff members for a feature story that ultimately touted Cedar State as "leading the charge" among HBCUs for diversity work. The university had garnered a national diversity award, our Office had just created and sponsored an HBCU diversity conference, and we were on a roll with on-campus and community-based programming. In addition to responding to questions electronically beforehand, I spent the better part of a day with the writer Mitchell as he accompanied us to activities conducted by our office. Mitchell was also the founder and editor for a popular website devoted exclusively to news about HBCUs, and he had become a huge supporter of Dr. Smith's progressive leadership. Thus, I had confidence that the piece would be supportive, although I could not predict the specific angle that Mitchell would assume regarding my representation in the piece.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the opening section highlighted my race, recounting how a local news station reporting at a celebratory event on campus had focused the camera on me during a

crowd dance. The photo atop the headline for the article did not show our diverse students or programs sponsored by the university to support inclusion. Instead, Mitchell had apparently visited my Facebook page and found a photo of me during one of our national fraternity functions from two years ago. The intent clearly was to spotlight my dissonant racial being — the White guy in the historically Black fraternity, who as readers would discover, also served as the CDO at a historically Black university.

The photo admittedly surprised me as an act of racialization. To back up for a moment, I would be foolish to not have envisioned that a story spotlighting our work would avoid making my race a central feature, if for no reason than to add controversy to spark readership and response. Furthermore, it is plausible that the framing of my fraternity identity at the outset could be designed to deliver instant credibility to me — "if he has been accepted into Kappa, then maybe he 'gets it'." Yet, the boldness and intentionality of the entire depiction again reinforced the feeling of racial tokenism.

This kind of "supravisibility" is experienced as "a double-edged sword: it can be empowering as well as disempowering" (Brighenti 2007: 335). Certainly, I was given extra credit for apparently being one of the rare White people who can present an authentic self that resonated with Black cultural identity. On one level, it felt meaningful to know that personally and professionally, I had acceptance and credibility; these identity markers likely granted me greater permission to tread into race issues on campus and perhaps even much quicker forgiveness for missteps in those endeavors. Maybe I was also contributing to breaking down broader racial barriers by modeling White progressivism.

Yet, I found it disconcerting to sometimes not know how to respond or to worry about whether some more critical individuals would think that I was attempting to appropriate a Black identity or deny my racial privilege — to be guilty of what Tate (2003) writes about in his book *Everything But the Burden: What White People are Taking from Black Culture*. I am, after all, fully cognizant of my racial classification. And furthermore, I had concerns that a serious error on my part would function to destroy efforts towards racial coalition building and reaffirm in some people's minds any stereotypes about White people. As such, these clearly well-intentioned and affirming statements of inclusion ironically operated as a concomitant form of othering.

Fraternity Membership and the Outsider-Insider

As a member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., one of the nine historically Black Greek-letter organizations, I frequently find myself on the receiving end of considerable surprise and questioning. While one of my Black frat brothers wearing paraphernalia might typically hear someone comment, "Oh, you're a Kappa!" the same scenario in my case typically generates the question, "Oh, you're a Kappa?" Thus, this type of questioning at Cedar State served as another linguistic form of othering which often lead to subsequent requests for me to answer the inevitable follow-up inquiry, "So, tell me, how did you end up choosing Kappa?"

These questions reminded me that I did not quite fit in to their socially constructed reality. While perhaps not intended this way, my being asked to recount the story of my membership over and over again seemed as if it stood as a kind of verification of my credentials for authentic belonging. I have spoken with so many Black male college students at PWIs who

have been routinely asked to produce their ID cards on the grounds of their own campuses, analogous to citizenship papers that one must constantly carry around like in the days of South African apartheid. Rather than presumed to belong, these students feel as if they must remain prepared to be validated by others. Laymon (2014) writes about how his Vassar faculty ID also has become a mandatory, yet still insufficient license to exist as a Black man at his institution.

At Cedar State, I would hear that when attempting to identify who I was to another person, some people would say, "You know, the White Kappa." The phrase became part of the semiotic of my borderlands reality. Again, I know that I received "cool points" for being in the fraternity, and while the notion of a White guy as a member added to this positive image, it also functioned as a constant reminder of difference. When I would be introduced by the president to someone else, he often involved my Kappa membership as a vehicle for establishing my authentic connection to the Black community and identity as an acceptable White person.

Occasionally, I would be asked to shimmy, mostly by students. For those unfamiliar with the concept, the shimmy is a trademark stylistic gesture performed by mostly younger members who typically incorporate it into strolls as a seductive move. In addition to the fraternity's legacy of "achievement in every field of human endeavor," the "smooth" Kappa personality is seen as emblematic of its identity. It would seemingly happen every few months, when someone associated with Cedar State would say, "Hey, Dr. G, can you shimmy?" The request also occurred at step shows or events where the undergrad members were present, when a song associated with Kappas would be played and members of the crowd would call out my name to join in. I always refused politely — or in the public settings, found a way to extricate myself from the space if I could sense that it was about to happen. To students, I explained both that I

did not want to end up on a youtube video because someone thought it was amusing to see a middle-age White guy bust out a shimmy as well as how I felt uncomfortable to be tokenized that way to prove that I was indeed "real." Certainly, I made it evident that I knew that their intentions were harmless, but I could envision days of old when Blacks were asked to dance for Whites out of amusement. I never heard an older Black member of the fraternity being asked to perform the shimmy.

Participation and Demographics

Programs hosted by the Office typically drew strong attendance and received excellent reviews. As one faculty member mentioned in an article written about our work, "Once you go [to a program], you just want more" (Edwards 2012). In the Spring of the first year, we held the first Unity Through Diversity Week, featuring a wide range of exciting activities ranging from panel discussions to performances to a closing awards luncheon honoring champions of inclusion on campus. One highlight of the week was the dynamic Journey of Understanding funded by a grant that I co-authored with a professor of human sciences. My idea, modeled loosely after the Tunnel of Oppression concept popular at many campuses, involved students as leaders and performers in an experiential program where they shared their own stories of discrimination and liberation. Reflective of the impact of the diverse range of students' voices, one professor wrote in his feedback, "I was thinking about leaving Cedar State, but after I saw one of the students who had previously been incarcerated in a facility I used to work in share his moving testimony, I feel compelled to stay and make a difference here." During the course of the week, well over

1000 people representing a strong cross-section of campus constituent groups were engaged in activities.

Our student-led organization, Diversity Champions, hosted a number of programs during the year on campus and in the community designed to foster cross-cultural awareness. For example, students traveled in groups to local elementary schools to deliver interactive anti-bullying presentations. Since I also served as the Title IX Administrator for the university, I asked the Diversity Champions to host a series of workshops in the residence halls around sexual harassment, which were well attended and highly appreciated. The "Bravest Man Pageant" served as the signature event of the year, with male contestants competing in a traditional pageant which included a special twist in the final scene where they appeared in a dress and high heels. While the audience in the packed auditorium initially roared in laughter, each contestant stepped to the microphone to speak about being brave enough to wear the dress in honor of someone close to him who had been victimized by domestic violence. As a survivor from the local domestic violence organization attested, it was the most powerful display of allyship that she had ever witnessed.

At first, we anticipated the strongest engagement in our programs from non-Black students, paralleling the work at PWIs where students of color tend to be most involved. However, at Cedar State, the vast majority of non-Black students either attended a satellite campus, were enrolled in professional programs mostly offered at night, or played on one of the school sports teams. Athletes typically already had a tight-knit social network on their teams and often reported being too busy to participate in extracurricular programming; they were more likely to pop in at various points rather than more time-consuming full participation. A

significant number of international students often engaged in our activities as well as those offered by the Global Programs office which provided considerable support for their matriculation at the university.

Over time, we discovered that the wide range of relevant topics addressed drew the interest of Black students mostly, as they seemed to be deeply interested in opportunities to examine issues of diversity from the broadest perspective possible, including intraracial diversity. From an experiential workshop on skin tone dynamics to events highlighting disability barriers, immigration, and gender bias, students reported on evaluation sheets that our programs made a positive difference in their lives. Activities that brought groups to the local community to engage with school children and seniors were particularly popular, as students seemed passionate about helping others to gain the knowledge and skills they had been absorbing. One student was quoted in the article mentioned above as saying that, as a direct result of our offerings, "more students are open to learning from other people, and from situations, that are different."

But most interestingly, we found perhaps the greatest appeal from a racially diverse set of individuals who might have otherwise felt as outsiders at the institution. This extremely cohesive collection of LGBT students, Black students whose interests fell outside the typical norms on campus, socially awkward students, and others of various identities were actively engaged and excited about the work that we did. I believe that we established a safe space where these young people could always be themselves and feel supported.

Generalized Feelings

While many of the moments spotlighted in this chapter referenced more challenging dimensions to my journey, it is important for me to note that I typically experienced an incredible sense of personal support and validation for our efforts. From features in the alumni magazine to the constant hugs that epitomized the spirit of the Cedar State family, I encountered a true family-like atmosphere, even more noticeable than at other HBCUs. For the most part, the campus community embraced discussions around diversity, and we witnessed significant changes in many aspects of behavior and policy. Publications and marketing materials began to reflect the racial diversity of the student population much more. The word "inclusion" started to become a common refrain among students. The student affairs unit held a workshop on LGBT issues. When I first arrived, the cafeteria rarely served anything that would accommodate vegetarians; in fact, one day the sign announcing the "Vegetarian Special" for the day listed the featured entree as pork stir fry. Months later, after collaboration with the food service company, dramatic changes to the menu occurred to create more inclusive options. I continually reiterated the theme that diversity constituted an "add-in," not an "add-on" philosophy. Using the analogy of a salad, our goal was not to merely toss on some croutons that could be avoided, but rather, to incorporate salad dressing to infuse the spirit of inclusion in all aspects of campus operations so that it represented part of our institutional DNA.

And for me, I cherish the powerful relationships that I built at Cedar State with individuals who cared about me and my interests. Yes, at times the playful comments could be "othering," but I am confident that the intent was to exhibit the spirit of connectedness. I was moved when, at the close of my first year, the Student Government Association named me as

"Faculty of the Year" (even though I only taught one class per semester). On a daily basis, I did not feel that heavy emphasis was being placed on my Whiteness, and if anything, it occurred in the frame of referencing the fact that an outsider could show up at Cedar State and become part of the family.

The following three seminal experiences will be presented for the purposes of identifying particularly noteworthy encounters in the trajectory of racial understanding for me. Moments of resistance have incredible value in placing needed attention on critical issues, as it may only take a singular case to counterbalance otherwise positive situations. At times, I include relevant theory alongside these stories, and additional analysis will be provided in the final chapter.

Seminal Experience 1: Hiring the White Coach

During the close of my first year, the university needed a new head football coach after a series of losing seasons under several different highly criticized coaches. The president had made it known to me and others on the hiring committee that he was interested in the possibility of bringing aboard a non-Black coach as a demonstration of the university's dedication to diversity. Indeed, the hiring of the school's and conference's first-ever non-Black coach would make a statement about inclusion and plausibly serve as an example for majority institutions to become more open to diverse candidates as well. The initial clear preference from the president was a White male named Randy who possessed a strong track record as an assistant coach and had grown up literally 35 miles from campus. Early on, Randy emerged as a leading candidate among committee members as well, but at some point, he decided to withdraw from the search. Dr. Smith reiterated his commitment to Randy, and he actually asked me to reach out to Randy in

an effort to help identify the source of his decision and ideally convince him to reconsider. I immediately thought of friends of mine who are one of the few people of color at their institutions and regularly receive requests to handle difficult situations involving students of color — as if only same-race folks are capable of building these successful relationships.

Ultimately, Randy changed his mind and placed himself back in the pool, with Dr. Smith wanting me to provide assistance and feedback with the actual application process for him. During his interview visit, Randy displayed his Southern charm and made references to growing up as a "local boy" who knew the area and the recruiting landscape quite well in the state. Interestingly, he alternated between two different racial themes. First, he declared that he had "coached lots of Black players and majority Black teams most of his career" and saw being at Cedar State as not much different. But seemingly in a contradictory way, he kept asserting that "I don't see Black or White — I only see Green and Gold (the school colors)." Dr. Smith pulled me aside and said that "if he's hired, you'll have to help him work out the race stuff a bit better."

The hiring committee assembled by the president met one final time to decide on its official recommendation regarding the selection of the new coach. As a member, I looked forward to the likely reality that members might finally offer their true feelings about hiring a White head coach, as Randy had presumably been declared the unofficial winner in informal conversations. The relatively large committee, comprised of representatives from a wide array of constituent groups, had not directly confronted the issue of race in previous gatherings, although it loomed as a bubbling undercurrent in sidebar exchanges and certainly in the broader campus community. Even during my visits in town to the barber shop, I would face questions about who would be hired since people knew I worked directly for the president and served on the

committee. To my face, people would typically make declarations in support of a White coach, while sometimes suggesting that a few alumni might have an issue with the decision.

As the meeting progressed, it became obvious that Randy would be the choice. Committee members praised his experience, his local connection, and his good performance in the interview process. Then, one of the older alumni members, a former football player, changed the tone when sharing his perspective. While making it clear that "I'm all for progress," he proceeded to express his concern about the message that it would send about a Black institution not hiring someone who was a "real HBCU person." The comment stung, and a few eyes glanced briefly in my direction to gauge my reaction to this moment of incredible racial salience. With a palpable tension enveloping the room, I began to raise my hand and prepared to issue a comment about the value of expanding the definition of what constitutes a "real HBCU person." Yet, before I could be acknowledged or utter any words, President Smith (who was sitting next to me) placed his hand over my arm and preventing me from gaining access to the conversation. As I looked his way, Dr. Smith shot me a quick and subtle headshake to strongly indicate that I should remain silent.

Several other older alumni began to reference their own internal pain of being regularly rejected for job opportunities throughout their lives because of race as well as the challenges that Black men continue to encounter when attempting to land head coaching positions at majority institutions. The committee listened carefully, showing deference to these individuals who were living and breathing legacies of both the institution and the state's turbulent racial past. To me, their words did not sound like a rejection of Randy per se — indeed, they may have also been resigned to the reality that he would be hired regardless of their position — but rather, part of a

cathartic release of long-held feelings and questions about this new multicultural era in society. These men needed to express those words publicly, if for no other reason than to be heard and acknowledged for their historical reference.

Then, several individuals in the room spoke much more personally and powerfully than I could have about their own positive interactions with this coach and their desire to move the institution forward as an example of diversity and inclusion. One vice president mentioned how she and her family had lived in the same city as the coach, with her children interacting with Randy and his family positively. Perhaps most poignantly, two students in the room offered their own testimonies about how much they had come to appreciate the importance of diversity and wanted their beloved institution to not be held back by the pain of the past. For the very reason that the alumni in the room had experienced outright racism, the speakers asserted that our school needed to model the spirit of inclusion for other institutions by hiring the person we deemed to be the best candidate. The men who had initially sounded to be in opposition started to nod in affirmation of these kinds of comments.

Initially, I remember being incredibly frustrated and disappointed in the silencing gesture from the president during that meeting. But ultimately, I have come to appreciate the value of his move. At that moment, my comments would have likely been perceived as a patronizing invocation of racial privilege. While the experience reminded me of the privilege that I and other Whites possess in rarely encountering such situations where our race is viewed as a disqualifying characteristic, I was most struck by the need to understand the performance of race at that instance. Typically, members of privileged groups are not confronted with moments where their

identities are considered problematic and questionable. My listening actually spoke louder for me as well as for coalition building in the interest of racial healing.

Soon thereafter, the committee voted unanimously to recommend Randy for the position. One administrator said to me that "it was perfect that the interviews came after Unity Through Diversity Week [sponsored by our Office]," as it helped to reinforce the kind of inclusive climate that made the issue of race less of a possible barrier for some people. One of the students even approached me to recount a story from a recent classroom encounter. She shared with me that one of her professors mentioned in class the possibility of a White head football coach being hired at the institution based on the media reports naming Randy as a serious candidate. Apparently, the students were quite vocal about their openness to this idea and their excitement about demonstrating to others that HBCUs were indeed inclusive and welcoming environments. Following this exchange, the professor purportedly remarked, "I knew that Diversity Week would brainwash you." The story served as a sobering reminder of the continuing challenge of reshaping attitudes, yet it also offered affirmation of the perceived impact of the Office's activities on the campus community and the desire of students to shift the diversity narrative.

While the hiring committee ultimately recommended Randy, the president saved the formal announcement for a few weeks later at a major party and media event on Memorial Day at his campus residence. Publicly, the institution made no statement in the interim — and some media reports actually circulated rumors that a particular Black finalist had been offered the position. Three days before the event, Dr. Smith told me that another candidate apparently still under consideration by him was a non-Black individual named Paul (we debated whether he was White or possibly Native American?) who possessed considerably less experience and success on

his resume. But Paul was young, eager, and photogenic, and Dr. Smith had found him to be one of those potential stars on the coaching horizon. I had deep concerns about the possibility of Paul being selected, as it seemed to me that his hiring would be perceived as a purely tokenized racial decision and place him in the unenviable position as the scapegoat used as evidence for not hiring another White person in a prominent coaching position should the team not turn its fortunes around. If the institution were truly committed to diversity, the person hired would have to definitely be viewed as the best possible candidate or else his credibility (as well as the president's) would be permanently compromised and questioned.

After spending a day wondering how to approach the president about my concerns, I called him and asked to meet at his house one afternoon. I reminded Dr. Smith about his comments to the senior leadership team encouraging us to always speak our minds and to welcome "courageous conversations" that needed to be held, even if they generated considerable discomfort. Once he affirmed the importance of these kinds of bold and honest exchanges, I proceeded to make the comments mentioned above, adding that my experiences could attest to the dynamics involved with a "racial hire." Dr. Smith listened intently, and after expressing appreciation for the perspective, informed me that he still had not made up his mind. To be honest, I could not tell if he were milking the drama or would still be seriously considering Paul for the position. Regardless, the qualities of that moment — a White CDO at an HBCU critiquing the notion of a White coach being hired by a Black president — were uniquely arranged to create some internal discomfort as well as a degree of satisfaction that I could offer a valuable angle based on my own positionality.

At the Memorial Day party, Randy was announced as the new coach, with an assortment of prominent alumni strategically placed behind him as he addressed the media and the crowd assembled for the occasion. Media stories abounded over the next few days, from the New York Times to CNN, addressing how the historic hire "raises eyebrows." During one newspaper interview, Randy manifested his stance that quickly became a common refrain for him: "Like I told everybody at the press conference, my vision's green and gold, it's not black and white… Like I said, it doesn't matter to me if they're black or white, I want to recruit the best players. I've recruited this area my whole life…" (The Sports Network 2012).

In one media account (Hill 2012), Dr. Smith offered the following thoughts about that final committee meeting:

> You could feel the emotional thickness in the room. There were alumni who said, very plainly, they personally felt that it was an insult to hire a white coach. They had been discriminated against in their coaching careers. They had been denied coaching jobs because of the black color of their skin, and there were people crying. It was an emotional time where everyone was having to face their internal demons. There was real wounding here. Something was being taken from them, that some core part of their identity was being taken out of them. And I heard this one student -- I won't say his name because he was really quiet -- he sat up in the back and he looked at the alum and said, 'I'm sorry. I understand how you feel, but the students are clear: We want the best coach, and we don't want race to be a factor.

A few months later near the start of the football season, I received an email from the Vice President for Media Relations asking if I might have interest in representing the university on ESPN during a panel discussion about the issue. The president certainly thought that it would be meaningful for my race to be front and center, analogous to when attorneys are hired based on a particular race and gender that would most likely serve as the best optics in front of the jury.

While I had some reservations, I agreed to participate and made the 90-minute drive to the studio the next day. In my mind, I wondered about the particular angle of the conversation, about the other panelists and their perspective on our hiring decision, about how it might look for me, as a White man, to be potentially framed as a defender of hiring White men over Black men — even at an HBCU. The moment also encapsulated so many of the interesting challenges facing other CDOs at PWIs who report feeling used as a pawn in the larger political game. While I celebrated any kind of inclusive hire, I wanted to be clear that I valued the HBCU history and tradition as well.

As we waited for the panel to begin, a six-minute piece that had been produced for the show played in our ears. I remember the last words in the segment — right before we went live to tape — where Dr. Smith responded to a query about being perceived as trying to move the university away from the HBCU label: "I'm not trying to -- I did… Cedar used to be a great black school; now it's just a great university." His words were intentionally provocative. I knew that he appreciated the notion of being an HBCU, but just wanted Cedar State to also be valued as having a broader mission and purpose as well. However, I had not anticipated those remarks, and I was concerned that Dr. Smith's comment would potentially upset alumni and even the wider HBCU community — with my face now plastered on the screen to represent the institution.

The other panelists — two Black males — included a representative from the Black Coaches Association and a former PWI football head coach who had been fired by a major university and now served as the president of a small HBCU. I spoke first, and I re-directed the

tone of the question about the consternation on campus regarding the hire by highlighting the positive mood currently in place and the greatness of HBCUs as bastions of exceptional education for all individuals. The HBCU president was up next, and he expressed strong reservations about the move and its implications for HBCUs and Black men in general. At that point, I worried about the third panelist's perspective and whether I would be isolated in the position that I had taken on by representing the university (and potentially, my race). If so, I would be cast as the White male going against Black men wanting to hire Black men to coach a group of predominantly Black men. The coach revealed strong support for the hire and the opening up of all positions for the best qualified candidate. I was not alone, at least in terms of "opinion."

Afterwards, the editor of the most prominent HBCU news website tweeted a comment about how he had been bumped off the show when the producer added me, but that he was ultimately glad that it had happened because of how I represented HBCUs positively. Another former student of mine from another institution tweeted disappointment that I had not engaged issues of race more deeply as he would have anticipated from me. The reality undergirding his comment added to my emotional stress believing that I had not performed at my best, because my fears surrounding the issue of representation led me to mostly script my remarks rather than being my typically improvisational self. I honestly suffered a bout of depression following the program, and to this day, have never actually watched it. My spirit understood the idea behind Steele's work on stereotype threat, and while others including Dr. Smith stated that I did well, the entire situation had been emotionally jarring.

Seminal Experience 2: Native American Team Nickname

Each year, the university partners with the alumni association to hold Roundup, a national gathering for alumni to socialize, learn more about the current state of affairs at the university, and raise scholarship money for students. The first Roundup during my time at Cedar State occurred in February — and having heard about some of the Office's new initiatives, I received an invitation to present a workshop. In general, my session outlining the importance of diversity at an HBCU was quite well received, and I even appreciated the two older alums who raised critical questions about the benefits of this work and the potential concern over losing traditional "cultural" elements that have sustained the school over the years. I made it clear that diversity and inclusion efforts were designed not to take away from the wonderful cultural traditions, but rather to expose a broader range of students to the HBCU experience as well as to potentially offer new ideas and traditions to the campus. Afterwards, several alumni approached me to express support for the presentation and the work overall, affirming that the institution has maintained a legacy of recruitment of international students and could continue to grow through additional diversity-related efforts.

The highlight of the Roundup is the opportunity for the attendees to hear a speech from the president and engage in a vigorous question and answer period. Working on the president's senior management team, I had become well aware of the often contentious nature of this dialogue session in the past — with the alumni savoring this opportunity to grill the president about their concerns and complaints. A gifted orator, scholar, and preacher, the president delivered a passionate presentation which contained references to university history and accomplishments, Biblical references, and a challenge to the congregation to support him in

taking the university to the next level. The room exploded in thunderous applause at the close of his sermon, essentially buffering him from the potential of receiving particularly caustic questions.

The third question, however, held particular relevance for me and the work of our office. Reading a prepared written statement, the middle-aged woman proceeded to mention how the issue of Native American imagery in the world of sports had become more politicized and controversial in recent years. The speaker continued by wondering whether Cedar State, out of respect for these concerns brought forth by Native American communities, ought to consider changing its nickname of the Chiefs* and all associated language and symbols. I was moved and thrilled that someone was actually raising the issue. But literally, even before the woman was able to complete her question, a resounding chorus of boos cascaded throughout the room, with audible comments chastising her for this apparently heretical suggestion.

To provide context, the university was one of 19 schools sanctioned by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) for continued use of Native American names or mascots that had been declared "hostile or abusive" (Kelly 2008). While the NCAA could not mandate that schools change names, it did ban any such references to those names in postseason play; furthermore, schools were encouraged to "educate their internal and external constituents on the negative impact of hostile or abusive symbols, names and imagery, and to create a greater level of knowledge of Native American culture through outreach efforts and other communication means" (Brown 2005). By 2008, Cedar State stood alone on the non-compliance list as the only institution that had neither made required changes nor filed an appeal to the decision. To my knowledge, no educational programs had been implemented on the issue.

Indeed, in a 2011 online article, university officials remained adamant in preserving the name and suggesting its importance as a symbolic marker of pride and history. The article pointed out that the decision to maintain the nickname was "vigorously backed by alumni," with the school athletic logo "bearing no small resemblance to a teepee." The sports information director, herself an alum, was quoted as saying, "Once a Chief, always a Chief." In general, members of the Cedar State family refer to the campus as "The Reservation," and Native American imagery can be prominently seen around the football stadium and even on campus every game day.

During football and basketball games, when the team does something well, the band launches into a song called "Cherokee," with audience members performing the "Tomahawk Chop" and performing a stereotypical "Indian chant." When I first witnessed the act, I was beyond disgusted. I discovered that essentially few if any students were even exposed to ideas that would challenge the appropriateness of the behavior. Looking around campus during game day, signs proclaiming the stadium to be "The Reservation" with burning spears on promotional materials provided evidence of complete normalization. Whenever I showed the video of the Cherokee song and chant from a football game to my friends who were involved in diversity work, they were both angered and shocked that such outdated conduct would still be prominently featured at a university.

I recall a particularly tenuous moment when I had invited a high-ranking member of a Native American tribe in the state to give remarks at our annual diversity awards luncheon. As another speaker made comments that celebrated the university's accomplishments in an attempt to call upon school pride, a few audience members without cognizance of the context initiated a

rendition of "Cherokee." Fortunately, it did not catch on, and we avoided generating offense to our honored guest.

As a CDO, I was truly embarrassed that I did not possess the power to truly advance the cause of critiquing and changing the name. The president had made it clear to me on multiple occasions that "the Chiefs name is too important to the alumni to be touched." Furthermore, I lived in a generalized sense of fear that I would receive a phone call from the media asking me, the CDO for the school, why the nickname and symbolism remained when it had been banned by the NCAA, and I would be forced to "defend" the institution and dishonor my social justice training and commitment. This borderlands encounter — torn between serving as an effective anti-racist ally for Native Americans deeply offended by the trivializing use of their images, names, and symbols and also laboring to honor the cultural autonomy of HBCU institutions — created considerable anxiety for me.

As mentioned earlier, I taught a class every semester (either Introduction to Sociology or Multicultural Education) in part as a vehicle for gaining allies for our diversity agenda. In those settings, despite some anxiety each time that I would reference the matter of the Chiefs name, I felt a profound responsibility to raise the issue and challenge students to think critically about its meaning and impact. Indeed, at an historically Black institution borne out of the conditions of oppression, it seemed particularly germane and perhaps necessary to push students to recognize the multiplicity of forms in which hegemony and racial objectification can occur.

These moments made me acutely aware of my status as an outsider, a White male, seeking to spark this discourse. After all, it is a historically Black school, and despite threats by the governor a few years earlier to merge the HBCUs in the state, the university had remained

intact and resolute in its purpose. Everything about the place, including the Chiefs name and "Reservation" label, were sources of considerable pride, particularly in a remote rural part of the state with little else to publicly celebrate. Again, many staff members grew up on the campus, went to school there, and stayed to work; for many alumni, the school had been their only option and ultimately a pathway to a better future than their parents or (in many cases) sharecropper grandparents could have imagined. Cedar State was essentially all they had ever known or wanted to know. And thus, while their reluctance to even engage the issue of imagery and names was troubling, I perceived it to be due to naive ignorance and pride rather than any outright disrespect for Native Americans.

In class, students appeared relatively open to at least considering the topic intellectually, and in many instances, they expressed appreciation for this perspective being raised to them. Yet, their socialization within this milieu allowed them to separate the academic discourse from the public displays that would continue on regardless. If no one else but Dr. G had brought forth questions, then maybe it was not really that serious? Analogous to being raised in a highly religious family and community, the notion of an alternate way of life seemed completely foreign.

So, who was I, an outsider White male, to be the judge about how the community manifested its school pride? Who was I to ostensibly lecture staff and faculty about oppression and racist iconography? Certainly, I would have utilized more strategic and subtler tactics to generate awareness, but in my estimation, my representation as a White male outsider would have likely been received as "telling us what to do." Even the president embraced the concept,

displaying various Native American symbols in his office and performing the Tomahawk chop along with the crowd at public events.

In all honesty, if it had been a predominantly White university, I believe that I would have felt more confident and comfortable to confront the matter as well as encourage consideration of semiotic transformation. I could have more easily framed the issue in terms of a clear example of hegemonic co-optation or internal colonialism, a perpetuation of a pattern of White dominance and control of Native American lives. But in this case, at an HBCU, I had less certainty that I could occupy that moral space. Had I been African-American, perhaps I would have at least been able to invoke in-group solidarity and references to the historical oppressiveness of racist imagery from Sambo to Blackface and connected it to this instance of "playing Indian" (Deloria 1998). Whether the words would have efficacy is debatable, but the possibility of having relative safety to stand in the line of fire seemed stronger.

In some ways, I could almost understand how the campus community remained indifferent to the offensiveness of the nickname and the Cherokee song. After all, the name did not reference a particular tribe, no mascots were performing culturally insensitive acts, and the gestures were in essence unknown to many people as even being related to "playing Indian." It apparently seemed neutral and non-culturally specific in their minds. But, I could not make a similar disconnect with regards to the concept of referring to the campus as the "Reservation." I was deeply troubled by its use, especially at an HBCU where no one would ever be able to justify calling any place "The Ghetto."

And as I investigated the matter more, I discovered that the current iteration represented a marked improvement over images from a few decades earlier, where more blatantly offensive

Native American symbols and imagery were employed. Thus, perhaps in the mind of older alumni and employees, the required work had taken place -- and the current students had no awareness of the previous context or the NCAA policies that had necessitated change across the collegiate athletics landscape. Still, I felt impotent in challenging behavior that had been deemed to be so hurtful for many in the Native American community — exacerbated by the fact that my status as a White male had perhaps added to the perceived inability to address it.

When I interviewed Susan, a woman of both Native American and Mexican American heritage, for a position in our Office, I had to inform her about the continued use of the mascot and the accompanying imagery. She seemed baffled by the concept that any school — especially a school originating from the legacy of racial hostility — would continue to highlight its allegiance to these concepts. I struggled internally, and I even questioned whether I wanted to offer Susan the position, knowing that I would be placing her in a context that could create considerable discomfort. Yet, I concluded that her presence and engagement could potentially serve as the impetus to generating more honest conversations about the issue.

When Susan attended her first football game and witnessed the Cherokee spectacle, she laughed hysterically. Being from the West Coast and immersed within social circles where such behavior would be completely unfathomable, Susan told me that it was just farcical that this type of performance would still take place — especially at an HBCU. While perhaps hiding some deeper pain about the issue, Susan preferred to view it as a symbol of how behind the times the place still was rather than internalize the situation as a source of intentional disrespect.

Interestingly, towards the end of his tenure, President Smith announced that he would be seeking to actively affirm the Chiefs concept and create further branding around it (a Chief riding

into the stadium on a horse was one rumor) — due to his discovery that the first university president had been half-Black and half-Cherokee. Thus, he felt that the name honored that president (who had also been a national political figure) and wanted to seize the opportunity to create alliances between Black and Native communities in the state. The move still struck me as plausibly another public relations ploy, and I was completely left out of any discussions around development or implementation of this angle. Again, now that the matter had been framed as a testament to the importance of community building between two historically marginalized populations, there was little space for me as a White male to raise objections or offer strategy for successfully establishing an inclusionary agenda.

In the midpoint of year three, President Smith abruptly resigned and an acting president who showed disdain for diversity efforts was placed into office. When I mentioned our interest in continuing the Bravest Man Pageant, he forbid it and informed me that "no cross-dressing would take place on my campus… and that kind of event is foolishness without any kind of educational value." One day soon thereafter, I received a call from an admissions counselor asking me to head down to that office because he wanted to show me something. I had developed a positive relationship with staff members there, and it would not be typical for someone to make this kind of request of me without an important reason attached to it.

Entering the office, I was approached by Scott, the admissions counselor, who quickly walked me to the storage closet and pulled out a single t-shirt from a box stuffed to the brim with them. The front of the shirt featured a stereotypical Native American chief image — the kind of visual that just screamed of the racist depictions that one would think people would know better than to reproduce. Below the picture was the line, "Make Your Reservation," a play on words

with the nickname of the campus and the notion of reserving a spot for the next year's incoming class of students. Scott gave me the confused look and asked what I thought we should do with the shirts. Immediately, I responded, "How about throw them away?" He then informed me that the acting president had personally ordered and paid for the shirts, and therefore, would be expecting them to be utilized in some fashion. I requested that the department kindly refrain from giving them away in any public context and to perhaps consider waiting long enough for the president to forget about the shirts.

Again, the tension heightened inside of me. I was a White male at an HBCU asked to advise staff members on inappropriate use of Naive American imagery. Due to my relationship with him and my position as the "diversity guy," I was able to offer a slightly stronger message about the offensive nature of the shirts — similar to the instruction that I would deliver on the subject in my Sociology and Education courses. But without any institutional power, what influence could I really have there? The name and the symbols persisted, and the shirts were probably given away somewhere. Since leaving the institution, I have been informed that the use of imagery has become even more blatant and offensive. As evidence, I witnessed a series of Instagram photos that depicted an activity held this past year during a football game under the theme of "Catch the Chief," where fans were encouraged to take pictures with a student dressed up in a stereotypical Native American costume.

Seminal Experience 3: Confrontation Over Intersectionality

After establishing our Office as a symbol of community building, I wanted to move into the second phase of the work: challenging people and the institution to confront some deeper

biases and barriers to full inclusion. Our programs had been quite popular, and I felt that it was necessary to push the envelope a bit. Thus, in the middle of my second year, I decided to invite the first Black gay male couple featured in *Jet* magazine's wedding section to speak for our Diversity & Inclusion Arts and Lecture Series. Admittedly, I shared this information with the president who expressed some reservation about the concept. He felt that there may be another vehicle for initiating conversations about sexuality on campus, but I decided to press forward and engage our student group, the Diversity Champions, to help promote the event. Our team was excited about making this move and thought that the program on the history of marriage would be edgy but successful.

A few days prior to the event, things started to fall apart. I received a phone call from the leader of the local minister's alliance who shared his plans to protest the event. Then, apparently after facing concerns from alumni, the university started to dismantle the program. The lecture was moved to another location, the alumni affairs office sent out an email proclaiming that it was "not an official university-sponsored event," and the speakers were at the last minute denied the right to stay in Campus Union housing — even though permission had previously been granted. While I had talked about the program weeks earlier in President's Council without a response at the time, my colleagues now distanced themselves from any support. The Diversity Champions were outraged, and our staff felt betrayed.

On the day of the event, the ministers' alliance and a TV news station showed up. When I approached the leader of the alliance, we engaged in friendly conversation — and he mentioned how much his congregation had enjoyed my presentation at the church months before. He was standing next to one of the university's Deans, who proceeded to refuse to shake my hand.

Rumor had it that some members of the maintenance staff were planning to peek inside to see who attended so they could "find out who was gay." We were later informed that some students were upset over the event's timing during Black History Month, ignoring the fact that the speakers were, in fact, Black and had made history. As expected, attendance was relatively low, and although the program was enlightening and featured spirited engagement between the ministers and the speakers, our entire Office was devastated by the entire experience.

Indeed, it took months for me to emotionally recover. I believed that we were on the side of both justice and education, as the speakers were sharing ideas and their life stories to present a human side to an issue that was constantly vilified in campus and in the community. Many supporters expressed appreciation for our willingness to take a stand, and when one of the Diversity Champions self-identified as gay for the first time in a meeting that week, he mentioned that the event gave him courage to claim his identity; we celebrated the moment for him and for the power of symbolic experiences as mechanisms for transformation.

On the other hand, the drama surrounding the event may have worked against our efforts to create space for meaningful conversations and a safe environment for everyone. It seemed that we inevitably lost some allies — perhaps just by addressing the topic, but also maybe as a result of the manner in which we went about it. While the topic was sexuality, I realized the power of a number of critical intersections. Despite our efforts to promote inclusion, this deep South rural campus was just not ready.

First, the emphasis on religion was ideologically anchored everywhere at Cedar State. In fact, despite being a public institution, prayers were offered at all meetings and functions. At one event the previous year, a visiting preacher who had been invited by the president to deliver the

invocation turned to me and said, “This school is more religious than private religious schools where I’m from.” My barber in town once stated that he could be friends with absolutely anyone, “as long as they are not those atheists.”

But even more, the spirit of religious fervor was imbued with the Black Southern Baptist tradition, and as such, any perceived deviation or implicit critique of it would be seen in racial terms. I recall once encouraging my colleagues on the President’s Council to consider inclusive prayers at events, not just ones always invoking Christ. I heard later how some individuals completely rejected the request since “we are a Christian country, and this is who we are here.” While perhaps not explicitly stated, the implication was clearly noted as far as the privileging of Southern Black authentic cultural norms — with my identity as the outsider seen as the motivation to threaten the natural order.

Practically all discussions of sexuality were viewed through the lens of a narrow conservative reading of the Bible that supposedly condemned it unequivocally. One time, a colleague and friend on campus told me, “I fully support everything about diversity — well, as long as we’re not talking about that gay stuff.” But again, the framing generally maintained a racial angle in my view, with the following logic being implicitly asserted at various moments: “We are Black. Black folks here in the South are deeply religious. The Bible condemns homosexuality. Therefore, Black people do not support homosexuality.”

To be certain, there were plenty of individuals who manifested acceptance and love for the LGBT community. And as one administrator shared with me, “Black people are accepting people. I had a good friend when I attended here years ago, and we all knew he was gay. It wasn’t discussed, but he was popular.” Two of the three SGA presidents elected during my

tenure were tacitly known to be gay, and yet the conversation around their identities was muted. The "don't ask, don't tell" policy permeated the environment. Thus, it was the overtly public effort against the prescribed definitions of sexuality that had been deemed problematic and plausibly seen through the prism of race, highlighting my outsider status in multiple ways. I was not Black, not from the South, not Baptist, and not an alum. While no one publicly commented on my being White during this entire scenario (and I did not initially see it as emblematic of my race), I can now appreciate how the intersections of these identities centered implicit Whiteness through my actions and the responses it generated. From his vantage point, President Smith had essentially anticipated the fallout that I had overlooked.

Recently, at a gathering for my Kellogg fellowship, my coach-mentor and I held a provocative conversation about social justice organizing efforts in the Deep South. He reminded me of the traditional importance of building relationships first with established elders before attempting to mobilize in the Black community. The elders are critical in gaining access and credibility. In turn, consensus building could only happen through finding commonalities and shared goals and then moving slowly, in contrast with "White Northern" approaches that were often animated by shock value tactics.

Therefore, despite what I believed to be good intentions, our agenda for this event violated these core principles and therefore could have elicited the issue of race when committed by a White outsider. Maybe the reluctance of my colleagues to support me reflected a response to their perceptions of my use of White privilege to go against their belief systems. I have learned that even when Whiteness is not directly visible or named, its presence can loom large. Indeed, I did not feel then nearly as White as I do now.

Epilogue

I also question whether there is an encompassing sense of White racial identity. Perhaps subcultural groups based on ethnicity — Jews, Italians, Irish, etc. — exist in an "imagined community" (Anderson 1983) that links them together, but race does not seem to exist in the same manner. Clearly, there may be common realities (some would argue, privilege, for example). While I cannot personally attest to the existence of a unifying racial identity for people of color, it would appear that a degree of shared experiences and a potential desire to find linkages for support and understanding might exist within social identity groups. HBCUs represent a place for Black students and staff to celebrate and preserve cultural connectedness — and traditions such as Homecoming which are far grander events at HBCUs honor the legacy of familial strength in resistance to societal forces that attempt to marginalize and disempower.

At Cedar State, my journey almost reversed the Hill-Collins' (2010) concept of "outsider-within," as I experienced what I consider being an "insider-from-without." I felt tremendous acceptance, and the efforts to racially classify me as "Black" were perhaps a message of wanting to place me symbolically inside the group. Certainly, as a White person, being labeled as "Black" is intended as a positive symbol of racial acceptance. In a recent article, a White congressman Steve Cohen referenced how his constituents in a majority Black district tell him that he is "Black" because of his ability to connect with their experiences, viewing it as "a compliment" (Bruno 2013). Yet, the reverse is generally taken quite differently, with someone Black being called "White" typically seen as a marker of a racial sellout (Kennedy 2009). Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) work on the "acting White" phenomenon identified this label as a powerful negative influence on the academic achievement and self-esteem for some Black school

children. I can imagine that psychologically getting accepted — and then being "overaccepted" — is far more challenging for people of color occupying majority White spaces than for individuals such as me at HBCUs.

And yet, my stories here speak to moments highlighting difference in critical ways. As much as I know and apparently authentically practice cultural codes that resonate within the Black community, I am reminded of aspects of the knowledge base and existential inner workings that will never be a part of my life experience. I personally encountered within myself moments of how privilege operated in subtle but profound ways that surprised and pained me. I can stand inside the space based on dispensation granted to me, but of course, I am "without" full and permanent access. But furthermore, I feel "without" a White racial space to claim either. Being Jewish generates for me divergent sets of encounters, histories, and feelings, and my philosophies and practices alienate me from many "Whites." I am not sure that I want a White racial space, but I question whether it might be necessary for me to find one in order to fully appreciate the complex dimensions through which it impacts my sense of self.

Ultimately, I am left with a deeper acknowledgement of White as a "racial being," a concept that I will explore in the concluding chapter. My time at Cedar State was rich and affirming, and I do honestly believe that my positionality and perspective were beneficial in shaping my work positively. And simultaneously, I discovered profound limitations and an awareness of being White that was challenging and insightful. The journey continues….

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The accounts presented in the previous chapter offer evidence of the racial realities encountered as a result of serving as a White CDO at an HBCU institution, using the phenomenological approach to identify my lived and embodied experiences. As noted, being White influenced aspects of the decisions made as well as the responses generated by my actions — in turn, challenging me to think more critically about my own racial sense of self in ways far more profound than I had ever done before. While I had spent years at HBCUs prior to joining the Cedar State family and definitely recognized the racial implications of that work, it was in the context of serving as CDO that induced extra attention and emphasis on these issues for me.

In a sense, my position placed me in multiple temporary and voluntary minority statuses. Beyond being White at an HBCU, I was a White CDO, a CDO at an HBCU, a White senior administrator at an HBCU, and an outsider to a relatively in-group oriented rural campus — all fairly uncommon identities that yielded considerable salience for others as well as myself. The events described from a symbolic interactionist perspective through an autoethnographic approach reveal the negotiated aspects of meaning that occurred, with tremendous impact on how I was viewed and came to understand myself throughout the journey.

To be clear, I have spent considerable time in my life in spaces where I was the "only," or the clear outsider. Typically, I received very welcoming responses, and I have been dedicated to identifying and challenging the privilege inherent in so many contexts where I can operate freely without negative response, in strong contrast with so many people of color who face unsafe

climates that they cannot easily escape. But this experience at Cedar State struck me as profoundly different in terns of "otherness" — not as a negative phenomenon per se, but rather, as one that helped me personally to better understand aspects of Whiteness, privilege, and racial performance.

In the introduction, three major categories for exploration were identified: diversity efforts at HBCUs campuses; understanding of Whiteness; and the impact of diversity work on racial identity of CDOs. This final chapter will address these areas in light of the ideas presented in the previous chapter plus implications for policy and practice. In addition, considerations of how social identities intersect to manifest particular power relations will be shared. Finally, I will suggest avenues for further research in these domains.

Diversity at HBCUs

In a recent policy paper on "repositioning HBCUs for the future," Lee and Keys (2013) assert that the changing landscape of higher education as well as the evolving dynamic of enrollment within HBCUs necessitate that these institutions must be even more proactive in embracing diversity as a core operating principle. At the Diversity and Inclusion Summit on HBCUs hosted by our Office, over twenty institutions sent representatives who were passionate about these issues (Stewart 2013). From the first LGBT center at Bowie State University to dynamic work around language inclusion at Tennessee State University, the excitement around establishing more inclusive campuses continues to be apparent. The considerable energy regarding the many initiatives that our Office implemented at Cedar State evidences the interest and benefits of pursuing this agenda. Thus, significant and meaningful diversity efforts exist at

HBCUs, and these schools have a great deal to contribute to the diversity narrative in higher education. But while Cedar State does not stand as the only school engaged in this work, it is one of only three HBCUs with a defined CDO role (with several others employing staff members to recruit for diversity or provide services for international students). Greater attention to the notion of creating CDO positions at these institutions and more thoughtfully defining the scope of their portfolio is warranted.

Since each campus maintains a different demographic makeup, school officials will want to think carefully about developing programs and services to meet the needs of its students. At Cedar State, the realities of non-Black students being more likely to attend satellite locations or at night as well as to be immersed within sports teams may have limited the degree to which they experienced the kind of White identity salience that encourages deeper reflection on the racial self. Regardless, their presence served to shift the conversation around how to best create inclusive spaces and prepare for more intentional diversity recruitment. For example, the state's growing immigrant Latino and Asian-American populations provide a fertile context, but the infrastructure around language development would need to be enhanced — and staff in various units at the school did initiate these discussions.

Perhaps as notable, my experiences attest to the importance of advocating for holistic approaches to diversity, as Black students can also clearly benefit from richer exploration of the entire panoply of issues pertaining to race, gender, sexuality, religion, disability, social class, etc. At certain campuses such as Cedar State, students are quite likely to have grown up in extremely homogeneous communities with little support for progressive thinking around inclusion. The majority of its students were from the state, with a significant portion from counties nearby the

campus. As such, one of our Office interns, a Laotian-American student, repeatedly heard that he had become a number of fellow students' "first Asian friend." While research consistently demonstrates that Blacks demonstrate higher levels of support for racial integration (Ihlanfeldt & Scafidi 2002), more work is still needed to provide concrete opportunities to further develop inclusive attitudes and habits among students and employees.

Symbolically, moves such as hiring the conference's first White head football coach signal to the rest of the higher eduction community that, contrary to popular perceptions, HBCUs are indeed diverse and committed to advancing the diversity narrative. Through more focused efforts and publicity, these institutions can also leverage their unique position in demonstrating the importance of balancing tradition and forward progress to become models of inclusion. My story suggests that I felt at home, gained tremendous insight into diversity issues, and helped to foster more awareness of the importance of ensuring that spaces could be welcoming and empowering for all. HBCUs can benefit from telling their diversity stories more and considering innovative strategies for implementing comprehensive agendas to achieve true inclusion.

While the benefits of diversity efforts for students and institutions in general have been fairly well documented (Harris 2013), there remains a divergent range of levels of institutional commitment to this work, including outright hostility (Clark, Fashing-Varner, & Brimhall-Vargas 2012). While Smith (2010) argues that diversity needs to be central to the institutional mission, it is also evident that each individual school occupies a unique space with regards to climate, resources, and perspective about what diversity means for that particular campus. The complex trajectory of diversity work implementation, therefore, might include a multiplicity of forms, approaches, and stages.

White Racial Self

Clearly, my experiences at Cedar State resounded with racial dimensions and implications, challenging me to better understand myself and the dynamics associated with racial presentation. Hall (1994) writes about the notion that cultural identities are bound in the nexus of larger historical and social patterns as well as our lived realities that constantly shift through experience:

> Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (394)

I am, therefore, the product of broader structural forces that shaped the world in which I found myself immersed throughout my life, but also my present (and even future) encounters to which I assign meaning. To Hall, identity is "not a fixed essence." (395) Instead, it remains available for us to uncover and discover.

While not investigating racial identity per se, I endeavored to understand what I have labeled as "White racial being" — how I come to make meaning regarding being a White person and presenting this racial self to the external world. I wish to advance a two-part framework for explicating the process that occurred in my own reflective project about race at Cedar State. In turn, it is suggested here that these experiences can have replicability in other settings where Whites may find themselves meaningfully engaged as the clear racial minority.

Within the concept of "racial being," I am interested in both how one enacts Whiteness and reflects the embodiment of it from the perspective of others. A critical factor in emphasizing

what I have labeled "racial being" as opposed to racial identity is the need to develop a kind of "double consciousness" regarding the symbolic interactionist interplay between one's own perceptions and the interpretations of reactions from others. The first part of "being" is the noun form, the realities around how one envisions the self and the influence of race on their thoughts and behaviors. The driving question is, "How am I a White racial being?" Next, I will move further into the realm of how one elects to present the racial self, and how one acknowledges both the dynamics of the context to influence these decisions as well as the anticipated and ultimately perceived reactions from others (in essence, the verb form of "being"). The driving question then becomes, "How am I being a White person?"

I thought carefully throughout the three years and beyond about the notion of White racial being as first an internal marker. While others may presume various stereotypical characteristics of White persons, I know that Whites maintain considerable heterogeneity in life experience and perspective. As a Jewish individual, I bring with me a sense of appreciation of othering based on religion and therefore a degree of spiritual connectedness with social groups who have also encountered similar historic genocides. I never claim to be "just like" Blacks or other people of color, however, as the notion of simultaneously occupying positions of privilege in this society mitigates against full alignment; thus, I invoke the metaphor of parallel lines to suggest both commonality and difference in the marginalization experiment, another exercise in the borderlands reality.

Yet, my Whiteness — imbued with the constellation of other identities to even include geography and education — certainly shaped the contours of my thinking and acting at Cedar State. I experienced situations from a divergent perspective and made mistakes as a result of the

dissonance between my worldview and ones shared more commonly in that context. For example, I had previously thought of the label "country" as being somewhat derogatory and White-centric, but clearly it carried tremendous positive connotations for many individuals there — especially with one of my Black male students who honestly surprised me when proudly referring to himself in class as a "cowboy." This particular world of intersectional identities was rich and often new for me.

It also seems reasonable to conclude that plenty of other side conversations unknown to me were held about my words and actions. I remember challenging the student government to not hold "Christmas" parties but instead consider the label "holiday" events that did not exclude others. Maybe keeping Christmas visible but also attempting to add other festivals might have been received better, even though it still would have inevitably privileged Christmas. Again, while it was a message about religious inclusion, the potential racial implications in that space were quite evident. Yet, as intimated earlier, people were probably far more forgiving than I deserved, and I likely received more leeway to err than people of color are permitted in majority White settings. For me, a White racial being was about recognizing details of my positionality more hidden to me as well as the privileges associated with usually not having to deal with marginalization in other milieus.

As reflected in the latter two seminal experiences, my status as a White male CDO related to DuBois' (1903) famous question, "How does it feel to be a problem?" I felt like a problem in a number of instances, a sensation typically uncommon to most Whites throughout their personal and professional lives. I am not talking about the temporal experiences where Whiteness is critiqued or when someone is called out for showing their privilege. Rather, it is

the deep-seated internal distress that one is not fully welcome or appreciated or valued, even when a number of signs would seemingly suggest the opposite. To reiterate, I am not intending to make a comparative claim with regards to the impact of these acts of marginalization — only to demonstrate how the feeling is uncommon for most Whites and therefore offers a glimpse into the microaggressions surrounding many people of color on a regular basis. These moments provide a temporary encounter with othering, a chance to existentially experience a dose of reality that can ultimately deliver a more empathic sense of understanding. It is also consistent with conversations around White privilege identifying the "nots" in many White lives — not typically having to deal with race-based targeting, not having to explain oneself, or not spending as much energy and time exploring issues through the prism of possible racial antagonism.

As Fanon (1967) has noted, Black bodies are hypervisible in White-dominant spaces, both in terms of physical presence as well as the critically speculative gaze applied to their actions and very being in those spaces. As an example, the young man for whom I am legal guardian called recently and casually mentioned that he was the only Black student within a sea of eighty White faces in his computer science class; thus, despite his standing as a good student, Abdul's absence on any date will be more noticeable and perhaps draw more suspicion than other anonymous White students for whom the professor would likely not know their identity. Yet, Ellison's (1995) notion of "the invisible man" ought not be seen as contradictory to this phenomenon, as I worry about whether Abdul will be sufficiently "seen" when opportunities for internships arise in his program. Gates (1994) identifies this hypervisible/invisible phenomenon as challenging both to the public image of Black males as well as their own struggles for identity, and Miller (2015) points out its historical precedence back in slavery.

Ironically, using the example of Henry Louis Gates being confronted by police in his own home, Wingard (2013) suggests that Gates' status as a Black man in the affluent Cambridge community rendered him both hypervisible and yet simultaneously invisible as either a renowned Harvard scholar or even as a potential resident of that area. As Yancy (2005) writes, "To have one's dark body invaded by the white gaze and then to have that body returned as distorted is a powerful experience of violation" (217). This theme of concomitant hypervisibility and invisibility has been explored by a number of writers analyzing the realities facing other marginalized populations such as lesbians of color (DeLong 2013), Black male faculty (Reddick 2011), persons with disabilities (Mitchell 2006), survivors of sexual assault (Phillips & Griffin 2014), and Black Republicans (Rigueur 2015).

Being a White CDO at an HBCU created sensations of hypervisibility and invisibility concurrently, generating considerable identity salience for me. Clearly, people knew and identified my race on a regular basis — yet, very rarely did people engage in deeper conversations that interrogated this racial self. In essence, the degree to which I could, in the words of one colleague, "pass as Black" rendered my race as relatively invisible at times. One student referred to me as a "clear man" rather than White, suggesting that I was racially ambiguous and not as much the "other" as he had anticipated. Yet, at the same time, there were moments when Black colleagues would engage in talk referencing "Black phenomena" or make decisions that impacted our work, without seeing me at all.

Drawing from the writings of Goffman (1959) in suggesting that individuals perform particular identities based on their desired managed impression, the verb form of racial "being" connects with the manner in which one elects to present the racial self. From the symbolic

interactionist tradition, self-perceptions can shape thoughts around self-presentation, which are still influenced by the ability to "take the role of the other" in order to gain insight into the appropriateness of the anticipated self-presentation. Interpretations of the response then shapes one's conception of both self and other.

So, in this context, as a White male who did not attend an HBCU institution, I had to think carefully about how to appropriately posture myself to avoid being seen as the hostile outsider who manifested disrespect for HBCUs and Black self-determination. As noted before, part of the CDO role involves a willingness to push back against practices that counter the mission of inclusion and equity. While CDOs at PWIs typically feel concerns about going against the institution, I also internalized an additional fear of being perceived as going against the dominant race at HBCUs. This precarious emotional situation can be both paralyzing and motivating — perhaps making me hesitant to act at times but also driven to potentially counteract prevailing assumptions about the commitment of Whites to supporting HBCUs and serving as racial allies. My White "being" shaped my "being" White at Cedar State.

Part of the "being" of White also was the reality that, at times, it would be less about how I performed Whiteness, but rather, how the presence of Whiteness constituted a performance in itself. Analogously, when Michael Sam elected to become the first prospect for the National Football League to publicly announce his homosexuality, his very existence automatically became a living performance of the LGBTQ community, regardless of the specific presentation of self that he provided (Garcia 2014). While I could engage in culturally sensitive and appropriate impression management that would hopefully manifest my commitment as an ally and partner in the equality struggle, there were moments such as the discussion of the White

coach where my presence as a White male automatically performed for me a reality about which I held little control.

In turn, I experienced a range of iterations of the borderlands encounter examined by Anzaldua. As presented in my autobiographical journey, I entered Cedar State without having done enough of the rigorous internal work of interrogating my own Whiteness and also having it questioned by others to me. In a sense, I thought that I had already developed a sophisticated understanding. Yet, I was able to see and hear Whiteness more profoundly and was surprised to recognize how many actions — from challenging my department chair Dr. Clark to my desire to speak out at the hiring committee meeting — emanated from the domain of White privilege. In the nepantla stage, individuals become aware of these multiple realities, and in coatlilcue, they wrestle through the personal disconnections between what was and what now is. Although initially challenging, these moments of self-awareness regarding my positionality and performance produced considerable liberatory potential and growth for me. And while I felt that I utilized this knowledge to make wiser decisions for the work of our Office in general, I am well aware of how later actions surrounding intersectionality issues demonstrated the steepness of the learning curve for me.

It is perhaps at this moment, through the textual production of this autoethnographic account, that I feel movement into coyolxauqui, where I can more richly appreciate and manage these multiple identity dimensions. Looking back with deeper perspective now on the nuances attached to my actions with the "gay speakers event" helps me to continue to evolve in understanding the complex racial dynamics involved in being a White person and performatively being White, with emphasis on how context matters. Even the idea of serving as an ally for

people of color — can one really self-appoint that identity or must it be bestowed by the group for whom we wish to be allies? — has divergent implications in "White spaces" and, in this case, "Black spaces." While functioning as a White CDO at an HBCU afforded me this incredible opportunity for moving through these phases, it must be my lifelong journey (as well as for all those who occupy dominant social positions) to strive for la mestiza consciousness by staying vigilant in examining the self, appreciating mechanisms for supporting pluralistic and inclusive thinking, and more thoughtfully continuing the fight for equity.

While I speak more to being the White CDO than just White here, I contend that Whites who are new to the HBCU environment could reasonably encounter similar phenomena. Being in different spaces where the cultural practices and assumptions may be inverted can offer these types of insights, especially when individuals are open to reflexive thinking. Interestingly, I did not spend a great deal of time talking with my White or other-race colleagues about our racial identities at an HBCU, but I did hear several of them comment in public settings that they did come to know themselves and matters of race better as a result of being at the school.

My tenure at Cedar State confirmed that White individuals who begin employment at HBCUs benefit from a period of intentional listening and observing of the cultural context. In particular, for those on the faculty ranks or with supervisory responsibilities over others, it is important for the community to see that these newcomers do not perceive themselves as the "White saviors," but instead, as individuals with a joint willingness to learn and contribute. Additional time invested in thoughtful conversation with colleagues about racial identity issues and participation in campus activities can provide even deeper insights as well as a symbolic demonstration to others of their personal dedication to serving as an ally.

Clearly, institutions that seek to support students in examining their racal selves will want to consider intentional strategies for encouraging this work. In addition to implementing formal initiatives in the curriculum or in co-curricular programs, however, more informal opportunities that encourage spontaneous dialogue and reflection are needed. My experiences illustrated that learning often happened for me when learning was not scheduled to happen. Supporting this claim, empirical research by Harper and Yeung (2013) at a PWI suggests that informal campus engagement activities may be even more significantly correlated with openness to diverse perspectives than more formal institutionalized ones. To be clear, formal programs and overall institutional commitment to fostering diversity in many cases stands as instrumental in establishing a healthy environment that encourages the more informal interaction. Through this dialectic, healthier outcomes in terms of students' (and employees') attitudes and belief systems can be positively achieved.

Hopefully, my story has provided insight into the possibilities involved in this type of racial examination journey for Whites. The work is indeed often emotionally challenging, yet it is precisely this discomfort that proves to ultimately be revelatory and even liberating. In order for members of dominant groups to more fully appreciate their positionality as well as better understand the identity dynamics encountered by others, these de-centering opportunities offer a profound context for transformation.

The Chief Diversity Officer and the Racial Self

The DuBois question again captures significant elements of the feelings perhaps internalized by many CDOs. The job inherently entails raising challenging and often

uncomfortable questions — and as Williams and Wade-Golden (2007) mention, the fact that most CDOs are people of color and women further exacerbates the situation when they interrogate White supremacist and patriarchal norms that often guide traditional institutions. These individuals are "problems" to so many in the institution, pushing individuals and units to confront their biases and resisting the path of least resistance that governs so much of institutional thinking. My experiences definitely correlate with these ideas, as I found myself attempting to push against some aspects of thinking and practice that seemed contrary to the principles of social justice.

As a result, the psychological effect on CDOs needs richer exploration. To explain, one of my good friends and former work colleague Marissa, a biracial woman, now occupies the CDO position at a community college in Washington state. As a highly skilled social justice professional who possesses a strong understanding of organizational change, Marissa is well aware of the strategies needed to move an institution towards greater equity and inclusion. She receives a very nice salary, serves on the president's senior cabinet, manages a fairly robust portfolio with a generous budget, and has been given opportunities by the president to grow her work and her professional standing in the field. One would imagine that, relatively speaking, she is in a good situation that many people would envy.

Yet, in our frequent conversations, Marissa reports a constant feeling of uneasiness, of being on edge in anticipation of the next microaggression to occur, of generalized questioning of whether her work is truly appreciated and respected. She notices that her salary still lags behind the other Vice Presidents, and her level of emotional investment in the institution has begun to decline. These concerns are real to her, and definitely common to many CDOs, particularly

people of color. Young's (2007) reflective work about the "burden of racial performance" speaks to the realities that many marginalized groups experience — constantly having to think about their own identities and the ways in which they "perform" these identities as well as how it is all received by dominant groups and even peers. As one Black friend of mine once said to me, "I love being Black, but there are some days that I wish that I didn't have to wake up and worry about having to *be Black* [emphasis mine]."

This problematic position definitely connects with the experiences of many CDOs. As Nixon (2011) writes, "The CDO's lived paradoxes of simultaneous visibility and invisibility, high rank and low resources, and recognition and tokenism can result in marginalization achieved not through sidelining or sweeping under the rug, but in essence by hiding the CDO in plain view, by creating window dressing without substantive resources or support" (33). They are often expected to make the institution "look good" and create considerable change in diversity metrics, all the while fighting to be respected. Perhaps no other position on a university campus carries this same level of emotional and political polar extremes simultaneously.

Thus, with regards to the borderlands concept, it can be surmised that CDOs of color may struggle with balancing their own personal identities with the role performance expected by the position. Again, since diversity work is in general quite connected to the personal sense of self for CDOs, this issue has additional importance. Many of these leaders wish to do much more but face tremendous limitations based on resources, institutional commitment, or even the position — inevitably leading to a pronounced sense of role conflict.

As an example, I recall an experience when I was teaching at a PWI where Black students expressed public outrage at perceived racist statements that had been spray painted in a

"free speech" area on campus. The hurt felt by the students was exacerbated by what they perceived as a weak response by the CDO who was Black. While I did not process the specific situation with this CDO, I knew him well enough to believe that he may well have wanted to issue a stronger public condemnation and punishment to the offenders — but the particulars of the "free speech" context and the prevailing relatively apolitical institutional ethos could have constrained his words and actions. Statements in public forums and online sources questioned the CDO's racial authenticity, and regardless of whether this response impacted his own internal racial identity, it likely created a degree of existential pain.

This case highlights a broader challenge for many CDOs who find themselves obligated to lower their initial expectations for institution outcomes or even feel political pressure to compromise some principles to gain smaller victories. It was difficult to accept, for example, that it would not be wise for our Office to pursue initiating a Gay/Straight Alliance on campus. For me, it then became a matter of identifying strategies for planting seeds that could ideally produce some degree of immediate impact — and hopefully, blossom later into greater institutional transformation. Thus, programs such as the Journey of Understanding which involved a number of LGBTQ students sharing their stories and receiving positive response functioned as a mechanism for gently moving the narrative forward.

My experiences suggest that CDOs may, in fact, undergo some degree of transformation in their racial sense of self through the process of doing this work. While the context for me was different than for CDOs at PWIs, it seems reasonable that others will face responses and internalize questions that serve as the impetus for advancing this personal journey. In my case, I believe that my immersion within HBCUs and a wide range of Black cultural spaces prior to

arriving at Cedar State did not make being there itself as a White person as likely to push me racially — and as such, it was being the CDO that fostered this growth. Being "responsible" for diversity issues meant a greater likelihood for paying attention to some of these topics and raising challenging questions for myself and others. My "title" alone led many individuals to ask my opinions on various diversity matters that again furthered my understanding and ultimate reflection on the meaning for me personally and racially.

It is hoped that the ideas generated from this dissertation can be meaningful for institutional leaders to consider when hiring CDOs and advocating for diversity work on their campuses. The role is emotionally, politically, and socially taxing — and without a sophisticated understanding of both the job and the person, presidents might be creating difficulties for the CDO that hamper effectiveness. CDOs need meaningful support mechanisms to include valuable external constituencies. While one can reasonably presume that college presidents have at least marginal understanding of the functions of the various units that report to them (or at least definite appreciation of their relative importance), the same statement cannot always be assumed true regarding the work of diversity.

Presidents who are truly committed to diversity and their CDOs themselves perhaps need to be willing to undergo training to more fluently speak the language and gain cognizance of the various models for diversity. They can also challenge senior staff members to become more willing to invest in racial identity work, allowing space for campus leaders to consider the exhausting emotional labor being undertaken by CDOs and hopefully commit to greater infusion of the principles of inclusion and equity within their units. In turn, these collective discussions

may assist CDOs in reflectively appreciating their own possible transformations in knowing the self over time as part of a broader professional growth experience.

With reference to all three of these foci of discussion, my experiences also speak to the matter of White males serving as CDOs, both at HBCUs and PWIs. As argued earlier, women and people of color have occupied the vast majority of these positions for important reasons of perspective, access to power, and example — but more recent arguments have also been issued about the plausible benefits of White males in diversity leadership roles (Catalyst 2012; White 2007). As Cullen (2013) contends, White employees may respond more favorably to diversity initiatives when presented by others who look like them, with those leaders also unburdening people of color from always being responsible for educating Whites on issues of inequality. Symbolically, there is power in bringing everyone to the diversity and inclusion table, particularly socially advantaged individuals who are willing to challenge their own privilege and manifest genuine commitment to equity.

Yet, even these considerations at an HBCU are complicated by additional factors. My experiences also suggest that "outsiders" (whether based on race, culture, geography, etc.) can bring fresh perspectives and ideas to further contribute to the complexity of the diversity agenda. And certainly, I was honored when students and staff members shared with me how much they appreciated my willingness to step outside of the comfort zone of a White-dominant world, to engage meaningfully at an HBCU, and to create programming that raised consciousness and enhanced community; several individuals mentioned that I represented the first White person with whom they had become close, and therefore, helped to shift their perception of White people in general. Yet, at times, I honestly struggled internally with some aspects of even being

in the position. As mentioned earlier, I wrestled with balancing the desire to advance a mission of inclusion that countered transcendent values held at Cedar State with a profound respect for the institution and its long-standing traditions. Perhaps another individual could have more seamlessly navigated through areas of rocky terrain that generated resistance for me.

Ultimately, my experience affirms that White people can play a significant positive role in the mission for diversity and inclusion within higher education and concomitantly benefit significantly from the experience. However, depending on the institutional type and focus for this diversity work, considerations for appropriate support and collaborative enterprise must be made to allow White CDOs to maximize the potential within themselves and the school. It is also advantageous for each institution to more proactively identify its central goals for this work to determine whether the positionality of the individual might stand as a critical variable in the hiring decision. I was recently invited by a search firm to apply for a Vice President/CDO position at a well-endowed small liberal arts PWI, but upon discovering the complete lack of racial diversity in senior administration, declined to submit materials as I thought that it would be inappropriate for a White male to serve in that capacity.

Final Thoughts

It is fairly rare for scholars to intentionally and discursively process the ways in which conducting research and writing about it has influenced them personally. Yet, in the case of the work presented here, there can essentially be no option except full disclosure. From the first moment that I even considered the position as CDO at Cedar State, a sense of reflexivity became inextricably woven within my spirit and shaped my decisions, reactions, and interpretations of

everything that I encountered. I was profoundly changed by the process — discovering so much about myself, the centrality of race within my consciousness (even when it seemed obscured), the complexity of diversity efforts and the CDO role, and the state of HBCUs — and I emerge from the completion of this dissertation hoping that it can serve as an example for others to consider when embarking on a similar journey of understanding.

With the highly personal and often emotional aspects of this work, I would encourage individuals engaged in it to be deeply immersed within a social network that can deliver valuable support and feedback. I often felt alone, and while circumstance contributed to these reactions, I recognize that some of my own insecurities may have limited my willingness to reach out for assistance. I thought, who else could have fully appreciated the special dynamics of the situation in which I found myself? CDOs, in particular, as a result of the complex constellation of roles and relationships that must be managed, are uniquely positioned to face considerable personal challenges in their endeavors. Intentional recruitment of mentors and nurturing peer networks are likely vital for longevity and success in the field.

Interestingly, those individuals in general willing to confront their own social identities in profound ways are also subject to an emotionally risky and tenuous journey that would benefit from ongoing support to keep them on the road and to guide them in the meaning making process. If we desire for people from socially advantaged positionalities to pursue the hard work of interrogating their privilege, it seems reasonable to suggest that we collectively provide a safe environment and the context for greater accountability. Perhaps I would have performed better as a CDO and gained even more personally through that kind of engagement. Regardless, I am

still better off as a result of both my time at Cedar State and the opportunity to make great sense of the experience through this autoethnography.

This study was designed to serve as exploratory qualitative research that can inform further inquiry into these issues. As illustrated throughout these pages, more scholarship on the matter of the complex dimensions of diversity efforts at HBCUs is still needed, particularly with regards to the efficacy of these strategies. Certainly, the approaches used and results attained might also be divergent based on institutional type, as this study examined realities encountered at a single rural public HBCU in the South with a relatively low percentage of non-Black students; as an example, a Gay/Straight Alliance exists at an urban HBCU campus less than 100 miles away from Cedar State. In addition, the unique journeys of members from all different social identity groups at HBCUs must still be examined. To broaden the understanding of the impact of diversity work on CDOs, deeper analysis of the wide range of identity characteristics is suggested. For example, the level of satisfaction or perceived ability to influence campus climate could vary for male and female CDOs. More sophisticated appreciation of in-group variations is required, such as the factors that influence whether Whites proactively pursue exploration of the racial self while in the HBCU milieu.

In the end, I am profoundly grateful for all those who challenged and encouraged me along this entire journey, particularly my colleagues and students at Cedar State. So many young people from the school stay in touch, and the week before I composed these final paragraphs, I returned to the school to attend a fraternity probate show for one of our former Office interns. It was my first time back on the campus, and a number of students told me how much they missed

the diversity programs that we delivered. Apparently, the Office is practically non-existent these days and the work has largely disappeared, except for banners hanging from light poles announcing home countries for the international students. I remember receiving a phone call a few weeks before from a major national media outlet asking my opinion on diversity matters at Cedar State these days in comparison to our tenure, with the reporter mentioning that she could not find much on the school website. While I declined to comment, I felt that her statement indeed stood as a strong comment itself on the change that the new president had ushered in.

The struggle to encourage progressive thought and action is not an easy one, and for the students and employees who valued those opportunities to grow personally, cognitively, and socially as a result of exposure to diverse ideas and experiences, I can only hope that the future will bring about transformation. In a time of "unprecedented crisis" facing HBCUs (Jacobs 2015), the notion of expanding vision and seeking innovation seems critical to ensure the vitality of these proud and successful institutions. Promoting diversity and inclusion can plausibly serve as one meaningful vehicle for sustaining the legacy. Opening the doors even wider — both in terms of "counting more diverse heads" and "making sure all heads count" — can perhaps be seen as beneficial to the schools and to all those who enter.

As our nation continues to experience tremendous inequality of opportunity and perspective, inclusive spaces that both affirm marginalized peoples and offer context for changing narratives among majority group members are vital. I can attest to the incredibly positive impact of being at HBCUs, and so can countless young people of all racial backgrounds whose lives have been strengthened as a result of matriculating at HBCUs. In the parlance of the times, Black lives matter — and so do Black institutions.

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