## Findings & Interpretation

### Shattered Glass

During my senior year in 2005 I was sitting in the Cultural Center when I was approached by a staff member along with some of my friends. “Did you hear what happened?” I had no idea what I was about to hear, but my response would mimic that of my friends. One of my peers had been thrown through the window of a local shop by several White students and had multiple stitches in his face. This was the beginning of a race war on campus. The series of racist comments and campus violence that would soon come as a result from this racist act would affect me in a way for which I had not been prepared. These events lowered my level of trust with my White classmates and I became skeptical of every White student on campus.

In the midst of racial tension, the African American community quickly came together in protest of the students who attacked my African peer. As a collective, we demanded the students be arrested for their crimes and proceeded to hold campus rallies on racism and discrimination for several weeks to come. After no action was taken against these students for their crime, we proceeded to advise every prospective African American student not to attend the university. This was one of many self-determining acts for social justice I participated in at my university. This very experience reaffirmed my self-affirmation, as well as other students. This lead us to self-determining for equality and safety on campus. In order to be successful at our institutions and beyond, we self-affirmed individually and came together to self-determine toward Civil Rights and graduation. This experience is one of many that inspired me to further investigate the perceived relationship between self-affirmation (self-worth greater than perceived worth from others) and self-determination (survival tool for maintaining positive self-worth).

From my study I became aware these concepts, along with success, have to be discussed one with the other in order to make better sense of them individually. In this chapter I present six major findings that arose from the data relating to the above topics when attempting to answer the following research questions:

1. How do African American students practice or engage in acts of self-affirmation at traditional institutions (PWIs and HBCUs)?
    a. What are the types of self-affirmation students are practicing at each institution?
    b. Does this practice of self-affirmation look differently at a PWI versus an HBCU? And if so, how?
2. What are these students perceived notions of success?
3. Why have these students chosen their institutions?
4. Why do these students choose to participate in culturally specific events/activities, environments, social groups, etc.?
    a. Are these examples of self-affirmation?
    b. How do they change the definition of self-affirmation, if at all?
5. Do these students see their choice to self-affirm as an inhibitor or facilitator to success?
6. Do these students perceive self-affirmation to have an impact on their desire to self-determine as it relates to their definition of success?

When analyzing the data to answer the research questions, I further placed the information gathered from the one-on-one interviews with the dual-analysis (Grounded Theory & CRT) in conversation with the education, law, and sociological literatures previously discussed in chapter two. Moreover, I connect direct quotations from the participants in the study to each sub-category of analysis. Many of the supporting quotations I found in my analysis showed a

perceived relationship between the concepts of self-affirmation, self-determination and success. Some quotations from the interviews also appear in the form of poetry, composed by myself.

**Findings from Grounded Theory**

After I completed analyzing the interviews using grounded theory several broad themes, categories and sub-categories arose. Grounded theory lead me to find several themes such as challenges, being an example, personal drive/persistence, self-motivation and diversity. Under each of these themes the categories and sub-categories produced many findings. Overall, I found the participants attending Justice University to have chosen their institution based on finances. The participants found Justice University to be more affordable and offering more financial assistance than PWIs. All of the participants had strong aspirations of helping their Black community through mentorship and being a role model. Their roles on their campus and surrounding communities greatly impacted their views of their collegiate experiences and vice versa. Despite the racism they experienced, whether on/off campus, each participant valued the education they were receiving and had an overall positive view of college. On the other hand, it was these very same negative and discriminatory experiences which self-motivated the participants to continue to matriculate at their institutions. Lastly, exposure to other cultures and a reflection of the racial make-up on their campus was very important to the participants at Midwest University. They appreciated the diverse make-up of the student body, faculty and staff and noted it as a benefit to their education. The lessons they learned from their peers of other cultures was just as important as the lessons they learned in the classroom.

**Findings after Critical Race Theory**

Upon completion of grounded theory I then applied CRT to those findings. I applied three tenets (experiential knowledge, challenge to ideologies and centrality to race/racism) to be able to see how race affected the collegiate experience of the participants. After completing the analysis with the tenets six major themes arose from my study: impact of family on self-affirmation, regulation of Blackness, down-playing of Blackness, educating/managing conflict around race, self-affirming in a multicultural society and self-affirmation and self-determination as giving back: hero/shero. These themes were a combination of grounded theory and CRT, which I named grounded critical race theory.

**Impact of Family on Self-affirmation**

Participants at both institutions practiced and/or engaged in acts of self-affirmation. The participants practiced self-affirmation through how they identified themselves, specifically through the process of regulating and down-playing their Blackness. In *To Break Away or Strengthen Ties to Home: A Complex Issue for African American College Students Attending a Predominantly White Institution*, Guiffrida (2005) explains cultural family ties can be a hindrance to success for African-American students. Focusing on Tinto's (1993) Student Departure Theory and how familial ties are distracting and inhibit success for African-American students, he claims this to be a much more complex situation. Guiffrida (2005) points out students with family support tend to be academically high-achieving and did not need to break their ties with family. Students with no familial support tend to be low-achieving. Low-achieving students appear to make frequent visits home to help family or were seeking a social (arguably cultural) connection they lacked at their institution. Instead of receiving financial and mental

support from their families, these academically low-achieving students provided the familial support to their parents, siblings and other members.

Family relationships can affect the impact or direction of self-affirmation. As Guiffrida (2005) described in his article mentioned earlier, familial relationships can cause a person to self-affirm in two different manners: towards family or towards education. This impact of familial ties makes the relationship between self-affirmation, self-determination and success a non-linear one. Students may self-affirm in a manner that causes them to drop out of school and tend to their family's needs or self-affirm in a manner that pushes them to continually matriculate and eventually graduate from their institution. Participants at both institutions had their process of self-affirmation affected by their familial ties. Tre, a participant, describes two forces that have impacted his desire to obtain a college degree: 1. The birth of his son 2. Taking care of his sick father.

Tre's Take on College

Not everything is always easy when you are going through college

you have different types of real life situations

you have different types of miniscule situations that you go through that make college a lot harder than it has to be.

When I say the hardships I mean having to stop going to college when my dad got sick *and having to start over*…and having a son in the middle of my collegiate career and *not always having the right funds to have to get things done.*

Like I said *those nights that go too long and those mornings that come too quick*.

It is a blessing *in all honesty* to see everything that you've gone through and STILL see that those trials and tribulations didn't stop you and that you are almost done.

***

Anne discusses her familial ties positively affecting her ideas of self-affirmation, self-determination and success:

Anne's Push in the Right Direction

The 3 of them [her siblings]… they don't have high school diplomas and everybody accredits that to my WHITE MOMMA cause their mothers are African American.

And it is like… IT IS MY MOTHER… not because she is White

but because my mother said you are going to do better than me

I don't care what it takes.

You are going to be better than me.

*So I do*

I'm trying.

***

Alexandra gives a negative account how familial ties impacted her collegiate experience:

Alexandra's Loss

I actually had some depression issues because of the fact that

ONE

it was really hard knowing that I was going to be here for an EXTRA 2 years on top of that

and THEN I had lost my mom when I was 14 *so like just a lot of it wasn't resolved*

so it started catching up on me around that time.

So… it actually started effecting me and so I ended up going to counseling for it… which the counseling center here is amazing and I slowly got out of it and basically I'm back on my way again.

***

The participants in my study expressed their family situations being motivators for them, minus one participant (her family had different desires for her). This also does not take into account the familial like ties, which are built between lower/upperclassmen as well, as expressed by Brown (2001). These students create a family like atmosphere with upperclassmen taking on the role as collegiate parents and underclassmen as their children. All of the students who participated in my study, according to them, were doing well academically when asked about their grade point averages (GPA). Taking on the responsibility of the role as a collegiate parent, these upperclassmen create an environment which underclassmen can self-affirm. This environment is created through the positive examples, advice on negotiating a White space and passing down of collegiate experiences from peer to peer. This concept of the collegiate family expands Guiffrida's (2005) ideas of familial ties. These African American students might have the support not from their biological family, but instead from their collegiate one.

**Regulations of Blackness**

In the education literature, Harper (2005, 2009) states social/cultural capital used by African Americans at PWIs is motivated by the oppression and racism they are experiencing. These negative experiences are then used by the students as inspiration to succeed at their respective institutions. The participants attending the PWI did relate to Harper's (2005, 2009) findings, however, the literature does need to be expanded to include students at HBCUs as well.

Anne's experience at Justice University was very different than most would expect. There is a perception that attending a HBCU automatically gives its students a certain social and cultural capital. Contrary to this perception, Anne's experience did not allow her to automatically gain this social and cultural capital due to her being bi-racial. More importantly, Anne's self-affirming acts (e.g., membership in NAACP) did not have the outcome she was hoping. Her

peers were not accepting of her because of her physical appearance. Anne was easily mistaken for being Caucasian despite her identification as African American; therefore, her peers commonly discriminated against her. This discrimination exhibited how her peers were not concerned with having racially diverse experiences. This discrimination Anne experienced is an example of the regulation involved in self-affirmation. Research tells us self-affirmation comes with benefits, but it also involves inclusion and exclusion, who is in and who is out. This inclusion and exclusion supports our claims of identity.

Anne's BLACK I-dentity

i

Well coming to Justice University was…in the beginning it was a horrible experience for me ummmm. I was treated terribly uh walking down the walkway

I had profanity yelled at me

I had people make fun of me

I had people throw themselves into me to point and laugh at me.

I was treated awfully

under the assumption that I was White and uh…ummm I mean they would yell White bitch at me and

*who* do you think you are

*where* do you think you are

just walking to class.

(Girl) I heard one girl who was on her phone and she was said *I did not come here to go to school with a bunch of White BITCHES*.

And I was just like…I mean I didn't even talk to her.

She doesn't know me.

You know and it was pretty upsetting because

as I learned in African American Literature which I had never even stopped to consider ummm half of the uh half of the slaves when they were freed

looked like me

like they looked White I didn't know that.

And I don't think anyone in the class knew that and… it was just it was so upsetting that I learned about how horribly the lighter skinned slaves were treated and I'd never heard about that before

and it was it was just upsetting because I felt like

*DAMN* I would have been treated bad back then and I'm getting treated bad now and there is nothing I can do.

It is not like I picked to look White that wasn't my decision.

My dad is very dark

*very very* dark

and people tell me all the time

that is not your dad.

It is like yeah it is. (She laughs) My parents have been together since my mom was 14 *that's my*

*dad.*

That's it.

So I've had a very different experience.

ii

You know at first I kind of felt that way but then I was like I mean I'm older I've been in school a long time I am a lot older than these kids

and I was like… you know it got to the point where *I don't have to prove myself to anybody.*

I am who I am

I know who I am. Like

I just feel like

I wish they would respect me just as one human being to another. You know just the fact that I'm a person trying to better myself clearly I'm in college.

But… they don't and… I guess that reflects the respect for themselves but… I'm at the point where I don't have to prove myself to anybody. I don't even…it used to be I'd get in the class and my first comment would be like oh well my opinion is like this *because I'm African American* and you know

and I found myself not even doing that now I'm just going to make my comment. You can make your own assumption and I don't really care.

It is like

I am

who I am.

iii

I have an aunt who does pass. (she laughs sarcastically)

She doesn't even speak to us I've never met her.

She's Italian.

iv

I think it is very positive to be in the African American community to be associated with it.

It gives you because… I do look White people usually talk to me like I am

and I've heard people say things that I mean they would never say around people that they knew were African American.

Like my mom and I were once

my mom worked in a building downtown and we were going on the elevator

and there was an African American man in a suit and tie

like he clearly worked there

and then there was a White man in a suit and tie

and we were all going up the elevator together

and the African American man gets off…and the White man looks at me and my mom and says *it's kind of funny to see a monkey in a monkey suit.*

And I mean I was so *shocked* it was like I didn't have time to be angry.

I was just like *I can't believe you just said that like do you know what year it is.*

*GOD!*

I was just shocked and I just looked at my mom like and we had the same look on our face it was just like.

So I try to tell other African Americans that…and usually they just don't want to hear it.

It is just like you have to be really careful.

You honestly do have to be very careful what non-African Americans that you trust out there because they are just… honestly racism is alive and well and they are not there to help you.

They don't want to hire you

they don't care how smart you are.

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I titled Anne's interview BLACK I-dentity because of the background of her collegiate experience. As stated previously, Anne is bi-racial and is often mistaken as being Caucasian. I capitalized 'black' in the title to demonstrate the emotions Anne felt concerning this. When I first encountered Anne she saw me putting up a flyer for my study. She approached me regarding participation and immediately became defensive with me when I asked her if she considered herself to be African American. I had found during my time at her institution, like many, the students did not fully read the criteria for participation for the study and some who inquired did not meet any of the criteria. I also capitalized 'black' in the title for the discrimination she

encountered at the HBCU by her African American peers and the Black pride she exuded in the interview. Identity is spelled as I-dentity as I place emphasis on the “I” to stress how Anne identifies herself as being Black and/or African-American.

While Anne does not state this directly in her interview, she has to protect and defend herself against African Americans and non-African Americans. She is constantly being rejected by both sides of her racial background. Anne's Black identity is one which is forever changing. As she discusses in the first stanza, Anne experiences hatred from her peers and at the same time finds personal victory in knowing slaves looked like her and were bi-racial. She finds empowerment in learning about her African American history. In stanzas three and four Anne talks about her physical appearance allowing her to reside in dual realities. She has been let in a world where it is acceptable to discriminate, stereotype, and be blatantly racist. Refusing to take advantage of the capability to pass and inherit White privilege, Anne resides in a world where her Black identity lets her be discriminated against.

In being able to make sense of things in the world people find it easier to have labels to identify what someone or something is. These labels often place people in a box in which they stay and reside forever, despite their efforts to change their labels or be able to fluidly move amongst multiple. When thinking of identity I commonly think of these labels, my notion of self and the role my identity plays in the construction of myself. I am not just an African American woman, wife, mother, or doctoral student. I am also an artist, an adventurer, an educator and a mentor. I feel that I am fluid and can change who I am and how I identify myself at any time and that should be accepted by society with open arms. My personal thoughts of how I define myself and the construction of these identities alone with how others define me lead me to explore further the participants’ construction of identity. These self-identifications and how I constructed

them also intrigued me to want to know how the participants navigate their identity in order to better understand their processes of self-affirmation.

What do we mean by identity? “Our present idea of ‘identity’ is a fairly recent social construct, and a rather complicated one” (Fearon, 1999, p. 2). Identity is forever changing either by the person itself or by society’s standards (Schultz, 2000). “Identity means either (a) a social category defined by membership rules… characteristic attributes or expected behavior, or (b) a socially distinguishing feature that a person takes special pride in or views unchangeable… (or of course both (a) and (b) together)” (Fearon, 1999, p. 36). As stated by Brunsma and Rockquemore (2002) in *Socially Embedded Identities: Theories, Typologies, and Processes of Racial Identity Among Black/White Biracials*, identity is constructed with a set of choices made by the individual. While this article focuses particularly on the identity construction of people who are bi-racial, I argue this set of choices extends to all who are constructing their identity. Making multiple decisions based on different choices of inclusion and exclusion in membership and characteristics of behavior provide fluidity to the process of identity development. As explained through protean identity, bi-racial people move fluidly between identifying as Black, White, and bi-racial (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2002). However, in Anne’s case, she does not move fluidly between racial identities. She identifies as being African American only and the dual-identity creates a problem for her.

There is also another aspect in which the education literature needs to be expanded as well, as Harper (2005, 2009) feels this oppression and racism should motivate the students to self-determine and this is not always true, especially in every setting which the student finds themself. At the PWI the students were more likely to regulate their Blackness, depending on the space they were in and choose not to self-determine through culturally specific events/activities

or pick/choose when and how to participate in those events. Some interviewees from the PWI specifically chose not to support culturally specific events/activities that were African American only. These participants wanted to support other cultural events and show they believed in and endorsed diversity/integration at their institution.

The psychology literature sheds light on the development of racial identity and its impact on self-affirmation. African American children go through an identity phase called race realization (Tatum, 1997); this is the process of developing awareness of being African American. The participants in the study also go through this race realization and even discuss how they face their own identities. The identity navigation via race realization is the main contributing factor leading participants to self-affirmation. The findings support the literature, but I would like to point out how the participants experience race realization differ according to the institution they attend. All the participants are navigating their identities whether it is through negotiation, defense, or both. However, the participants attending Justice University have various factors built into the institution to assist in fostering this realization and push toward self-affirmation. Through institutional values and the values of the professors the participants are very racially aware by the African American history integrated and taught across multiple disciplines.

**Down-playing of Blackness**

Participants at Midwest University are self-affirming and navigating their Blackness; however, they do so in a way where they negotiate their Blackness to their convenience. As I talked with the participants from Midwest University I noticed a tension between assimilation, being strategic academically, selling-out and compromising. This tension is unique to their environment as they are attending a PWI and are constantly negotiating and down-playing their

Blackness. The participants at Justice University did not express these tensions due to the monolithically raced environment. The participants who utilize their racial identity for their convenience do so for social and/or academic gains. For example, for social and academic benefits the participant may not identify his/herself as African American or place diversity at the forefront of his/her identity. This down-play of Blackness exhibited by the participants is due to participation in other cultural activities taking place at their institution, as well as, to appear being for diversity and inclusion. The participants sacrifice their own racial identity in order to support diversity. While I do not agree this sacrifice is necessary, this is what the participants have chosen to do. Also, the participants forego their racial identity for academic gains. In order to be accepted among their Asian or Caucasian peers they give up parts of their personality, acting 'less black' in order to gain membership into study groups.

Chester Changes

Talking to people outside my race more… I was uncomfortable at first.
And then I could see also that *no one* was comfortable with me at first.
So… it took me a while to get to a PERSONALITY that they would talk to
be comfortable with
and not making any awkwardness.

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**Educating/Managing Conflict around Race**

All the participants in my study self-affirmed by attending culturally specific events/activities or environments; however, I discovered alternative ways in which students were self-affirming as well. The participants from Midwest University self-affirmed not only through attending culturally specific events/activities, but also through educating their White peers about

the contributions African Americans have made to society (e.g., Tommy's class presentation). Whereas the participants from Justice University speak more to the importance of the racial education received at their institution (e.g., Anne's story of learning about bi-racial slaves).

Tommy, like other participants from the PWI, demonstrates an alternative way to self-affirm. He chooses to self-affirm without excluding non-African Americans by challenging his peers to understand the influences African Americans have had to the development of society. His self-affirmations occur through the vehicle of using education as a tool to inform others about his value. He affirms himself counter to Anne who does so through interactions in an all-African American environment. Using education to reaffirm himself amongst his peers, Tommy seized the opportunity to use an assignment to show his non-African American peers the contributions of his race to the field of agriculture.

Tommy Teaches

Yeah so like I told you.
I'm in agriculture education that's a lot of people from the rural area that don't necessarily agree with African American lifestyle I would say.

And ummmm I just got done lecturing on Black History and Agriculture and just being able to do that and be able to say
ummm to talk to people that I know that they OPENLY discuss with me that they aren't comfortable with me being in the classroom with them
and uh I think that shows a lot of maturity a lot of understanding of just MYSELF
I'm comfortable in my own body to go out and talk to you about my culture even though you don't respect my culture.

I was pumped up to give that lecture. I was pumped.
Ok this is my time to shine
this is my time to go out and let everybody know that African Americans have made an impact in your day to day life that you don't necessarily might not know about it.

So that was something
it wasn't like I'm going to get you back by saying what you said about me or saying what you said about the different races

but uh it was always ALWAYS I'm a let you learn something that you didn't learn before.

So in class when you do we do a lot of presentations
our lesson plans
we do a lesson plan every week and ummm most of them is straight role play.
Everybody is just the audience.
The audience is the students but the student body are the audience which are the students of a teacher.
So ummm  but it's just role-play ok we going to go ahead and ask you some questions
we are going to do this
nobody is even paying attention.

But for me to grab everybody's attention
grab everybody in and see that we all have a commonality regardless if you like it or not
it was something that uh I was excited to do.

Well at the end of my presentation I was able somebody actually walked up to me a White girl walked up to me and asked if she could use my presentation for another class.

I was actually saying that I was able to be motivated by them not wanting me there.
I was able to teach them something by doing this.
The fact that she was moved and understood the importance now
a little bit cause I was only able to give 25 minutes of my presentation of my hour long presentation.

So she was like can I get some of your references
can me and you talk about this a little bit more.
And this was one of the girls that I thought would not be accepted of this just based off her perception of life and that was amazing to me
made me feel good about what I just did
what I spent a lot of time into.

***

In addition to choosing to educate others, these participants used the racially diverse student body as a means to educate themselves about other races and be able to navigate Whiter spaces. These students viewed participating in primarily culturally specific activities as limiting academically and socially. They purposefully sought other ethnic groups' events and activities to participate.

Chester's Stepping Out

Down here I'm more open to do more things… *more diverse things*…

step out of my culture

out of the typical things outside of my race

embrace things of other cultures.

I'm more open to cultural things…

go to cultural events

go eat sushi with some of my Japanese friends from Engineering

just stuff out of my typical culture.

I've learned to embrace other things that other cultures do and not think they're weird.

***

Tommy's Diversification

The diversity of campus... has also helped me a little bit.

I know a lot of African Americans we kind of... we don't diversify ourselves all the time on campus... so I want to leave that alone and there's some good and some bad when it comes to like my social aspect of life.

A lot of people asked me where did I go

other people would go... I didn't know you still went here because I haven't seen you in so long I just decided to diversify myself amongst different cultures here on campus and...

I feel like well rounded me a little bit more than just coming from the south side of the city and coming down here and hanging around with African Americans all the time...

and going back and just doing the same thing.

Just utilize the University for the 40,000+ (he laughs) students that they have.

***

The participants attending Midwest University stated how they wished the university was more reflective of the populations of the nearby cities, but accepted the racial make-up at their institution because they felt it reflected the active job market. Allen and Comeaux's (2009) article on enrollment of African American students at PWIs uses the University of California (UC) system as an example. Policy 209 outlawed the usage of race as an identifying marker for admissions to the universities. McDounough, Outcalt & Tobolowsky (2005) state the differences in the racial make-up of the state of California vs. the enrollment of African American students in the UC system, emphasizing the drastic differences between the racial demographics of the surrounding areas to the universities vs. the racial make-up of the student population.

When discussing an elitist organization she participated in high school that was all African American Patrice stated:

Patrice as Racial Competitor

They taught us how to compete against another African American… but when you get in the REAL WORLD… it's bigger than that.

You have to learn how to compete against the OTHER races and I think that's the only thing they fall down on.

***

While my study does not answer the research question if participating in culturally specific events/activities and environment changes the definition of self-affirmation, I believe it does bring a different perspective in terms of what self-affirmation looks like. Examples of self-affirmation when participating in culturally specific events/activities and environments were very clear. However, it was the examples of self-affirmation when not participating in this culturally specific way which was surprising.

**Self-affirming in a Multicultural Society**

At both institutions, I found with the participants their self-affirmation involved their identity as being African American and a member of a multicultural society. This recognition of membership as African American and in a multicultural society occurred for the participants in an all-African American environment and those in a diverse space. Chester discusses his reality of dual membership:

Chester's Moving Forward

I remember being out and being called a NIGGER by some drunk White person.

It's like yeah… that does happen sometimes and you gotta let it go…

IF we show anger to it, that shows it hurts us.

I feel like

at this point

*we should just be past that*

and move on

and we can be successful without that.

I ignore it because if you get into a conflict with them

people *sometimes believe them over us*…

I know a lot of people choose to go to HBCUs just because they want to have predominantly African American friends so they won't have to go through that situation

BUT in real life you're going to deal with racist people all the time.

Your job's not going to be 50% BLACK, 50% White, it's probably going to be 20% Black or 10% Black… kind of how college is at a big university.

***

Here Chester is recognizing his identification as African American by himself and others when racial slurs were spat at him. He chooses to reflect on this negative experience by confirming again his decision to attend a PWI. He deals with negative experiences such as this one by reminding himself what he is learning to deal with on his college campus is something he will have to deal with post-graduation.

Alexandra, also a participant attending Midwest University, takes a similar approach as Chester:

Alexandra's Pondering Race

Just my experiences at this University…

I've actually found that I find myself in a lot of *uncomfortable cultural situations* where I'm usually [the] ONLY minority around

and so I learned to work with other cultures and work with other people and keep a cool head even though their expectations of me are kind of RIDICULOUS at times.

*And I've noticed that*

*and I've learned to just*

*not necessarily be like*… oh it is because I'm Black. No not necessarily… it might be because of something else.

I usually take that experience and try to look for other reasons for it. I try not to just automatically think it is because of my race.

*Why would it be that?*

Sometimes it is… but majority of the time it is something else.

***

Alexandra's approach to her identification as African American in a multicultural society is to analyze her experience. She reflects on being in uncomfortable situations, but stresses the importance of analyzing the situation. She takes her time to understand if what she is

experiencing is based on her race or if it can be attributed to something else. Tommy, however discusses his process of self-affirmation in a multicultural society in a different manner.

Tommy's Take on All Black

I wouldn't say that I'm involved in any organization or...

I'm not like actively involved in any student lab African American movement or anything of that I do support them if they have something going on and ummm it peeks my interest. But...

The pros the fact that we are getting African American students to understand a little bit more about academia sometimes.

Even helping those students out where some might be on the edge of leaving school or just need an extra push here and they don't have a quote unquote support system that maybe they need somebody there that can help them out in any form or fashion.

I have mentors that I've met at the Cultural Center.

So that's something that is open always

you never know what you might get out of an experience so that is a pro for me

you never know what you can get that is not necessary a con.

Ummmm but a con for me is depending on whether it be African American homecoming or that's one reason I didn't want to do African American homecoming.

I did University homecoming court instead, was the fact that I don't like being at the University and having African American in front of everything like an adjective.... to describe any event that is going on campus.

So I'd rather be

I'm more about inclusive.

If I see that down there does that mean my Asian friend can't come?

What does that mean to me?

So I'm really careful about pubbing stuff like that from an organization because my advisors tell me I could do it also just the fact that we are here to be inclusive at Midwest

we are not here to discriminate against anybody else and sometimes I do feel like that when you go to different events

this is only a Black thing.

Not necessarily people don't say that, but you could just feel whether it being the music that's playing whether it be the conversation that is going on

at a lecture or a Greek organization might have like it is a different discussion.

It might be like about skin complexity with an African American community.

We are going to talk about different things that are involved with us

however we never really talk about anything else when it comes to an inclusive standpoint but it's not meant to do that.

Because...

well I'm talking about my advisors in my minority organizations because as a minority we are not

we are not talking about anybody that is not the majority.

Therefore if we are talking about going to an African American thing if we are talking about Hispanics in my organization they might not want to go.

Or they might just feel like ok that is a Black thing I don't know anything about that I'm really uncomfortable about being around Blacks

They are loud

They are rowdy.

You got to think about all these different perceptions that might come into play.

So if you are going to publicize something just talk about issues that are being talked about or just talk about doing it as a group as a cultural emergent type of thing instead of like those who put it some greek letter organization going out talking about Civil Rights or something.

***

Tommy negotiates and down-plays his identity as African American in order to be included in

the multicultural environment at Midwest University. This navigation of his identity is important

to him as he recognizes the perception of African Americans at his university. He strives daily not to perpetuate those stereotypes.

Tre, having a completely opposite viewpoint of Tommy, discusses his decision to attend a HBCU and the benefit it poses as he recognizes his participation in a multicultural society.

The Real World, Featuring Tre

I think it poses a pro… we all have culturally specific activities.

I don't think culturally we look at those activities as a hindrance. I think it is a balance because we don't totally live in a culture that's not the culture we live in.

We HAVE to mingle and be a part of another culture

not all of our customs

and not all of our activities are AFRICAN AMERICAN

but it does serve as a balance *because when I'm not in that world I still have that part of myself.*

So it is not like a permanent sacrifice of what you are used to and what you do in your culture, *you are not sacrificing it so you can have whatever*.

***

Tre's self-affirmation of his African American identity is impacted by attending a HBCU. The university's all-African American environment allows him to build-up his self-value. When Tre embarks outside of his university's campus he has self-affirmed his identity in a manner where whatever situations may occur in the multicultural society which we live, he can handle them. The university serves as a balance for him. He is able to keep his African American identity with him, even outside the university, and not sacrifice his identity and culture completely. Tre attributes his positive self-identification and the security he feels in his racial identification to the culture of Justice University, something he states he could not gain attending a PWI.

**Self-affirmation and Self-determination as Giving Back: Hero/Shero**

Every morning it appears the participants in my study put on an invisible cape and begin their day. Each of them discusses the importance of giving back to their communities and helping others. Brown & Davis (2001) state there is a social/cultural capital that is passed down at HBCUs. This passing of knowledge from generation to generation, peer to peer equates with the collective desire to better the African American community. As stated in the literature review, a part of the six point goal of HBCUs is being a role model and providing leadership for the Black community. The inheritance of this social/cultural capital of networks, educational knowledge and positive self-images is the foundation of how the students become role models and leaders in their communities. Harper (2005) demonstrates an expanded version of Perna's (2000) discussion of cultural capital to extend beyond biological parents, but includes collegiate parents who are the givers of knowledge along with faculty and staff. The collegiate parents take on the responsibility of educating their peers on how to function in a racist environment and building leaders to teach others this navigation of a Whiter space (Brown & Davis, 2001). Tre discusses how students are examples for each other:

"Other students look at me and not because of the degree, but everybody looks at everybody."-Tre (Justice University)

Giving back to their communities is something each participant does collectively, self-determining together. However, these students do not hold the group as being accountable for the passing of capital to/for the betterment of their communities. The participants take on the individual responsibility and do not share their Superhero capes with others, but bear the burden alone.

Selfless Patrice

I want to say that my life is not my own.

My life is not my own due to the many successes

or all the successes I've had… the life that I live.

It was all about ME

all about me

and now today *I'm all about everybody else*.

I'm trying to bring other girls up

I'm trying to train them

not just in twirling

but with LIFE.

My comrades

my friends

my peers

I'm trying to be a role model to them because they… you know *I don't drink*

*I don't smoke*

*I don't party*

so I'm really trying to be that example that this GENERATION NEEDS that is worthy because I want to show… that you could STILL go to college… you can work and STILL have fun without those other things.

My life is *not my own* and I'm kind of glad TOO because then I could be EASILY influenced if I allowed myself to *just relax* and *be like everybody else*.

***

As Patrice discusses taking on the responsibility of being an example for others in her community, so do the other participants in my study. What I found to be extremely interesting is

the participants have abandoned the self-determining mindset many carried before them in the Civil Rights Movement, Black Panther Party and Freedom Schools. They have abandoned the idea of togetherness and have invoked more of self into their self-determination process. Anne references the time period of the Civil Rights Movement, but does not discuss the concepts of being collectively minded to have made those political advances.

The Commitment of Anne

That's my whole goal… is to just help bring other people up.

If I can rise to the top

and grab two hands on my way up

*I mean that's three of us on top*.

I talk to my parents and I look at pictures and stuff from the 70's *and I'm like* WHAT HAPPENED. We have a bunch of BIG BOYS…. *You don't want a boy in a man's body*.

***

It is difficult to determine if this commitment to the community is a belief of the participants of Justice University only. There was one participant from Midwest University that shared his sentiments on giving back to the Black community:

> "give back [to community] for the opportunity to have received this education.
>
> I'm not just a taker, I'm a giver." –Chester (Midwest University)

I argue the participants at Justice University focus on giving back to their communities as this is a part of the mission of HBCUs (Brown & Davis, 2001). Further research with a larger participant pool would need to be conducted to concretely state if this argument can be upheld.

In this chapter I have stated the six major themes which emerged from the data:

1. Impact of family on self-affirmation
2. Regulation of Blackness

3. Down-playing of Blackness
4. Educating/managing conflict around race
5. Self-affirming in a multicultural society
6. Self-affirmation and self-determination as giving back: hero/shero.

The first major theme, impact of family on self-affirmation, produced the finding of familial ties being formed between upper and lower classmen at their respective institutions. The participants built close relationships with their peers and sought guidance from them as underclassmen. Once obtaining upper-class status themselves, the participants took on the same role of mentoring, guiding and assisting the new underclassmen at their institutions. The participants were no longer in the role as the child in the familial structure on their campuses, but now in the role of parent.

With the second theme in the data analysis, regulation of Blackness, also came the second finding. This finding of self-affirmation as inclusion and exclusion sheds light on the boundaries the participants in the study found themselves actively living in its constraints. These boundaries forced on them by their peers, institution and society dictated how the participants were identified and in what spaces. Their African American peers regulated the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion based on physical appearance (skin color) and behavior (acting ‘Black’).

The finding which fell underneath the third theme, down-playing of Blackness, exposed the negotiations the participants found themselves taking part in daily. The students negotiated how they acted, dressed, looked and spoke depending on the racial setting they found themselves. This negotiation of their race occurred multiple times in a day depending on what spaces the participants were attempting to gain access. Many times some of the participants, particularly those at Midwest University, negotiated their racial identity by foregoing their Black identity and replacing it with an all-inclusive diversity mindset or beliefs.

The fourth finding from my study showed the participants self-affirming in a different manner than typically expected, through educating their White counterparts and themselves. The participants at Midwest University self-affirmed by giving 'teachable moments' to their White peers on the contributions or benefits Blacks made to society. These participants also sought their racially diverse student body as a means to educate themselves on other cultures in order to better manage their way in the Whiter spaces at their institution. On the other hand, at Justice University, the participants' racial education (African American history) was integrated into every academic discipline.

For participants at both institutions recognition of a dual membership in two societies was a consistent finding. This fifth finding of my study showed how the participants acknowledged, accepted and understood their membership in dual realities, one African American and one multicultural. This dual membership provided a balance in the participants' lives by allowing them to increase and maintain their valued sense of self, no matter the racial setting. This dual membership forced them to make accurate assessments of racist experiences to determine if they were racist at all. As well as, this membership caused some participants to down-play their identity in order to gain access and academically advance in Whiter spaces.

The sixth and final finding was also consistent amongst participants at both institutions. Each participant's self-determines collectively with their African American peers, but choose to bear the burden of bettering the Black community individually. This individualistic outlook is very different than historically how African Americans have viewed the task of helping their community.

These six major findings arose from the coding after I analyzed the data with Grounded Theory and CRT, ultimately producing Grounded Critical Race Theory. The poems throughout

the chapter are direct quotations I reconstructed demonstrating the constructivism of research. In the next and final chapter I offer my conclusions of the study with a discussion of my personal dilemmas, limitations of the study and personal reflections.