

2012

# Black students' classroom silence in predominantly White institutions of higher education

Mahajoy A. Laufer

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.smith.edu/theses>

 Part of the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Laufer, Mahajoy A., "Black students' classroom silence in predominantly White institutions of higher education" (2012). *Theses, Dissertations, and Projects*. 639.

<https://scholarworks.smith.edu/theses/639>

This Masters Thesis has been accepted for inclusion in Theses, Dissertations, and Projects by an authorized administrator of Smith ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@smith.edu](mailto:scholarworks@smith.edu).

Mahajoy Adia Laufer  
Black Students' Classroom Silence  
in Predominantly White Institutions  
of Higher Education

### **ABSTRACT**

This qualitative study explored Black students' silence in classrooms at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) of higher education in the northeast United States. Fifteen student interviews revealed that teaching material centered on European-American culture and history influenced their silence. Participants perceived devaluing of people of color in course material and perceived that professors used and allowed racist language and opinions to pervade the classroom. Students negotiated the tension of having discordant views from the mainstream and at times, between other students of the same racial and cultural group. They often elected to speak out against perceived discrimination and remained silent in other times to avoid being judged. Often students found "safe spaces" including self-affirming majors and courses of study, and joined cultural and political student groups.

Most participants perceived that they were stereotyped as the "angry Black" person and felt intimidated when in the racial, social class, and gender minority. Many participants believed that self-silencing for the sake of gaining knowledge was instrumental for their development as a student. The study concluded with suggestions for multicultural curriculum development and social policies for countering race bias and microaggressions in PWIs to increase Black students' comfort speaking out in class.

**BLACK STUDENTS' CLASSROOM SILENCE  
IN PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS  
OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

A project based upon an independent investigation  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

Mahajoy Adia Laufer

Smith College School for Social Work  
Northampton, MA 01063

2012

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank my parents Prakash and Jody and my sisters for encouraging and supporting me. I thank my friends and peers who have helped me discuss, question, and think deeply about my work.

I thank my participants for opening up and sharing your experiences with me for this project. Your voices are beautiful, powerful, and moving. I am honored to have shared your insights, your profound words, thoughts, and feelings.

I would like to thank Hilton Kelly and Patricia Romney for inspiring me to get my Master's. I thank my research advisor, Starr Wood for her guidance and insight. I would like to thank my best friend Lise for her never-ending good spirit and encouragement. I thank my partner Misty for her love, kindness, and humor.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iii
LIST OF TABLES .....	iv
CHAPTERS	
I INTRODUCTION .....	1
II LITERATURE REVIEW .....	5
III METHODOLOGY .....	33
IV FINDINGS .....	40
V DISCUSSION.....	73
REFERENCES .....	93
APPENDICES	
Appendix A: Letter of Informed Consent .....	107
Appendix B: Internet Posting, Letter or Email, Talking Points.....	109
Appendix C: Data Collection Instruments.....	110
Appendix D: Interview Guide.....	111
Appendix E: List of Referral Sources.....	113
Appendix F: Recruitment Poster .....	114
Appendix G: Human Subjects Review Approval Letter.....	115

## LIST OF TABLES

Table

1. Demographic Personal and Family Information .....	42
2. Demographic Institutional Information .....	43

## **CHAPTER I**

### **Introduction**

This qualitative study explored Black students' classroom silence in predominantly white institutions (PWIs) of higher education in the northeast United States. The study used in-depth, face-to-face individual interviews to understand the institutional, structural, interpersonal, and intra-psychic processes that accompanied Black students' classroom silence.

There is a body of exploratory research emerging on the challenges of Black students in higher education settings. A better understanding of those challenges will assist higher educational systems and policy makers' efforts to close the racial disparities in higher education. In addition, this study may illuminate how Black students' classroom silences are shaped by their psycho-emotional comfort, personality, cultural background, experiences of racism, stereotypes, and Black identity development. A few small exploratory studies have been conducted along these lines.

In a focus group of 11 Black students in a PWI, Davis, Dias-Bowie, Greenberg, Klukken, Pollio, Thomas & Thompson (2004) identified a theme "They All Seem the Same; I'm The One Who's Different." Within that theme, Black students described that in classes with "sizable" numbers of Black students, or in classes taught by Black professors they felt able to speak without picking their words carefully or fearing that they "hindered" class discussions. In such classes, Black students spoke more than in classes with white teachers, or when they were the only Black student in the class. Using a focus group, Moore and Toliver (2010) studied six Black

professors' effectiveness of teaching Black students in PWIs. Black professors explained that they often adapted the presentation of a class to reach Black students through teaching culturally relevant material. Black professors also said that they "go the extra distance" (p.941) to engage and mentor Black students.

Ogbu's (2004) use of racial identity provided an explanation for Black peoples' psychological stress when speaking in class. Ogbu found that Black people used Standard English (SE) to advance socially but subsequently weakened their cultural connection to the Black community. Black students often feared that if they spoke "white" and gained academic recognition, they risked losing a sense of belonging.

Helm, Sedlacek, and Prieto (1998) surveyed freshman and junior students of color about their perceptions of the university's cultural climate and their satisfaction at the university. Many Black students reported disappointment in classes at PWIs because of the racist attitudes of professors and peers. In a mixed methods observation study, Harper (2007) explored 131 Black undergraduate students in Black sororities and fraternities. Under the theme "Forced Representation," students expressed that their classroom participation decreased when they felt that white teachers and students wanted them to represent their race.

In a published discussion, "Branching Out and Coming Back Together" (2010), three Black female college students explained that they spoke up in class to deflect stereotypes about Black peoples' intelligence. In a two-year ethnographic study of 33 11th-grade students, Fordham (1993) found that high-achieving Black girls did not speak in class voluntarily in order to "gender pass." Black girls "gender passed" by avoiding romantic relationships or attracting attention to themselves. These girls diminished their female selves in favor of a masculine status equated with academic achievement. Morris (2007) found that Black girls in a Washington D.C.



public school were vocal and visible in all classes, including advanced placement classes. However, teachers constantly admonished these “loud” Black girls to act more like “ladies” and behave more demurely.

Clearly, this emerging area of study is indicating that cultural and political difficulties exist in the setting of higher education for Black students. It is logical to believe that these difficulties may be barriers to education and ultimately to graduation rates for Black students. Research in the area of classroom silencing is yet another example of how racism continues to deeply impact of the Black community. The research study question asks, *How do Black students describe, explain, and understand their own classroom silence in PWIs?*

### **Definition of Terms**

The definition of the term Black included people of African descent which encompassed African Americans and those from the African Diaspora world-wide. I chose to capitalize the “B” in Black as a way to resist negative stereotypes associated with Black people. The definition for a predominantly white institution (PWI) of higher education included community colleges and four-year public and private institutions where students of color made up less than approximately 35% of the entire student body. I defined professor as any instructor in the institution. Silence was defined as not speaking particularly when feeling prevented from expressing a point of view. The definition of silence is prefaced on the understanding that all students have been silent at some point in their educational career. Speaking out was defined as voicing an opinion to two or more people. The definition of speaking out included the expression of an opinion in defense of a personal or political value or belief.

## Organization of the Thesis

This study was divided into five chapters. Following the introduction, the second chapter presented literature about what is currently known about silence in all levels of schooling, in education, and across cultures. In the third chapter, methods for the study were outlined including the use of snowball and purposive sampling to obtain data, the procedures used to protect confidentiality, the data collection materials, and method rationale. In the fourth chapter, student responses to the study questions were presented in three themes. Lastly, the discussion section described implications for future research studies and suggestions for social policy and program development.

The conclusions of the study are that Black students spoke out more in classes when learning material related to various social identities including race, class, and gender. Students felt silenced and angry when being tokenized or stereotyped. Furthermore, when learning material centered on European-American history and culture, students felt uncomfortable addressing issues of power for fear of being seen as overly sensitive. However, students sometimes felt compelled to educate classmates and professors. Black students believed that in-group silencing occurred and believed that *self-selecting* their silences to enhance their learning was an important educational tool.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **Literature Review**

The literature review below will highlight past research about silence in a variety of settings such as intimate relationships, classrooms, and workplaces. The literature presented here was divided into four sections. The first section examined how silences conveyed various religious, spiritual, cultural, and political meanings. The second section explored how racism and race stereotypes in a professor's pedagogical style prevented or encouraged students to speak in class. In addition, this section looked at how tacit and blatant stereotypes and racial microaggressions from staff and administrators impacted Black students' comfort level. Conversely, institutions offering courses that valued Black culture and Black vernacular increased Black students' participation in class. The third section explored how personality and mood impacted Black students' silence in the classroom at predominantly white institutions (PWIs), namely communication anxiety, self-silencing, and low assertiveness. The fourth and final section addressed how racial identity impacted Black peoples' decision to speak out in places of employment and education. This section also discussed how participation in gospel choirs, Black Greek affiliations, and Black counter-spaces encouraged Black students to speak out.

## What Silence Tells Us

### Understanding Silence in the Classroom

Researchers have argued persuasively that silence is a sociocultural phenomenon (Ronningstam, 2006; Schultz, 2009) and that in various communities, people categorize others by how they speak and what they say (Saville-Troike, 2003). For example, Navajo people valued tactful, discreet, and quiet speech while disapproving of bragging and pompous speech. One researcher found that bilingual Navajo and English-speaking Native Americans considered immediate responses in discussions impolite. In an education conference, bilingual Navajo and English-speaking teachers were “kept out of the discussion” (Saville-Troike, 2003) with English-speaking teachers because of bilingual speakers’ long periods of silence between questions and answers. Some Native Americans viewed silence as “an Indian way of communicating” (Glatzmaier, Myers, & Bordogna, 2000, p.207) and believed that personal silence fulfilled a spiritual practice of communing with nature. A study of Navajo children found that “overt verbal performance is alien” (John, 1972, p.338) to children who value “quiet, persistent exploration” (p.338). Dumont (1972) studied Cherokee children taught by white teachers. One teacher used a multitude of “words, tones, and moods” (p.354) and called on individual students to speak in front of the class in answer to his questions. Dumont observed that the children were piercingly quiet in that classroom and believed that the students considered the teacher’s methods incompetent and disrespectful. In another classroom at the same school, Dumont observed that Cherokee children asked questions and talked freely. The teacher in the livelier class talked less and encouraged students to work together without calling on students to speak in front of the class (Dumont, 1972).

Piestrup (1973) observed the ways teachers corrected the Black dialect of 208 first graders in Oakland. When teachers used a playful, story-oriented approach to teach reading and were aware of Black students culture and dialect, children learned to read with enthusiasm. When teachers corrected or interrupted students when they spoke in Black dialect, students withdrew “into a moody silence” (p.170). Other researchers have found that Black children were unlikely to respond to “known-answer” questions white teachers asked because they were more accustomed to inferential questions commonly used in the Black community (Heath as cited in “Discourse in the Classroom,” 2006).

Across many cultures, silence has been observed as a religious practice of respect, solemnity, and ritual (Jensen, 1973; Nyoye, 1985). Silence has been shown to manage interpersonal conflicts and veil emotional intensity, as observed in the Valbella people of Italy (Nwoye, 1985; Saunders, 1985). Some cultures considered silence more valuable than speaking. For example, the Japanese valued *haragei*, or communication without words, more highly than eloquent speech (Saville-Troike, 2003). The Igbo people of Nigeria viewed silence both “a medium of communication in itself and a context for communication” (Nwoye, p.191, 1985). However, in fast-paced, industrial societies such as the United States, people accustomed to computer communication, television, news, and email rarely found moments of silence, making interpretations of silence rare (Li Li, 2004).

### **Silence in the Classroom**

In research on elementary students, Schultz (2009) applied sociocultural theory to understand, work with, and manage students’ silence. Schultz said that teachers must learn about the meanings of their students’ silence through careful observation. Li Li (2004) argued that “teachers often enlist ‘participation’ as an evaluation criterion. But they do not recognize ‘silent

active listening' as a legitimate form of participation" (p. 82). For example, students were silent to show respect, to avoid saying something negative, to build rapport and agreement with another person, and to show kindness (Tannen, 1985). Silences also conveyed deference, hostility, resistance, and defiance (Jenson, 1973). Some white students used silence to show noncompliance with conversations about race in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1996), or expressed frustration when students of color brought up racist incidents by rolling their eyes, fidgeting or sighing loudly rather than speaking (Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009).

Students' silence at times served as a political resistance (Jensen, 1973). Minh-Ha (1990) argued that "silence as a will not to say or a will to unsay [dominant structures of control] and silence as a language [needs to be explored]" (p.373). Silence may then be a strategy to reject subservience by a refusal to interact. For example, Foley (1996) studied Mequaki students in predominantly white high schools. Anger at the racism and diminished expectations white teachers held of their intelligence, fear of new surroundings from leaving the reservation, and their lack of interest in the material was expressed through Mequaki students' classroom silence.

Past research revealed researcher and teacher race-based biases about student silence. Gilmore (1985) conducted a three-year qualitative and observational study in a predominantly low-income Black elementary school. Through observations of students and teachers, interviews with teachers, administrators and parents, Gilmore explored "non-submissive subordinate" silences. In these power-play silences, Black students used defiant body language or "stylized sulking" to take over the teacher's authority. Gilmore said that students' insubordinate behavior could be "closely associated with a conveyed message of Black alignment" (p.161), suggesting that he considered stylized sulking a characteristic of Black culture. The study revealed white teachers' assumptions of Black students' behavior as insubordinate, without questioning the

teacher-student interaction that caused the behavior. Other researchers have also located silence in deficiencies of the individual students' nature. In Dumont's (1972) observation of Cherokee students, white teachers considered students innately afraid to speak, disengaged, and shy. Dumont (1972) observed lively behavior in students' own communities and in the playground and realized that students used silence in their *interactions* with teachers in the classroom environment.

Peers and teachers have expressed race stereotypes of Asian people as characteristically silent (Lei, 2003; Schultz, 2009). In a two-year study, Lei (2003) found that many teachers and students in a racially diverse midwest high school viewed Asian boys, mostly immigrants, as shy, mysterious, and alienated from those outside their ethnic groups including Asian American students. Asian students' own opinions countered the stereotypes that they were characteristically quiet; they explained that their reluctance to speak in class came from their fear of being ridiculed for being unable to express themselves in English.

Chinese American author Kingston (1989) expressed the torment of being required to speak aloud when she first learned English. She described that her silence began in kindergarten when she had to speak in English and remained for the next three years. Kingston said, "The other Chinese girls did not talk either, so I knew the silence had to do with being Chinese" (1989, p. 80). Of a lesson recitation in front of other young students in her Chinese class, she wrote, "You could hear splinters in my voice, bones rubbing ragged against one another" (p. 81). Schultz (2003) stressed that, although people with marginalized social statuses such as women, people of color, Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender/Queer (LGBTQ) individuals, and those with physical and mental disabilities must grapple with societal silencing, silence is always a choice.

However, many researchers suggest that structures that silence students of color are hegemonic and embedded in student and professor beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors.

Schmader, Major, and Gramzow (2001) studied 676 Black, Latino, and white undergraduate students to determine whether ethnic minority students disengaged from their academic performance on test scores due to their perception of negative race stereotypes. Schmader et al. explained that disengagement was made up of two components: discounting the validity of assessment reported to them and devaluing the importance of the feedback as unrelated to the self. Schmader et al. analyzed responses from two quantitative measures on the devaluation of academic success and of systemic ethnic injustice students perceived to self and others in their own ethnic group. Results indicated that Black students did not devalue their academic success or discount test score results. However, Black students' perceived personal discrimination and discrimination against their own ethnic group lead to greater discounting and devaluing of test scores as biased against them. Perceived systemic injustice was related to devaluing of academic success.

A study by Swim, Hyers, Cohen, Fitzgerald, and Bylsma (2003) studied 51 Black students in a northeast predominantly white institution. They collected reports of racial incidents students recorded in diaries and analyzed them in conjunction with their scores on quantitative scales of emotion, identity, and self-esteem. Swim et al. found that students encountered "definitely prejudiced" racial incidents once every other week. Diary entries showed that overt verbal incidents were most frequently recorded with perpetrators who were aware of the prejudice they exhibited. The overt verbal incidents most often occurred with friends. Students also reported that staring was the type of incident most often encountered and that "bad service and interpersonal awkwardness [with white people] occurred at about equal rates" (p. 61).



Students reported that anger was the most frequent emotional response as well as decreased comfort and threatened feelings.

### **Imposed Silence, Encouraged Voice**

#### **Teaching Practices that Silences Students**

In her book *Teaching to Transgress*, hooks (1994) explained that many teachers avoided curriculum acknowledging race, class, and gender due to their fear of the uncontrollable emotions such topics might elicit from students. hooks argued that for students of color, the avoidance of topics such as race may result in discomfort and lack of safety that may cause them to shut down.

The experience of professors who educate for critical consciousness indicates that many students, especially students of color, may not feel safe in what appears to be a neutral setting. It is the absence of a feeling of safety that often promotes prolonged silence or lack of student engagement. (p.39)

Sealey-Ruiz (2007) conducted a qualitative study of 15 Black female adults at a New York college with ages ranging from 23-57. Sealey-Ruiz (2007) gathered data from teacher conferences, direct observations of discussions, and students' written assignments to explore whether students participated more when material was culturally and socially relevant to their own lives. When curriculum encouraged the use and study of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), explored the legacy of slavery and oppression, and fostered hope for personal goals and the future of the Black community, students' vocal participation increased.

Lee (2006) studied Cultural Modeling (CM) in curriculum, which is the acquisition of academic knowledge combined with everyday knowledge. Like the previous study, Lee found that fostering spoken and written AAVE and using culturally relevant material boosted student

vocal participation. In a three-year “intervention” in a Black urban high school, Lee implemented CM into the literature curriculum with the purpose of using AAVE to bolster communication and interactive learning. Lee collected data through student and faculty interviews, classroom observations and recordings, assessments of student comprehension of class material, and faculty meetings. Students were experts on class material such as rap lyrics, films, and short films, and therefore had more “genuine knowledge about the meaning of everyday texts” (Lee, p.310) than their teachers. Lee found that when students’ level of vocal engagement was high, which Lee calls “African-American English improvisational argumentation” (p.312), academic reasoning was at its highest. Additionally, Lee described that the value the curriculum placed on AAVE and students’ experiences in material comprehension was vital in instilling students with the sense that they “understood how to navigate” (p.317) their learning.

Black students’ racial identity may achieve Cross’ (1991) highest stage, characterized by a steadfast commitment to Black social issues through speaking out against racism when learning about history, culture, and politics in Black Studies courses (Adams, 2005). In a mixed methods study, 155 Black, white, and “other” students who were both enrolled and not enrolled in Pan-African Studies (PAS) at a predominantly white institution reported their GPA, completed the Black Identity Scale and then participated in one of six small focus groups. Black students who had taken classes in PAS expressed an increase in ethnic pride, self-confidence, academic success, and “voice” to stand up to injustice. Their fears of stereotype threat diminished, as did pressure to conform to white values more than Black students who had not taken a PAS class. White students who had taken PAS also increased motivation to be committed to social justice, to learn about racism, and to challenge white privilege.

Knaus (2009) argued that curriculum based on critical race theory, centered on marginalized groups' narratives, was a way to resist white supremacy. Knaus (2009) applied critical race theory, defined as the deep-rooted presence of racism on several social levels including United State laws, institutions, culture values, and policies into his curriculum development. Knaus argued that mainstream school curriculum was essentially white supremacist pedagogy that alienated and demeaned students of color. In Knaus' study, critical race theory was applied through a creative writing class that focused on developing students' voice. Through "voice class," students wrote personal essays that stressed expression of emotions and personal experiences. In addition, students used material such as music, poetry, and rap to cover issues such as abuse, rape, poverty, violence, and drugs.

hooks (1994) also stressed the value of tapping into Black students' every day and experiential knowledge. She argued that Black people were authorities on Black history and literature because they spoke from "the passion of experience, the passion of remembrance" (p.90) but were often simultaneously expected to be the "native informant" and provide information for white students' learning. hooks required that all students she taught speak in class; even if they used sign language, she expected all students to contribute. One teaching strategy hooks used was to redirect students' attention from her voice to listen more closely to one another particularly when relating academic material to one's own experience. hooks explained that this intentional redirection was a requisite to students' liberatory learning, wherein teachers must inevitably relinquish dictatorial teaching. Liberatory learning allowed students to "come to voice" (p.148) so that they felt free to speak up in all classes. Some researchers have looked at whether the race of the teacher, in addition to pedagogical practice such as prioritizing

classroom discussions of race, class, and gender impacts teaching effectiveness for Black students.

Moore and Toliver (2010) conducted a focus group of 10 Black professors to discuss their effectiveness at teaching Black students in New York predominantly white universities (PWIs). One participant explained that Black professors were intentional about adapting class material to reach Black students. This participant believed that Black professors “go the extra distance” (p. 941) to engage and mentor Black students. Brown (2009) explored the pedagogic performance, or ways of instruction, of nine Black male teachers in an urban midwest school. In a two-week observation, Brown noted three different styles of performance among the teachers: the Enforcer, the Negotiator, and Playfulness. Brown noted that the teachers who used the Enforcer style instilled the importance of discipline and control through sternness and seriousness, while teachers with the Playfulness style connected students to academic material by talking about Black popular culture. Brown argued that the Enforcers used an authoritarian teaching style to protect students from a society that harshly penalized Black males who rejected obedience. However, all teaching styles shared a commitment to the improvement of social conditions for the Black community.

In a focus group of 11 Black students’ experiences in a predominantly white southeastern university, Davis, Dias-Bowie, Greenberg, Klukken, Pollio, Thomas, and Thompson (2004) identified five themes. Under the theme of “It Happens Every Day”:  
Unfairness/Sabotage/Condescension,” one student said that a professor’s offensive comments caused her to walk out of class. When the student confronted the professor about the comments, the professor threatened to give her a C. Within the theme “They All Seem the Same; I’m The One Who’s Different” students said they felt relieved in classes with “sizable” numbers of Black

students and in classes taught by Black professors. One student described her experience in such a class:

I think out of all my classes I have taken here my best experiences have been in classes with Black professors. And sadly to say that's just how it is. I felt at home in those classes. I felt like I learned more because I didn't have to spend time fighting with somebody I guess and saying quit looking at me or having to pick my words carefully, or there have been times when I felt like I hindered class discussions. (Davis et al., 2004, p. 432)

The study implied that she may have had viewpoints that countered white students' viewpoints, so she opted to select her words carefully and minimized how much she said. A Black high school student in Carter's (2007) qualitative and ethnographic study said that when he was one of the only Black students in a class he felt shy and unable to "open up." Another study examined many levels of silencing in predominantly white institutions and looked beyond individual teachers to administrators and general atmosphere of the institution for indicators about Black students' comfortability.

Feagin, Imani, and Vera (1996), Solarzano, Ceja, and Yasso (2001), and Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, and Rivera (2009) found that teachers, administrators, and white students were often hostile and indifferent to the opinions and experiences of students of color. Students of color perceived that white students rolled their eyes and sighed with exasperation when issues of race were broached and sensed that professors ignored racial microaggressions that occurred in their classes (Sue et al.). According to Pierce (1970) who coined the term, microaggressions are subtle, often daily, intended or unintended mistreatments that ignore, tyrannize, and terrorize people of minority status. In the study by Sue et al. students of color said that feelings of anger,

self-doubt, anxiety, and exhaustion kept them from speaking up against microaggressions in class. Black students experienced strong emotion when teachers were indifferent about addressing microaggressions or when they used material depicting Black people as criminal and violent. Solarzano et al.(2001) found that when white students became defensive or passive in regards to topics of race or blatantly stereotyped Blacks as academically inept, Black students felt shut down and angry.

Solarzano et al. conducted 10 focus groups across three PWIs that explored 34 Black students' perceptions of microaggressions. The study found that professors assumed that Black students were unintelligent, gave a lower grade for a Black student than a white student with identical scores, and accused a high achieving Black student of cheating. In a focus-group study, Feagin et al. (1996) explored the experiences of 36 Black students and 41 of their parents at a PWI in the southeast. The study found that white professors made remarks that Black people were criminals, that they would fail in their field, and that their culture was "abnormal." Black students felt alienated, angry, and dejected by the racist treatment (Feagin et al.). Perceived microaggressions often pressured Black students to prove that they attended a PWI because of merit rather than affirmative action (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Solarzano et al). A Black female student at a southern university said that a white professor gave her the impression that she was not wanted in class by refusing to include her in the class and instead selecting a white student who had enrolled after her. In Feagin et al.'s (1994) study a Black male student noted that older white teachers often responded negatively to queries he had in the class but provided lengthy responses to white students' questions. In a qualitative interview of nine Black students in a predominantly white high school, a participant remarked that white teachers ignored him when he expressed points in class or raised his hand in class (Carter, 2007). The teacher's

disregard of his opinions, in his words, ‘proved’ his lack of value in class. In Johnson-Bailey’s (2001) qualitative study, Black administrator and teacher Faye noted that in higher education, white men challenged professors without any sort of reprisal. However, if a Black woman disputed the professor’s point she was met with resistance. hooks (1989) found that Black and white professors held equally pejorative views of Black students’ intelligence, presence, and opinions and Bowman and Smith (2002) found that white students, were not alone in holding “symbolic” racist beliefs towards Black students and minorities.

Bowman and Smith quantitatively studied race attitudes and beliefs of 68 Black, 86 white, 90 Asian American, and 46 Latino students in a large midwestern university. Bowman and Smith found that white students felt more strongly than Asians that minorities took advantage of economic benefits and held more political sway in desegregation policies, government, and media than they deserved. White and Asian American students equally held conservative views of reducing welfare programs more strongly than Latinos and Black students. Latino and Asian students held high cultural stereotypes of Black people as essentially “violent, poor, and welfare-preferring” (p. 115), whereas whites and Blacks held equally low cultural stereotypes of Blacks. Asian students most strongly opposed special programs such as scholarships, admissions, and support services for Blacks and other minorities. This study did not discuss whether professors were adept at identifying and addressing such symbolic racism in the classroom.

### **Institutional Environments That Silence Students**

Half the Black students in Feagin et al.’s (1996) study reported mistreatment by staff and administrators. They perceived that staff and administrators dismissed their concerns, rushed through guidance appointments, and gave inadequate information about financial services

provided at the predominantly white institution (PWI). The lack of quality time staff afforded Black students was alarming given Adam's (2005) study that found a statistically significant positive relationship between satisfaction with the university and satisfaction with administration and teachers among Black and whites students. The importance of teacher and administration on college satisfaction outweighed satisfaction of close friendships, community involvement, and intra- and inter-race friendships (Adams, 2005). Black students in the study by Solarzano et al. (2001) perceived that counselors discouraged them from taking rigorous classes because of their race. Black students experienced heightened security surveillance at Black events and around campus and more severe penalties than white students for loud parties (Feagin et al., 1996; Solarzano et al., 2001). Such racialized scrutiny coupled with a rejection of Black students' academic and social concerns reflected the notion that PWIs were "white spaces" where Black students were viewed as intruders (Feagin et al., 1996).

Other researchers examined how race bias impacted Black peoples' mood. In a quantitative study of 229 Black adults, Carter and Reynolds (2011) measured how stress, attitude of racial identity status, and emotional states were linked to race. Carter and Reynolds found that Black people of upper middle class were more likely to belong to the Dissonance racial identity status (devaluing Black status and valuing white status), while lower and working class people were more likely to belong to the Immersion racial identity status (aware of racism and understanding whiteness). Furthermore, upper middle class Black people's attitudes were lower in the Immersion/Resistance status (lower idealization of, and loyalty to the Black community). Mood states such as depression, anger, and tension were associated with Black people in the Conformity status (racial status ambiguity and confusion), while those with Internalization status



(objective towards dominant group, cohesive sense of self and commitment to Black group) had fewer emotional reactions of such intensity.

Helm, Sedlacek, and Prieto (1998) surveyed Asian, Latino, Black, and white students in Maryland about perceived racial diversity and satisfaction at the university. Black and Asian students who perceived faculty to be racist were more likely to be dissatisfied with their university than white and Latino students. Fries-Britt and Turner (2001) also studied how stereotypes impacted Black college students' classroom experience. Some of the emerging themes were found in other studies, including having to prove their academic ability to peers and faculty (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Sue et al., 2009) and receiving racist comments about physical appearance by faculty and peers (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001). Black students' emotional toll of encountering racism from administrators, students, professors, and staff may implicate philosophical differences at the institution level. Students attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) received emotional, academic and spiritual support because of core values absent in PWIs.

In *Speaking the Unpleasant*, by Chavez and O'Donnell (1998), Chavez compared today's HBCUs academic, spiritual, and socially supportive atmospheres to the philosophy of pre-segregation schools. Chavez argued that pre-segregation era values at HBCUs are still present in HBCUs. Pre-segregation HBCUs considered education a spiritual gift that prepared students to serve humanity. Teachers instructed by connecting material to their own lives and taught students about human conditions of others throughout the country. Chavez wrote differently about desegregated schools that he later attended. He said, "We no longer talked about freedom, the diversity of human experiences, and social advancement. The academic no longer coexisted

along with the struggle for freedom. It was replaced with competition, individualism, objective knowledge, and meritocracy” (p.34).

In her book *Sistahs in College: Making a Way Out of No Way*, professor and researcher Johnson-Bailey (2001) collected narratives from Black women who returned to college at a later point in their lives, many of whom had grown up during segregation. Marcie had attended two HBCUs as a traditional student and after 10 years of being out of school she went to a white college. She finally returned to a former HBCU. Speaking of the classroom environment at the HBCU in relation to the PWI Marcie said,

There are students [here] who are able to be heard that would never be heard in a classroom at a white large state university....You are heard [here] because you are in a Black women’s school and the Black woman instructor will look up and ask if they have something to say. She will take time to draw that student out in class. (p. 36)

Marcie noted HBCUs were not free of discrimination. Black elite’s colorist and classist views were endured by those from the “ghetto” causing lower class and darker skinned students to be silent. hooks (1994) described a similar awareness when she attended Stanford coming from a working poor background. hooks explained,

As silence and obedience to authority were most rewarded [in Stanford], students learned that this was the appropriate demeanor in the classroom. Loudness, anger, emotional outbursts, and even something seemingly innocent as unrestrained laughter were deemed unacceptable, vulgar disruptions of classroom social order. These traits were also associated with being a member of the lower classes....It is necessary for students to assimilate bourgeois values in order to be deemed acceptable. (p.178)

As a professor, hook's observed that Black students were the most active in vocalizing anger and frustration about conforming to middle class behavior. The tension to bridge "two worlds" of bourgeois social codes and class struggles often caused them to become passive or compelled them to avoid classes that devalued their voice.

Researchers have criticized the theory that Black students' academic performance, reasoning, or speech result from being raised in cultural deprivation. Some researchers rejected the deprivation myth outright (Labov, 1994; Valencia & Solarzano, 2004 abridged), while some termed it "difference" (Gee, 1996). By the theory of cultural deprivation, or the theory of "difference," Black children must acquire language by mastering middle class verbosity (Gee, 1996; Labov, 1994). In a 1965-1968 mixed methods study with groups of Black adolescent boys in Harlem by a team of two white and two Black researchers, Labov (2004) found that when the Black researcher, also raised in Harlem, interviewed an eight-year-old, he only elicited one-word answers. When the researcher brought bags of potato chips to create a party-like atmosphere, invited a friend of the eight-year-old, got down to the interviewees' height, and introduced taboo words, the eight-year-old expressed himself colorfully and energetically. Labov noted that a teacher will need to enter the social world of Black children to elicit their speaking because of the power imbalance between teacher and student. Labov also interviewed a college-educated Black man of upper middle class in a study of South Central Harlem adults. Labov found that the man's "middle class verbosity" (p.144) such as repetitive, decorative "fashionable words" was emblematic of a culture that believed middle class speech represented one's learning. He further stated that, unlike those people "enmeshed in verbiage, speakers of Black Vernacular English take great delight in [verbally] exercising their wit and logic on the most improbable and problematic matters" (p.144).

## **Mood as an Explanation for Silence**

### **Silencing the Self, Communication Anxiety, and Assertiveness**

Researchers Carr, Gilroy, and Sherman (1996) studied 40 Black and 40 white women's silencing the self in intimate relationships to see how it related to mood. Three quantitative measures were used: the Silencing the Self Scale (Jack & Dill, 1992), the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (1964), and the Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, Ward, Mendelson, Mock, & Erbaugh, 1961). The study found that Black and white women silenced themselves equally. Depression was linked to silencing the self for white women but not Black women (Carr et al.). The below study researched at-risk students' mood and communication without studying race.

Lippert, Titsworth, and Hunt (2005) applied the ecological model, a model that accounts for the social, individual, and cultural factors of academic risk, to explain verbal aggression (VA), communication apprehension (CA), and supportive communication (SC). Lippert et al. quantitatively analyzed students from a large midwest university; 160 were regular admission students and 82 were on academic probation due to low test scores. The McCroskey Scale (2001) measured CA in dyadic, meeting and group communication; the Infante and Wigley (1986) Verbal Aggression Scale assessed students' verbal aggression; and the Supportive Talk About School (2005) measured school support from family and friends. Lippert et al. found that among the three situational types of CA, academically at-risk male students had higher levels of CA than males who were not at risk. However, at-risk females reported lower levels of CA than females not at risk. At-risk males held higher levels of VA than at-risk females, but the difference was not significant.

Byrd and Sims (as cited in Ralston, Ambler, & Scudder, 1991) studied 144 Black students at two different midwest predominantly white institutions (PWIs) to see if race contributed to increased CA in the classroom. The study analyzed CA through two quantitative measures: McCroskey and Richmond's (1987) Classroom Communication Apprehension Measure (CCAM), a 10-item self-report that measured the context of CA and Personal Report of Communication Apprehension Measure that asked students to report traits of CA on a 24-item questionnaire. Byrd and Sims modified the CCAM by requesting that students indicate their level of anxiety in classes when in the racial minority. Byrd and Sims found that males reported significantly higher levels of CA than female students. Harlson (1995) researched communication from another angle, namely, whether certain social statuses impacted assertiveness.

Harlson performed a mixed methods study on how socioeconomic status (SES), year in college, and gender influenced assertiveness of 560 Black college students in four southeast PWIs. Students' assertiveness was measured with the College Self Expression Scale (Galassi et al., 1974). Attitudes and beliefs of 21 of the 560 Black students who had completed the quantitative measure were explored using the Qualitative Interview Survey Questionnaire. Quantitative results indicated that gender, school year, and SES did not have a significant effect on students' assertiveness. However, the qualitative measure showed that males held higher positive assertiveness such as friendly behavior than females who showed higher negative assertiveness such as anger-expressing behaviors. Both males and females showed higher than average negative assertive scores. Furthermore, qualitative interviews showed that the majority of the 21 students were most comfortable adopting passive submissive assertive styles and that their passiveness had increased since coming to a PWI. Some students perceived that speaking

out aggressively in class and speaking with teachers outside of class increased attention from white teachers. Male students believed that white teachers were either non-responsive or academically punitive because of their outspokenness. Future studies might examine the social and academic effects of Black students expressing lower friendly behaviors in PWIs than students at HBCUs (Haralson, 1995). Such a study might explain how isolation, not only between Black students and those from other races, but among Black students may relate to silence in class.

## **Black Identity and Culture**

### **Acting Too White, Speaking Too White, or Too Black**

Ogbu (2004) reviewed ethnographies and autobiographies from slavery to the present in a theoretical study on collective identity which was defined as the sense of belonging to the Black community. Ogbu developed six themes from his analysis. Three particularly noteworthy themes were: peer pressure against coping strategies of acting white, oppositional frames of reference, and coping strategies for “the burden of acting white” (p.14). According to Ogbu, language use was an in-group strategy to strengthen bonds to the Black community. From this standpoint, Black English reflected solidarity with other Black people and could “deceive, confuse and conceal information from [w]hite people in general” (Dalby, 1972, p.172). Under the theme of peer pressures from acting white, Black people who spoke Standard English (SE) were often ostracized by other Blacks because they had “joined the enemy.” Ogbu explained that in the present, Black students who fear they are “acting white” may hide that they study, act like class clowns, or pretend they do not understand class work. Black people who began to talk and act “white” felt psychological stress because of their perceived lack of loyalty to their own people. However, code switching around white people or even abandoning cultural ties to the Black

community allowed Black students to “gain acceptance and approval from those in power” (hooks, 1989, p. 80).

Robinson (1996) conducted a quantitative study of 135 undergraduate students (race unspecified) at a university in Michigan. The study explored the impact of their high or low cognitive complexity and high or low race bias on a perceived Black or white speaker’s use of non-standard English. Students were randomly given a packet that indicated the speaker was Black or white or to the control group where race was not mentioned. The participants listened to a 45-second recording of a male speaking non-standard English. Next, participants completed the Speaker Evaluation Attitude Questionnaire that focused on the speaker’s social status, dialect, and educational background. Participants then completed a qualitative measure where they wrote how friendly they considered the speaker to be. Lastly, participants’ cognitive complexity was measured using the Role Category Questionnaire (Crockett, 1965) and completed the Rokeach Race Belief Scale (Rokeach, Smith, & Evans, 1960) that measured race prejudice. Robinson (1996) found that both Black and white experimental groups rated the speaker of non-standard English as uneducated and of low socioeconomic status. Results also indicated that low and high cognitive complexity paired with low and high racial bias were influenced by the perceived race and dialect of the speaker.

In a study of 102 Black undergrad students in a public southeast university, students rated an audio tape of a Black man speaking either Black English (BE), code switching (CS) in an appropriate social context with a friend (ACS), CS in an inappropriate social context (ICS) in an interview, or Standard English (SE; Koch, Gross & Kolts, 2001). Participants then rated the speaker with the Revised Speech Dialect Attitudinal Scale (Mulac, 1976). Koch et al. found that on the measure of whether participants would be friends with the speaker, participants rated the

SE and ACS speaker higher than ICS but the difference between the SE/ACS and BE-speaker was not significant. Koch et al.'s findings suggested that Black students considered people who violated the social norms of speech in formal contexts unattractive friendship prospects. Interestingly, participants rated SE and ACS similarly on the getting to know the person measure, indicating that they did not regard BE as inherently negative. Koch et al. also found that across gender, participants rated SE and ACS-speakers as having higher socio-intellect and rated the SE speaker higher than the BE or ICS-speakers in attractiveness.

In a southeastern predominantly white institution (PWI), Payne, Downing, and Fleming (2000) examined how 72 Black students perceived a speaker's character based on whether or not they spoke BEV. Students listened to a 4-minute audio-taped excerpt of a speech by Jesse Jackson translated into BEV. Students then completed a 7-point item measurement of speaker credibility (McCroskey & Young, 1981), a 7-point measurement of speaker sociability (McCroskey & Young, 1981), and a demographic data informational form. Students then listened to the same speech delivered in Standard English (SE) and completed the same two 7-point measures. In the findings, students reported SE-speakers had stronger character, more competence, and higher sociability than the BEV-speaker, but less honesty. Payne et al. believed that Black students rejected BEV because of a desire to fit into the mainstream. Given the breadth of studies on bias and Black English, code switching, and Standard English in this literature review, it is surprising that the literature left out in-depth descriptions defining and explaining what those dialects were comprised of. Further, none of the literatures indicated whether speakers themselves were speakers of BEV.



## **Black Women Who Speak Out, Black Girls Who Are Too Loud**

Bell, Meyerson, Nkomo, and Scully (2003) explored 80 Black and 40 white women's life histories and challenges in the workplace to understand how they instigated change in the workplace or in the community. Bell et al. found that white women did not overtly express anger at sexism or racism in the workplace while Black women often expressed frustrations vocally. Giving back to the community and having fluid cultural ties allowed Black women to maintain a sense of belonging to the Black community even while becoming independent and economically successful. Black women explained that these cultural connections were reasons they spoke out against racism and sexism at work. Believing in meritocracy, conceiving the self as an agent of change rather than the system as an agent of change, and being unable to understand "rituals, languages, and assumptions of groups other than their own" (p.396) were reasons white women did not speak out at work. Bell et al. found that Black women who used silence to "armor" themselves from racism and race stereotypes distanced themselves from people of color. Their findings suggested that when Black women had a racial identity that rejected Black culture, their voice was inhibited, but in particular when issues of racism surfaced.

Black college students curbed their objections to opinions raised by white classmates because they wished to appear "objective," academic, and unemotional ("Branching Out and Coming Back Together," 2010; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001). In a published informal conversation, three young Black women's experiences at PWIs were explored ("Branching Out and Coming Back Together"). Two of the young women spoke of discomfort in classes particularly when race came up because they felt the topics magnified their race. However, the two young women assented to educate white students on Black history and culture in an effort to quell stereotypes. One of the young woman said, "I have to be in class with these people...always

raising my hand, always answering questions. I don't want to be that [B]lack girl, sitting there, 'she's a [B]lack girl, she got in because she's a minority' (p.62).

Fordham (1993) may have defined the young Black women from the previous study as gender "passing" where she described that to adhere to the academy's insistence that Black and white women be "taken seriously" they must hide their femaleness. Fordham's studied 33 high and low-achieving 11<sup>th</sup>-grade students and found that high-achieving Black females possessed a "ghost-like existence and status at their school," (p.10) did not speak spontaneously in class, or "announce and celebrate their presence" (p.16). Further, parents restricted Black girls' female sexual relations so that they would focus on their grades. These invisible Black girls hid their opinions, avoided romantic relationships, and gave up their ability to stand up to administrators and teachers who doubted or dominated them.

Studies have found that teachers, administrators and staff and students considered Black high school girls "disruptive," "large and loud," (Lei, 2003) and "unladylike" (Morris, 2007). One Black teacher in Morris' (2007) two-year mixed methods qualitative and ethnographic study explained that Black girls' loudness was their defense against "the system" that did not provide for them. Lei (2003) conducted a nearly two-year qualitative study of students, teachers, administration, and staff at Hope High School in the midwestern city of Jackson. Lei found that Black girls' loudness resisted oppression and asserted their status as "somebodies." Loudness was therefore an act of resistance to the systemic invisibility of Black women. However, many adults perceived Black girls' loudness as threatening; certain teachers hid in staff rooms to avoid confronting race issues Black girls wanted to discuss (Lei, 2003). Although many teachers encouraged Black girls to behave more like ladies (Morris, 2007) by being quieter, one teacher told Black girls that to be a lady meant to behave with "strength, outspokenness, and self-

reliance traditionally rooted in Black femininity” (p. 509). Morris found that Black girls often dominated classroom discussions in science and math classes, and outnumbered Black males and Latina females in advanced placement courses. Morris’ findings suggested that Black girls’ loudness was an asset to their academic success.

### **Finding Voice**

For people of color, finding one’s voice is an act of resisting oppression (hooks, 1989; Li Li, 2004; Housee, 2010). hooks (1989) said, “for us, true speaking is not solely an expression of creative power; it is an act of resistance, a political gesture that challenges politics of domination that would render us nameless and voiceless (p. 8).” hooks wrote about the transformative process that takes place when one speaks and argued that speaking is an active way for an individual to move from object to subject. An empirical study analyzed how group membership helped Black students feel confident moving from “object” to “subject” by speaking out.

In a mixed methods observation and focus group study of college students, Harper (2007) researched 131 Black sorority and fraternity members about their class participation in predominantly white classes. Harper found that students felt a responsibility to speak more in class to quell stereotypes about Black people and Greeks as “party animals,” to increase learning, and to show they understood the material. Students participated more in class to uphold the cumulative grade of their chapter and to be role models for other students. Students said their participation decreased when white teachers and students wanted them to represent their race, also found in other studies (“Branching Out and Coming Back Together,” 2010; Carter, 2005; Harper, 2007; hooks, 1994; Strayhorn, 2011), but increased when a teacher’s style was engaging and interactive.

A study of gospel choir membership for Black students at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) explored how singing in a gospel choir helped students find voice. Strayhorn (2011) used qualitative interviews to study 21 Black students at a southeastern PWi who were members of a gospel choir. Strayhorn explored the importance of the choir on students' social and academic success. A female student noted that "singing with Voices helps me feel like I matter, well, we [Black people] matter to [said university]" (p. 142). Another student said that songs of Black heritage allowed him to "give voice to the sounds of Blackness (Strayhorn, 2011, p. 147)" that could "speak the unpleasant" (Chavez & O'Donnell, 1998, p. 32) about slavery for example. Gospel choir members felt burdened about representing their race but enjoyed stepping into the educator role through gospel music. Students noted that the gospel choir connected them to inner strengths such as "faith, hope, intelligence, and confidence in one's own abilities" (p. 145).

The above studies showed psycho-emotional benefits for Black students who joined cultural groups and organizations. Black students groups at PWIs were "an attempt at self-determination and cultural maintenance in a sea of whiteness" (Feagin et al., 1996, p.72). The Black community often accused middle class Black people of abandoning the community unless they showed their loyalty to the community through joining Black cultural groups or Black social movements (Harper, 2006; Ogbu, 2004). Researchers have used the term "counter-spaces" (Carter, 2007; Solarzano et al., 2001) to describe the activities or places that help Black people find rejuvenation of their racial identity and protection from racism. Carter (2007) observed and interviewed nine high-achieving Black students in a predominantly white northeast high school and their use of counter-spaces. Carter found that the "The Stairs" that lead up to the library was a place students congregated to connect to their racial identity. At "The Stairs," Black students

bonded with “fictive kin,” (other students who shared economic, cultural, and social similarities), highlighted their Blackness by speaking in Black English Vernacular (BEV), talked loudly, braided hair, and discussed popular culture. Some students said that they felt more free at the stairs and able to talk whereas in class they felt restricted by norms of “speaking correctly” or pressured when being the only student of color in class. Carter argued that “The Stairs” gave Black students connection to the Black community which is necessary for their “academic survival” (p.551).

### **Summary of Literature**

Past research has laid a broad framework for understanding Black students’ decision to remain silent in class and their choice to speak out. Sociocultural explanations for silence included cultural upbringing that valued silence as a form of eloquence, spiritual expression, and political resistance to material or teachers’ low expectations. Studies have indicated that the anxiety of appearing unintelligent, doubting support for unpopular race-related views, communication anxiety, and low mood affected Black students’ silence. From a systemic perspective, the academy silenced students when campus security considered Black students criminal, when counselors were unresponsive to students’ academic goals, or when staff provided inadequate information about financial and academic services. Professors were at times complicit in stereotyping Black students as criminal, engaging white students more actively, dismissing Black students’ academic, career and personal concerns, and doubting students’ academic ability. Black students felt silenced when professors instructed using material rife with microaggressions, adopted a passive stance when racial incidents occurred in the classroom, or taught in an inactive manner. Black and white teachers engaged Black students by finding culturally relevant course material or using teaching styles that were effective in engaging Black

students. However in some cases, both Black and white teachers perceived Black students as less talented and driven than white students. From a race identity perspective, Black students chose not speak in class or perform highly in class to avoid being considered “white.” Other Black students spoke out to counter negative stereotypes about Black people. Furthermore, language inhibited students from speaking in class; Black students anticipated negative stereotypes about intelligence from other people of color and white people for speaking Black English Vernacular (BEV) or not speaking in a manner acceptable in the institution’s academic culture. Conversely, in classes where students actively used BEV, studied material directly related to their racial and ethnic experiences, and encouraged emotional connection to material, Black students spoke more. In addition to culturally competent class material and instruction, students found encouragement for their voice in organizations such as Black Greek affiliations and gospel choirs.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **Methodology**

#### **Purpose of Research**

The purpose of my study was to describe Black students' classroom silence at predominantly white institutions (PWIs). Using qualitative open-ended interviews, I collected data from Black college students in several PWIs in the northeast United States to address the following question, *How do Black students describe, explain, and understand their own classroom silence in PWIs?*

#### **Research Method and Design**

I chose a flexible method of research, meaning that the data was “recorded as a flow of events and conversation...or a verbatim record of a conversation with a given purpose” (Anastas, p. 414). The purpose was to discover unexplored information about Black students' silence in classrooms at PWIs. I collected demographic data including gender, sexual orientation, race, language, age, major, family socioeconomic status (SES), city and state of origin, and year of study at the PWI. I collected data through individual face-to-face interviews using open-ended questions to elicit the richness of personal perspectives. I conducted interviews in quiet public places and campus buildings to increase participants' comfort in speaking openly. It is likely that interactions prior to the interview through email or phone calls established rapport and encouraged students to delve deeply into their personal narratives during the interview (Anastas, 1990).

## **Sample and Recruitment**

I used purposive sampling to recruit my sample. Purposive sampling required that I define exclusion and inclusion criteria to seek people who fit the selected inclusion criteria (Anastas, 1999). My study looked at the population of Black English-speaking students in PWIs. The study population included Black students in post-graduate studies and in undergraduate studies in the northeast United States. My exclusion criteria for the sample were students in grade school, those not attending college, those from colleges with over 35% students of color, non-English speaking students, those under 18, and non-Black populations. Thirty-five percent reflected my personal belief of an adequate “critical mass” of students of color in an institution. According to critical mass theory, a critical mass of students of color is not an actual number, but the concentration of students of color to prevent minorities from feeling alienated, pressured to “represent their race,” or uncomfortable speaking up about personal experiences in the classroom (Anderson, Daugherty, & Corrigan, 2005; Cole, Bennett, & Thompson, 2003). The definition of silence included stifling a thought or an opinion by being silent. Speaking out was defined as vocally expressing a perspective with at least two other people, often one that countered a dominant view.

I chose the term Black because I wanted my sample to include people from many nationalities which the term African American might have excluded (Wijeyeshinghe & Jackson, 2001). The research included racial and ethnic diversity among Black people. Students identifying as mixed race, students of varying socioeconomic backgrounds, and geographic locations were sought. Males and Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender/Queer (LGBTQ) students were actively sought. I sought participants from a variety of higher educational institutions



including four-year colleges, two-year colleges, graduate schools, private, and public colleges and universities.

I relied on snowball sampling, meaning acquaintances and respondents who had participated in the study recruited potential participants through word of mouth. Snowball sampling enabled me to recruit “hidden” populations that make up a slim percentage of the higher education student body (Anastas, 1999), for example Black LGBTQ individuals, Black men, and Black graduate students. I also recruited participants by posting fliers in coffee shops (see Appendix F) and sending emails to people who might know of potential participants (Appendix B). Obtaining the sample was feasible because of the large population of students in the recruitment area. All of the Five College institutions in western Massachusetts are PWIs and between them have approximately 1,500 Black students. Cities and towns outside the Five College area but still within western MA, host many PWIs, colleges, and community colleges that between them have approximately 2,454 Black students. Limits to the use of nonrandom sampling were that it did not produce a representative sample and therefore had limited generalizability. For instance, Black students who found their classroom silence too painful to recount may have been represented using random sampling. In the current study only those students who felt comfortable enough to have stayed at a PWI or to talk about their silence, were included. The findings of my study are not representative of any particular college or of the larger Black population of Black students in PWIs in the United States because of the small sample size of 15 participants, the use of nonrandom sampling, and the fact that only a few students from each university participated.

## **Data Collection**

Fifteen one-on-one interviews were conducted with students who fit the research criteria. Participants' rights and privacy were protected through the submission of my study to the Human Subjects Review Board of Smith College School for Social Work prior to collecting data. I received approval from the Human Subjects Review Board (HSR; Appendix G) stating that the study was in accord with codes stipulated by the National Social Work Codes of Ethics and the Federal regulations that protect human subjects. I sent a letter of informed consent to participants prior to the interview. Participants had the opportunity to ask questions about the research through the initial contact by phone or email. Participants completed the form prior to the interview and we reviewed and both signed the letter of informed consent in-person prior to data collection (Appendix A). Demographic data were collected through a questionnaire (Appendix C) administered before the personal interview. Participants were also given a list of mental health centers to contact should the interview cause any discomfort (Appendix E).

Demographic data such as race, age, gender, social economic status, sexual orientation, city and state of origin, student year, and academic major were obtained since literature has shown these variables may affect the psychological well-being of participants when studying any social phenomenon (Gomez, 1990). I studied Black college students making race a necessary demographic to analyze. Age was important to show how students of different ages had different perceptions of their silence. Analyzing gender helped me understand whether students' perceptions of being silent differed based on gender. The type of major may have contributed to students' choice of silence because some courses require more talking than others. Sexual orientation was important to determine whether homophobia and heterosexism may have influenced whether a Black person remained silent in the classroom. Socioeconomic status and

location of origin were helpful in understanding factors of culture and Black identity. Once demographic data were collected, I obtained data through interviews (Appendix D).

I increased the trustworthiness of my open-ended interviews because questions were evaluated by my research advisor and the HSR Board. Interview questions were non-leading and therefore countered researcher bias. Non-leading questions allowed data to authentically emerge. Validity of the research questions were ensured because they were informed by past literature. A review of literature countered my personal biases to control the direction of responses. Furthermore, the open-ended nature of the questions allowed for unanticipated respondent opinions to be expressed. Fifteen face-to-face individual interviews were conducted between January 30th and February 18th, 2012. I tape recorded interviews with an Olympus Note Corder DP-10 digital audio recorder. I took minimal notes during the interview. The signing of the informed consent letter, completing the demographic form, and completing the interview took approximately an hour. I manually transcribed the data and was the sole transcriber.

Within flexible methods, the researcher is not considered a separate observer and the interaction between participant and researcher is “part of the data as well” (Anastas, p.58). My identity as a mixed race Black woman student may have impacted the interview process and accounted for differences in participant responses. The embedded role of the researcher reflected the aim of qualitative methods to capture data in near-experience interactions. Simultaneously, my racial identity and student status was likely to enhance participants’ comfort level which may have elicited authentic responses. I safeguarded participants’ freedom of expression by closely monitoring my own reactions. Through neutral facial expressions and tones, I strengthened the validity of the data. These closely-monitored efforts to remain systematic prevented me from “controlling the flow of the data” (Anastas, p.354) or leading participants to respond in any

particular way. I used reiteration and clarification of content to avoid misinterpretation of words expressed.

I am aware that my racial and gender, SES, status as a student, and past experiences of my own classroom silence in PWIs yielded certain assumptions. Personal assumptions included that other self-identified Black students considered racism, race stereotypes, social isolation, and marginalization integral to understanding their own silence. Given my own biases, I made efforts to include literature that challenged my own perspective and to carefully study and analyze discordant views that arose from the data in my discussion section.

### **Data Analysis**

I analyzed the recorded interviews through content analysis wherein I used thematic coding to organize the text from the interviews into themes. I used grounded theory, which means that the empirical data were grounded in the “contextual data that are generated by flexible method research” (Anastas, 1999, p.423). I used a Web App Dedoose (Dedoose, Version 4.2.83) to store my data, apply codes to text, and analyze text. Dedoose was helpful in showing patterns in my data with its visualization feature that quantified how coded text interacted and how coded text can be analyzed with demographic data. Because Dedoose is a tool, creation of themes and deep analysis of text was done in reference to the program but not through the program. Using Dedoose, I grouped data into categories of similar attitudes, statements or feelings, and then assigned codes to the data. Next, I compared and contrasted the coded content against other coded content and generated categories. Lastly, categories were analyzed and put into a core concept or theme.

I countered researcher bias that may have threatened the study’s trustworthiness by using many sources such as literature, quotes and vignettes, and minimal field notes from the

interviews to analyze themes in the content. Reliability was sought by paying careful attention to transcribing the complete interview including pauses and small utterances. Reliability was ensured through taking minimal field notes during interviewing to capture details of the interview at a later point. Validity was enhanced by continual evaluation about the purposes, rationale for type of study, data collection instruments, and findings by the research advisor who oversaw my work. Efforts were made to maintain the validity of the data by analyzing discrepant views, not only by deliberately seeking a sample that may have been excluded in previous studies on my research topic, but by including contradictory perspectives that arose in the data.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **Findings**

This chapter outlined participants' responses to questions about Black students' classroom silence in predominantly white institutions (PWIs). The major findings of the study were organized into three themes: "Culture of Higher Education," "Social Identity and Belonging," and "Qualities of Silence." The main findings of the study were that nearly all participants perceived that their self-imposed silence and socially-imposed silence was mediated by their social identities. Self-imposed processes included intimidation, shyness, fears of being seen as unintelligent, and protection from stereotypes. Socially-imposed forces included racism, classism, and sexism in curriculum, as well as peer and professors perspectives and teaching material that was socially oppressive. Outside the classroom, participants perceived that their silence about sociopolitical views helped them retain cultural connections with family and friends. Sometimes participants risked rejection from their social group and retaliation from peers, professors, and employers when speaking out against discrimination. The definition of silence included stifling a thought or an opinion through being silent. Speaking out was defined as vocally expressing a perspective, often one that countered a dominant view. Definitions were not mutually exclusive and participants' responses showed interplay between silence and speaking out depending on the circumstances.

Findings were arranged into five sections for organization purposes. These sections were demographics of the sample, the three identified themes, and the chapter summary. There was considerable overlap between the sections and therefore the findings in each section informed other sections. In the first section, demographic data were explained which included participants'

age, race, social class, sexual orientation, gender, religion, language of fluency and of origin, town of origin, year of study, major of study, and level of study. The second section, “Culture of Higher Education” described how the institutional culture of considering academic material impersonal, being in the race, gender, and social class minority, being stereotyped and tokenized, speaking “properly” and learning white-centered perspectives were reasons many participants felt silenced. The third section, “Social Identity and Belonging” explored race, gender, sexual orientation, and group membership. This section looked at participants’ perception of how dialect and sociopolitical beliefs distanced them from or connected them to white students and to their own racial or cultural group including family and friends. The third section, “Qualities of Silence” explored the ways in which participants valued speaking out in terms of personal values, religion, and the learning environment. This section also explored students’ perceived their opinion was valued and how their bodies responded to their silences. This chapter concluded with a summary of the findings.

### **Demographic Data**

Demographic data collected included gender, race, age, socioeconomic status, languages grown up speaking, languages of fluency, sexual orientation, major, level of education, year of study in college or university, and geographic location of origin.

Table 1  
Demographic and Personal Family Information

<b>Id</b>	<b>Race and Ethnicity</b>	<b>Fluency</b>	<b>Language Raised</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Social Class</b>	<b>Raised</b>
82	Black, South American	English	English	Female	Heterosexual	40	Upper Middle Class	Caribbean
83	Black, Dominican-Kiskeya, Haitian	English	Creole, English, Spanish	Male	Queer	23	Lower Middle Class	Northeast
84	African American/Puerto Rican	English	English	Female	Bisexual	21	Lower Middle Class	Northeast
85	Black	English, Black English	English	Female	Queer	21	Poor	Northeast
86	Black	English, Sign Language	English	Male	Heterosexual	27	Upper Middle Class	Southeast
87	African American	English	English	Male	Heterosexual	42	Middle Class	Northeast
88	African American, Jamaican	English	English	Female	Heterosexual	21	Lower Middle Class	South
89	Black, African American	English	English	Female	Heterosexual	30	Middle Class	Asia, Africa, Southeast, Midwest
90	Black	English	English	Female	Heterosexual	35	Lower Middle Class	South
91	Black, Black American	English	English	Female	Bisexual	18	Poor	West Coast
92	African, Somali	English, Somali, Arabic	Arabic, Somali	Female	Heterosexual	No info	Upper Middle Class	Middle East
93	Black	English	English	Male	Heterosexual	20	Lower Middle Class	Northeast
94	Afro-Caribbean	English	English	Male	Queer	21	Poor	Northeast
95	African American, Haitian	English	English	Male	Heterosexual	18	Lower Middle Class	Northeast
96	African American, Jamaican	English, Jamaican Patois	English	Female	Heterosexual	21	Lower Middle Class	Northeast



Table 2  
Demographic Institutional Information

<b>Id number</b>	<b>Education Level</b>	<b>Year of Study</b>	<b>Major</b>	<b>Approx. percent minorities</b>	<b>Type of Institution</b>
82	Masters	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Clinical Psychology	30%	2-4 year, private all women's
83	Undergrad	6 <sup>th</sup> year	English	20%	4-year public, coed
84	Undergrad	Junior	Psychology	20%	4-year public, coed
85	Undergrad	Senior	Social Theory and Policy	20%	4-year public, coed
86	Ph.D.	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	African American Studies	80%	Public, coed
87	Master's	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Social Work	42%	Private, coed
88	Undergrad	Junior	Anthropology	20%	4-year public coed
89	Undergrad	Senior	Art	20%	4-year public coed
90	Undergrad	Junior	Anthropology	27%	4-year elite, all women's
91	Undergrad	Freshman	Economics	25%	4-year elite, all women's
92	Master's	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Social Work	42%	Private, coed
93	Undergrad	Freshman	Computer Science	14%	2-year public coed
94	Undergrad	Senior	Ethnic and Gender Studies	17%	4-year public, coed
95	Undergrad	Freshman	Political Science	10%	4-year private, coed
96	Undergrad	Senior	Psychology	20%	4-year public, coed

## **Culture of Higher Education**

Fourteen participants perceived that the culture of higher education, namely a culture of formality of language, standards of education supported by a dominant perspective (white, male, and wealthy), impersonal and objective interpretations of academic material, and hierarchy based on intelligence and knowledge impacted the decision either to speak out or become silent in class.

### **Being in the Race, Gender, and Social Class Minority**

Nearly all students perceived that being in the numeric minority in race, gender, or social class were reasons they seldom spoke out in class. Participants described being a “Black dot,” “the one Black person in a sea of whiteness,” “sticking out like a sore thumb,” but simultaneously fading “into the background,” and being in classrooms “with all the white people.” Participants felt uncomfortable drawing attention to themselves, tokenized, and afraid to “go against” the opinion of the majority. A female junior said that in classes where she was in the racial minority, “I’m trying so hard not to step on everyone’s toes I’m literally stomping on *mine*.” However, a male Master’s student and male freshman perceived that their classes were racially diverse and therefore perceived that their silence was unrelated to race and gender. The Master’s student had not considered the relationship between the sociodemographic makeup of his class and his level of speaking before the interview.

Most students believed they would feel “less triggered,” that they would not “second guess,” or “sugar coat” their opinions on racism, sexism, Black history, and slavery, and “not stop talking” if they took classes where peers were of the same race, gender, and social class. Three female participants believed their classroom silence would have a unique quality if they

were in a classroom only with peers of the same social identity. A senior said if she were in a classroom with all Black women she anticipated an “unspoken welcome” that would encourage her to speak even though she is shy. A Master’s participant said in an upcoming group for women of color her silence “will be silence of joy.” A freshman said that in a class only with Black peers she would feel a “silent support” from other students. Conversely, two participants explained challenges of being in the racial majority. A male Ph.D. participant who studied in a department with “mostly minorities” struggled to overcome “herd mentality” and often was judged by peers for voicing perspectives that were not “Black enough.” Further, a senior female believed that even if she had attended a Historically Black College or University, she anticipated having to confront “internal conflicts” among Black peers such as homophobia and colorism.

Some participants felt more comfortable in classes taught by professors of color. A female participant recalled having a Black female professor and said that being “reflected” in the professor helped her feel comfortable speaking in class. She also noted that the professor’s requirement that everyone speak pushed her to speak in class. A male Ph.D. participant reflected on being a minority in college, saying that having a white professor made it difficult to express views that challenged the racial majority. He further said that almost all the professors in his current program are people of color. He perceived that “none of the professors, I believe, encourage, or enjoy silence. Um, instead they would much rather, um, allow students to really take the front seat with their comments.” A female senior felt inspired by her professors in her major who were predominantly women of color. However, she had felt let down by a female professor of color who remained silent during a controversial race discussion between the participant and a white peer. Although disappointed, this participant empathized with the

professor, thinking that the professor was in a position to appear unbiased about race and gender as a woman of color. She said,

The professor that I had that I was describing that experience with [the controversial race discussion with a peer], she was a woman of *color*, which is interesting *also* because processing that [the incident] I also processed what was her role in that, and what did I expect of her as a facilitator. Um, and in that case I felt that she was, like, she dramatically, like, let me down, but also lookin' back at it, I could understand the awkward position in which she was in.

A female freshman expressed her wish to have more faculty of color at her institution.

I just wanna know, are you fully representing people of color in the curriculum. The teachers, right? So you have one Black, one or two Black people in the whole econ department. That, to me, signify a problem [*sic*]. You may have one Mexican person, or someone from Latin America in the whole Latin American studies department. How does the teachers represent the students that are gonna be interested in the class, or the people that are in the text, or the department, you know? Um, so, I just feel like, you know, the books we may get are great, but who written those [*sic*]? You know?... I have no problem with a white working class woman writing a book, but in an all, predominantly white class, I would hope those people get access to literature written by Black people.

While this participant perceived that having an insufficient amount of people of color on the faculty signified an institutional concern regarding diversity and a lack of multicultural material, another female student perceived that having predominantly white professors and peers made her feel culturally different from others and therefore too “closed off” to speak.

Almost half the participants said they felt “out of place” with peers in their institution who were of upper middle class. One female junior from a private college said she often did not feel “adequate” or “smart enough” compared to rich students. A female freshman said she lacked the tools to express her views because she had grown up poor. She said,

If I was white, and I came from a middle class neighborhood, or even say lower class neighborhood, the tools I would’ve received in high school would have helped me a lot in class, and so I would feel comfortable in class. Not all white people feel comfortable in class, that may be due to different things, I don’t really know, I’m not a white middle class person, you know, but, I know that I would at least have the tools to express what I wanted to say at least the way that I know the teacher wants me to say it.

Another female junior perceived that a professor taught from a white middle class family’s perspective creating an idea of normalcy that she felt alienated her personal upbringing as a lower middle class woman of color. Three participants from a lower socioeconomic status said they could not engage in conversations about their family or “things like hockey and football,” or join social activities with white people. A male participant said,

In conversation if, like, people are talking about, like, things that they have, and what their plans are and stuff I’m generally more silent in that, like I don’t have those things and can’t really communicate on that level, like, I don’t know (pause), I’m trying to think of some like, examples. Uh. people that would, like, get, like 1,000 dollars for a bar mitzvah back in high school, I’m Jewish technically, I don’t really identify as Jewish because I don’t really, like, celebrate Judaism at all, except like, when I’m like with my mom’s side of the family, but like, I would have some Jewish friends, and like they would have these things happen for their bar mitzvahs, or bat mitzvahs, and, like, I coul,

[sic] I couldn't really communicate on that level just cause like, getting 1,000 dollars wasn't ever gonna happen.

One participant said that her wealthy roommate trivialized her poverty and how expensive she considered the textbooks. A working poor participant said that her classmates often voiced negative assumptions about poor people. When she disclosed her socioeconomic status and confronted her classmates about their prejudiced attitudes, she described their shock that she identified “in such a way.” She said,

Me being that I identify as working poor, when I hear people say ignorant stuff about, like, poor people being *lazy* and not working hard enough, when I *comment* on that, it's just like, you don't know what type of reaction you're gonna get cuz often times people, I think *now* it's not as easy to distinguish between people's class, and often times people are shocked that I identify in such a way.

Her comment pointed out the assumptions peers have not only of poor people but of the image of the higher education student as a middle class or wealthy student. Two participants felt that their race and social class identities created a cultural dissonance between them and their peers. One participant perceived that white students displayed an “unspoken discomfort” around her. She believed that they perceived her as an outsider because she did not have a “ponytail” or wear “Northface.” A male senior said he felt rejected by professors, white, and Black students because of his radical views, his dreads, and his race. Speaking about these “rejections” he said, “So I just, become like a shell, I feel. I just sit there. Just takin' up the seat. And, I see when class is done, I get up and walk out. I just leave.”

### **Racism in class**

Twelve participants said that racist and sexist material, comments, and racist and sexist perspectives of peers and professors influenced their silence or speaking out. Participants perceived that professors allowed racist and sexist opinions to go “unchecked” and were sometimes teaching racist and sexist material and points of view. One female student said that a professor did not address a peer who said Africans were “barbaric” even though she and two African students had challenged the peer about her disrespectful comment.

When a professor said nothing after a white male student accused a female participant of “using my [her] identities against” him for his denial of racism and classism in feminism, she stopped speaking in class. Another female participant said a professor lecturing on Africa showed a film of “natives walking around naked” from Papua New Guinea. The professor was “furious” by the student’s email complaint because “no one had ever called me [her] prejudiced before.” A professor “didn’t choose” a participant who raised her hand to object to the professor’s point that Africans and people of color were “less civilized” than Europeans because of their technology. A male student dropped his major in criminal justice because he perceived that he was learning “to arrest myself.” He said,

I just feel like I was sittin’ in a class I was learning how to arrest myself, to discriminate against my own self. And I’m like, ‘I didn’t come to college to learn, [*sic*] I wanna *help* people, not *hurt* people.’ And when I say people, I mean people who look like me, people that come from the same environment, who have the same struggles as me. That’s what I felt that class was just teachin.’ And it was hard.

Four participants objected to being taught “European-based history” without exploring racism and white-domination. One male participant challenged his professors’ perspectives but chose his words carefully because,

Once you say the word race in class, or racist, to a white person, it’s like, I don’t know, like, disrespecting a *Christian*, like saying ‘Jesus is wack [*sic*]’ in front of a Christian, you know, it’s like the no-no, you don’t *say* that.

Because of the lack of perspectives of people of color in material, some participants took on the responsibility of education their peers on their own. A freshman participant and another Black student dominated classroom discussions “because we feel as if it’s important for them [white peers] to hear our spin on things because for too long they’ve had their own spin.” She also critiqued professors’ selection of white-authored material. She said, “[Our peers] need to know that we [Black people] do produce our own literature, we do analyze the culture around us, the economic structure around us, you know, we do make contributions.” Another male participant enjoyed “teaching everyone about diversity and culture” through an on-campus organization. A female senior considered herself a “community resource” about issues related to people of color. One participant perceived that people were uncomfortable with him challenging white domination during a class discussion. He said,

I just felt like that was very *obvious*, I thought that was kinda one of hooks’ main points that whiteness in the Black imagination is a form of terrorism. And I said it very *clearly*, ‘whiteness is terrorism,’ and I never really had a conception of how that sounded to folks [peers], but I understood quickly when it wasn’t put on the list, it was changed to something else.



His comment underscored the balancing act many participants faced when speaking up; they voiced strong opinions but often found that in regards to racism, they perceived that white peers and professors were not prepared to listen.

### **Risks of speaking out**

Seven participants noted that when they spoke out against racism, administration, supervisors, peers, and professors denied their truth or retaliated against them. Two participants said that speaking out against racism left them unsupported or attacked by peers. A male participant noted that professors gave him bad grades for being “outspoken” about social justice. He also said when he became outspoken regarding discriminatory campus policies administration sent a high level Black man to befriend him.

They tried doin’ the little brown nose effect, get the Black guy who has a high position on campus, get him to be your *friend*, and um, try and like, ‘We’re gonna help you *guide* you and *support* you,’ I was like, ‘I don’t need your help, I don’t want your help. Like, if you’re gonna *help* me, let’s change up some of these *rules*, let’s start *doin’* somethin.’”  
And I felt like it was just a way to try to make me quiet.

Another male student perceived that his silence was his fear of being unheard and invalidated especially by white people who he perceived had the ability to “just turn off” thinking about racism. Three participants brought concerns of perceived racism to higher authorities: one was asked to leave his internship, one supervisor failed to admit her prejudiced treatment of African staff, and an authority denied that a participant was being targeted by police because of race. This last participant recalled,

She [the administrator] just right, like, immediately blurted out,

‘Miss \_\_\_\_\_ [participant’s name], that’s not what’s going on here! I have to tell

you, you need to trust you this process, I *assure* you that this has *nothing* to do with it!’ and I’m like, ‘Well, I’m feeling harassed by a police officer and, like, you know, I’ve seen this happen. I study this, I do research in laboratories, in the psychology department or wherever else they talk about this very same issue, and for you to rule it out, and say it’s absolutely not a factor, I feel silenced.’

### **Tokenism**

Six participants perceived that pressure of “representing” their race due to being a minority in a field of study, being one of a few people of color in a class, or confronting stereotypes of taking advantage of “affirmative action” influenced their silence. One participant “hated” that others called on her to be “the voice of my [her] race.” Another participant stayed silent in class discussions to avoid appeasing bids from peers and professors to represent her race and social class. One female participant spoke about her tokenism as being a result of hyper visibility in her physics and math field.

It’s an all-white thing, and a boy’s game. I’m not gonna lie and say there isn’t some sort of pressure to be on your A game all the time. I guess for me, I’d rather be silent, which is sad, because I’d rather be silent even if I have something positive to contribute, I’d rather be silent for fear of appearing, you know, below average, than speaking up, and, you know, I do remember feeling that way, put yourself out there to be *judged* (Laughs).

Conversely, one female participant spoke up more in class because of being tokenized and stereotyped. Stereotypes of Black people being in higher education because of “affirmative action” sparked her to sit in the front of her classes and become a “role model” for students of color.

## Can We Talk about Race, Class, Gender---and Religion?

Many participants perceived that they spoke more in classes that discussed race, class, and gender. Some participants changed majors to courses that studied race, class, gender, and sexuality. A female participant said,

I realize that the older I'm getting I'm choosing more. I'm choosing classes that will have more seats filled with people who look like me. And it's sort of me challenging my silence, to be in a place where we can all equally, not equally, all share our *experiences* of silence, as opposed to *feeling* silent, and not being able to speak up because no one in the room will be able to relate to me.

One participant spoke out more in classes studying race and gender, even when in the racial minority. A male spoke more in an English class because a professor "allowed" him to discuss Canterbury Tales from the standpoint of racism and colonialism. However, a Christian participant said that when issues of religion came up in class, she was reluctant to speak up for fear of being judged "because there wasn't really room for that [religion] in academia." A male Roman Catholic participant also shied away from conversations involving religion with friends on campus to avoid starting a "feud." Conversely, a Muslim participant, confronting Islamophobia post-9/11 started a "campaign for Islam" and began to wear the *hijab* (head covering). She highlighted her religious affiliation in an attempt to draw attention to her friends' hypocrisy of fearing Muslim-sounding names, promulgating messages saying, "Let's Nuke Them" while caring about her as a friend. She said,

We [participant and coworkers] were having a lunch, she [her coworker] said that she was having a surgery so she went to consultation with the doctor and she found out his name was Achmed, and now she's freaking out. And I'm like, I told her, 'You just

invited me to your home for Friday dinner. Did you not notice that my name is \_\_\_\_\_ [participant's name]? You could've rode [*sic*] a taxi with my brother? What is wrong? And she's like, '\_\_\_\_\_, [participant's name] you're not them!' And I'm like, 'Why is the doctor gonna be them, too?'

### **Speaking “improper” and “unacademic” English**

Four participants believed that their inability to understand professors' language were reasons they “strayed away from conversation.” Two female participants said that professors used “highly technical” and “highly academic” language that intimidated them. One student “Googled” words after class to help her understand “what's being said.” One male participant said professors and peers made him feel like “an idiot” for not knowing “a lot of big words” so he carried a dictionary with him all day. A participant who had grown up in the Caribbean said her “limited vocabulary” made her uncomfortable speaking in class.

Some participants perceived that having little exposure to highly academic words and speaking in Black English Vernacular (BEV) and slang were related phenomenon. Participants had mixed beliefs about the advantages of using BEV in their institution. A male participant said slang allowed him to have a sense of “power” on campus where only Black people understood what he was saying. This participant had perceived that others in his university disapproved of vernacular and nevertheless stopped using “proper words” in class saying, “I feel like I reject who I am every time I speak properly, speak the proper English.” A female participant said,

So some people may call it [vernacular] less academic, or some stupid language, or twist on English, I call it a part of my culture, so you have to respect it as much as you have to respect the fact that I like to eat yams, that's a part of me. If you don't like it then you

need to take a class on African American Vernacular, and then maybe we can conversate [*sic*].

Even though this participant valued her dialect, she noted challenges of using vernacular in academia. She recalled a time when she remained silent about a class video that portrayed a woman's "white guilt" about slavery because she feared her "natural response" that might involve cursing was not "correct academic language." A freshman male stopped speaking slang and began to use "proper words and less profanity" when he came to his college because he feared his friends might be embarrassed to be in public with him.

Two students felt unsettled speaking vernacular amongst peers of color. One male Ph.D. student noted that as a Black man, peers, and faculty critiqued him both for speaking in vernacular and for using "highfalutin words." A female junior said that other women of color in an on-campus theater and writing group were surprised to hear her speak in vernacular so she often "switches off" her vernacular around them to avoid being judged.

One female junior perceived that peers and professors devalued BEV because of racism. In a lecture class discussing BEV, a professor showed a video of President Obama speaking and another of a Black comedian speaking. This female junior participant was offended when the white students laughed at the comedian and President Obama speaking in "ministerial, rhythmic tones."

### **Knowledge, intelligence, and social status**

Many participants said that knowledge about a subject was part of how others perceived their intelligence, making them selective about when to speak in class. One freshman male only spoke in class when he knew the answer, thinking that if he appeared unintelligent professors would lack initiative to help him. A female participant spoke only when "comfortable with the

material” to deter race and gender stereotypes of her intelligence by peers in science and math courses dominated by white male peers and professors.

One female participant felt intimidated by other students who “take up a lot of space so there isn’t space for other people, to like, get involved.” Wealthy students who “dominate the classroom” led her to feel uncomfortable speaking. Another female participant perceived that race and gender of other students related to her classroom silence. She perceived that “arrogant white males” who were combative with professors and other students “disrupt the learning environment” and “get the attention” that she as a Black women did not get. She said,

Generally professors don’t really, they’re kind of the same way as the students, unless you go above and beyond to be kind of like, ‘Hey!’ You kind of, like, fade into the, into the background I suppose. I just feel, especially in discussion based courses definitely. You have a few that like to speak a lot and they tend to be white male students. And, at least in the classes I’ve taken, and I know generalization is not necessarily a good thing, but I’m talking about in my own experiences, um, they tend to be white male students, and they’re the ones who get the attention.

Another female participant perceived that professors “allowed” Caucasian students to “totally dominate the classroom” by choosing to call on Caucasian students. Another female participant became intimidated by white males who she perceived were “combative” in class. She said,

If you speak in a way that’s very simple, it’s almost, it’s like, *you’re* simple. And I find, to me, it’s ridiculous to me how some of my [white male] classmates go back and forth and it’s literally who, who can sound more like Webster.

Her point illustrated how she perceived that white male students in her class were viewed as intelligent based on their vocabulary and competitiveness. She continued to say that because she

did not understand complicated terms, students perceived her as unintelligent and unfit to be in class. She recalled how she felt after requesting that peers speak more simply,

‘I have *no* idea what you’re saying, can we put that in simpler terms?’ It’s like, ‘Well why are you *here*?’ It’s like, the, just because I don’t get it in the way that you’re explaining doesn’t mean I don’t wanna *be* here to get it.’ And I can think of that with, *specifically* with white males in my classroom that *literally* go back and forth and challenge each other, and challenge the professor.

Two participants perceived competition in graduate school and a hierarchy of status among peers. A Ph.D. participant said the competitive spirit of graduate school caused his comments to be “brief and to the point.” A female Master’s participant said that professors “catered” to the Ph.D. students who were the “favorites.”

### **Personal knowledge and book knowledge**

Five participants said that when they contributed to classroom discussions with personal anecdotes rather than “book theory,” their knowledge was discounted by peers and professors. Participants were mixed about whether they spoke up more after having their personal perspective discounted. A freshman participant challenged the concept that “theories” and personal experience are separable. Of a class studying the economic structure of Brazil, she said, “No one thought to ask the Black girl from Brazil what it was like to live in Brazil in those conditions. However, we’re stuck on this theory, but why not just ask?” Two male participants said that without having personal experience about a subject, they preferred to remain silent. A female said that knowledge gained from Black people was valuable in classes, so when white peers continually said her perspective was “wrong” she did not feel like speaking in class or attending class. Contrarily, when a professor used his “book theory” to counter a participant’s

experience saying that voodoo was a self-fulfilling prophesy, she spoke up. This participant had told the class about a “vision” during pregnancy that saved her life. Her professor had replied by saying, “No, Mrs. \_\_\_\_ [participant’s name]. It’s impossible.” She described her reaction,

Before I will argue. Before I will be mad at them. I will be like, ‘who are you? Do you know, have any idea about the level of the universe, how far we can go? The abilities that we have, what’s out there? Who are *you*?.... I mean my mother came from another island, and then we came to the islands and then we settled there. And then we had the natives, the Carib and the Arawaks, and the Spaniards killed off the Arawak mean thinkin’ they would steal their joy because they were very joyful people. That’s our tribe, that’s the tribe that I came from. And they mate with their wives thinkin’ that they would kill off (wiping her hands) that way of thinkin.’ So those kids were still born with this sense of joy. So, they left, and they migrate back to Cuba and Spain’... So those differences, that when they don’t know if you hear [*sic*], and not seek to understand [the differences] but yet, when you hear, you should have as much as you can [of her perspective], you should be the one *agreein*.’ That stuff will break my silence.

Her response showed that although she was less likely to speak as forcefully as in the past, she nevertheless disagreed with his point that went too far, and stated her opinion.

### **Sexism in Class**

Many participants saw explicit sexism from professors and peers such as “victim blaming,” defending “grey rape” and “date rape,” referring to “325 students in a class as ‘you guys,’ and “treating the so-called women in class differently than the men.” A male senior participant spoke about a professor he perceived was sexist in the way he treated female students and in how he understood the teaching material,



He [the professor] was just, really, really, he was very, like violent professor, and I say that, I mean more so verbally, like the way he would like, *move* in the classroom. It was very violently, like, sexist as well. Like, he would just treat the, the, the quote end quote women in the space so radically different than he would treat the men. He would just use all these *jokes* and all this nonsense over and over again. And I think, um, his conception of race was just, it was just more the general, like fabric of how he was teaching that whole racist and white supremacist way that he was conceptualizing these authors. That was, that was just *there*, but I feel like his sexism was much more, kind of open, he was much more comfortable kind of *professing* that part of himself. Um, and I remember that silence, cuz I recognized, and it was one of those times when I really recognized clearly that I really was recognized in my silence in that [*sic*], I don't know, I ended up dropping that class. I just couldn't deal. I just could *not* deal.

One male participant perceived that sexist views were entrenched in many of his courses and he spoke up when hearing something that he felt “needs to be checked.” He spoke up during a lecture about forced sterilization of women because of IQ tests saying, “This is so sexist right here!” He continued to say that many of the women who did not pass the tests were immigrants who “didn't know English.” A female junior's science professor asked her in front of the class why there were so few females in science fields.

### **Class Size**

Four participants said that classroom size was important in whether they spoke out or were silent. In large lecture classes participants remained silent because they were in the numeric minority unless they had a “relevant” question. In large lectures, participants remained silent even if they objected to a professors' choice of words (using Negro for African American, for

example). The size of the class was less important for some participants. One female said that the classroom was a “stage” where peers vied for their opinion to be heard. She said she would rather speak outside the classroom to her peers about the material even if her grades suffered. A male participant said he felt more comfortable speaking in classes where students sat in a circle so that he could “read people better.” For one female, size and structure was less important than how a professor valued her opinion. A female junior recalled a time when she raised her hand “three to four times” and the professor rolled his eyes, crossed his arms, and refused to call on her. His body language deterred her from “speaking up.” This student said of the institution,

I feel like they want you to be quiet and just ride it. Ride the education and be grateful that you have, or you will be able to have a \_\_\_\_\_ [college name] education. I feel like the silence means they don’t wanna hear or know about you, you know, they want to only know about themselves and only associate with themselves, only hear from Caucasian people like them. It means just be quiet and just ride the waves. Don’t make waves, you know. Try to get through this to go to the next place. That’s what it means to me, now.

## **Race**

### **Danger stereotypes, being “overly sensitive,” and the “angry Black” person**

Nine participants said that stereotypes of Black people were pervasive in their institution with staff, peers, and faculty. The two participants who received disciplinary actions because of speaking out against a discriminatory practice or policy in their school or employment were males. A senior male participant who had two years before gotten expelled from his university because he had taken the blame for a Muslim friend who had written his dislike for America on a napkin said that white students, staff, and faculty viewed him as “a dangerous person.” He said,

I don't walk around campus as if it's safe, I feel like I'm in a prison. I walk around, I see police, they smile and laugh in my face but I know, like they're out, they're paying attention. I know they're out, like, I, I don't know. I feel like I'm in a war zone. Um, I don't treat this like it's a school. Cuz for me, I go in the bathroom and sometimes think like, you don't know. Um, I don't, I never had FBI or state troopers come after me. They had mad military on this campus...So, it's constant, I feel a sense of fear.

A male participant was asked to leave his internship because his supervisor thought he undermined her authority when he questioned partial treatment of a Black client. He said,

Like, if a white, if I go in and tell my supervisor, ask my supervisor, 'Listen, why did you do this and this?' But then a *white* man does the same thing, he might get a *different* response. *Me*, it's gonna be like, 'oh, he's the angry Black man' and you know, it might blow up into somethin' that it really, that it really *isn't*.

The seven participants who felt that they were rebuffed or dismissed for speaking out against discrimination were female. These participants perceived that stereotypes of being "*that* Black girl" or the loud and angry Black girl who is always drawing attention to herself were reasons they resisted speaking out in class. A female senior participant involved in social justice activism on campus felt "disrespected" because public security considered her a threat, a "bad seed," and "the worst student" although she prided herself on being a community resource. Two female participants learned to keep their facial expressions "pleasant" to avoid the "angry Black woman" stereotype. A female sophomore said,

I'm very cautious of how I present myself, or I *try* to be because it's always this ideology of the angry Black woman, so, like, I try to make sure that, you know, if I'm in deep thought, people probably will mistake that as me being angry, or something like that,

because sometimes when I'm really, just in lala land, or thinking, um, I think yes, but more specifically bein' a Black woman plays into that silence. So often times, like, when a white woman is angry everyone will stop and listen, but if a Black woman is angry, she's just a [*sic*] angry Black woman. And so, often times I feel as though, um, when I'm in class, and like, uh, when someone, like specifically a white woman is really frustrated with the reading, and she expresses that frustration, everyone is like, 'Oh, yeah, such good points, and, you know, bla jee bla jee bla [*sic*], and encouraging her to go more in depth about it, but then, um, when I say something similar to that magnitude its often read different.

Another female participant said that white people "over apologize" to her for small accidents. She said, "And so sometimes I go above and beyond to look more pleasant, cuz I'm wondering, 'does my face look like I'm gonna stab somebody for bumping into me?'"

Three female participants chose not to speak out in class because of fears of stereotypes of being "overemotional" and "angry": one said that peers judged her especially when using slang or expressing her anger about slavery, one was dismayed at an older professor's use of the word "Negro" for African American, one was offended when a professor played a video clip of a Black comedian who used the n-word. None of the participants spoke out for fear of being stereotyped as "the angry Black woman."

### **Social Identity and Belonging**

Many of the participants said that their race, gender, class, and sexual orientation made a difference in what and how they communicated with family and friends. Many participants noted that belonging to a social group encouraged them to speak out. One female participant spoke out to draw attention to her social class, gender identity, and race because peers under the "liberal

umbrella” viewed all women as the same. Four participants noted that belonging to political activist organization on campus or cultural performance groups helped them build skills to become “outspoken,” “empowered,” and to “take up space.”

A female Master’s student from Somalia said her cultural upbringing instilled in her a sense of familial pride since a young child. She said “It’s a culture of pride, and you don’t let anybody tell you you’re unimportant. And if you let anybody tell you, you not important that mean in reflects badly on your family.”

Another participant noted that group membership should not be assumed. This junior female had spoken out in class to align with another woman of color on the subject of gender violence and was “shut down” because they had a dissimilar experience of gender violence. She felt worried in the subsequent class, unsure of whether to speak for fear of offending someone.

### **Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation**

Three female participants said that gender and race kept them from speaking up in class. One participant linked her classroom silence to her Caribbean culture where “women need to be seen and not heard.” Another participant said that raising her hand to speak brought too much attention when she already had “strikes against” her as a Black person and a woman. One female participant said that being Black and a women kept her from speaking in her white male-dominated field, however, in other classes that focused on sexism and racism, she felt confident to speak up even as a race and gender minority.

Four participants talked about Black men’s silence in the classroom. A female junior observed that Black men in her classes “slouch, they kind of, if they do talk, they’re hands are in front of their mouth (demonstrating), um, it’s like, really low, few words possible.” A male

senior believed his silence came from intergenerational silences of Black males. He said of his silence,

It's me, it's my Blackness, it's my, my, it's the weight I carry on me, I don't know. It's not just me. It's my family's [silence]. My silence comes from my dad's silence, *his* dad's silence, *his* dad's silence, you know?

Two male participants considered quietness and silence part of taking responsibility for patriarchy, heterosexism, and becoming aware of how a “domineering tone” and “taking up all the space in the world” often silenced women’s voices. Two participants actively challenged other peoples’ heterosexism and homophobia. One female Muslim participant spoke up to her classmates when they refused to debate about gender equality because they believed gay people should be “burned in hell.” A politically queer male who had grown up Christian told his family and friends that using the word gay as an insult was as bad as using the n-word. One junior female said that for white queer people, her race overshadowed her queer sexuality, forcing her to “come out” to white queer people in the university community.

### **Sociopolitical Beliefs and Same Group Member Connection**

Nearly all participants said that their views on politics and social issues about race, gender, and sexuality distanced or affirmed their group membership with friends, family, and their larger social group. Most participants believed that if in a class with predominantly Black peers, issues about race, slavery, politics, and racism would be “easier to talk about” and that there would be a “shared commonality” of opinions and experiences dealing with race and racism. Some participants said that their political and social opinions distanced them from their friends, family, and community causing them to avoid certain topics or become silent. During the question-and-answer session after a Spike Lee lecture, a male Ph.D. student asked whether Mr.

Lee still supported President Obama given “all the foul shit Obama’s been doing” in terms of prisoners of war and other policies. The audience of 950 predominantly Black people responded with a litany of verbal disapproval of his question. The participant said,

For days, I was just like, ‘*man!*’ And because you identify, for good or for, for good and for bad, with this community. And when you offer that kind of opinion, and when you see that people aren’t lovin’ you at least for that position, it’s just like, ‘*damn---uunh!*’*[sic]*’ It hits you hard. So then I was silent for about two to four days.

A male senior participant hid his queer identity from his parents but said they were aware of his political activism. He avoided conversations about sexuality with his family to avoid “shutting them out” particularly because his mother was a devout Christian. One male senior said that his beliefs in gender equality, structural racism, and social oppression countered beliefs held by family members, especially members who were homophobic. However, the participant’s friends enjoyed hearing about his new sociopolitical views. He said,

Um, my friends, my friends take it, they love it. A lot of my friends are from \_\_\_\_\_  
[city of origin], they just from the’ *hood*. They don’t, they didn’t come to college. They are either locked up, a lot of my friends were older than me, so um, they, they were locked up, got kids before I even *graduated* [high school]. Like, my education is like, in essence, I do it for *them*, for *they* *[sic]* kids because I know if they could, they would be here.

### **Dialect, “academic” words, and connecting to same group members**

Most participants said that using Black English Vernacular (BEV), or speaking Standard English (SE), the “Queen’s English”, or “academic language” was a way to connect or distance

from their own racial group. Participants differed in how their language related to being silent. One female decided against “assimilating” to academic language and upheld vernacular at college to remain connected to the people who were “the most important” to her. She said,

Those [people from her home town] are the people I keep in my mind when I’m taking a class, you know, those are the people that I write for, I try to relay the experiences while I’m writing, anything that I’m doing.... Most of the people I know did not make it to college, or didn’t graduate from grad school, or aren’t alive. And so now that I’m here, I’m making sure I’m still representing all of those people who are still left behind.

A Master’s participant from the Caribbean said her silences were “no more” when she returned to her home country where she could speak her dialect with her family members. She said, “Boy, when I’m home now, I just flow.”

One participant explained that because of reading about theory, becoming a critical thinker, and incorporating terms from his reading into conversations at home, he has become isolated from family and friends. This participant, a male Ph.D. student, spoke of a “separation” from family because of the terms he used that he gained from his education. He said the inability to “divorce” language from the terms used in academic texts caused a tension with friends when trying to explain what he is learning. A friend from home told him that he was making her “feel stupid” in how he spoke to her. A female senior spoke of a similar distancing because of dialect and word choice,

If I speak how I’m comfortable in, and if I speak how I am at home, I feel as though it wouldn’t get me very far in academia, because it’s seen as not appropriate or not academic. Um, and when I’m at *home*, I find it that, if I speak how I speak around my friends or acquaintances *here*, then I’m perceived as a bougie [*sic*] Black girl or, I’m



tryin' to fit in, it's just a weird dynamic so I often find myself in this fringe, like in between two worlds. And I don't fully fit in between both of 'em, just kinda drifting. Four participants who grew up speaking SE felt alienated from both Black and white students in the way they spoke. Two female participants who grew up speaking the "Queen's English" were seen as acting "white" but neither being "Black enough" or "white enough." A male freshman said that whenever issues of race arose, he remained silent. He said, "I almost can't speak about issues of race. Like, just like, the merits of that, anything I might say might get discounted because I, like, talk white." This participant said that others rarely perceived him as Black based on his appearance, his clothes, and how he spoke. The other fourteen participants did not indicate that their Black race was questioned by others.

### **Qualities of Silence**

Some students said that their silence was part of a process of gaining confidence, reflecting on their surroundings, learning new information, and deciding whether others around them were open to hearing their opinion.

### **Silence for Learning**

Four participants said that their silence was how they gained knowledge and upheld a learning environment for the self and for other students. One participant said silence allowed others' comments to "resonate" with him. Another participant said that his "silence mode" was one of listening and learning to prepare him for "arguments and debates" when he felt ready. A Christian participant said that her silence helped her "listen and to learn" and reflect on whether her comments would be "beneficial" and constructive. This participant recalled a time when she spoke up to her classmates who planned a group "attack" on their professor who had "disabilities" with speech. She said,

And I remember that, that time I was like, ‘uhn unh [*sic*]. I just have to say something. I disapprove. That is not the way you guys are all, we are all grownups. And yes he is not teachin’ the way we would like him to teach, but he is a teacher and we need to give him the respect’.... I will not sit here and settle and agree for you guys to smash him down. You can ax [*sic*] him some questions, and say what’s the plan and wait. Give him the benefit of the doubt. You don’t know what he’s experience’ [*sic*].

Similarly, a Muslim participant said that her silence gave her time to reflect on whether comments would be “goal oriented towards goodness” rather than “downgrading or demeaning.” This participant also said because English was her second language, when becoming “emotional” her silence helped her find eloquent words to describe her thoughts and feelings.

One female participant recalled a moment when her silence on the topic of indigenous women’s rights gave her a new perspective on interactions between her and her peers. She wondered if her “role” as an educator on issues about people of color lead her classmates to become silent. She further wondered whether she intimidated peers because she was “the authority” on issues relating to people of color.

Four female participants challenged themselves to speak more in class to value their own opinions. One participant quoted writer and activist Audre Lorde as an inspiration for speaking her mind saying, “it’s better to speak and be misunderstood than not speak at all” and another participant decided to be the first student to speak in her higher level seminar so as not to “retreat into silence.” Another said that it was important for her to “hear herself speak.”

### **Imposed Silence**

Eight participants said social forces such as race and culture imposed silence on them. A female junior reflected on a class where she perceived that white students had not ever felt

silenced after participating in an activity called “Cross the Line.” She said it’s “madness that there’s even a little bit of silence going on” in her life. A male senior said that at a work meeting, anticipation of being overlooked by others, and “trampled on” made him fearful to share his experiences about race. A female Master’s student who had grown up in the Caribbean said that as a child the “culture” did not give her the opportunity to speak and express her “likes and dislikes.” Three participants said that messages from teachers and professors caused them to feel insecure in their abilities. A male senior said growing up he was considered a “bad kid” and his teachers told him that his lack of “self-control” led to his outspokenness. Because his teachers viewed him negatively, he developed a “silent personality,” which led to enduring insecurities about “who I am as a person.” When asked to name her silence, a senior spoke of social forces,

I don’t know what I would call it, or what language I would use. Um, I think it would definitely have the words exploitation, and, and validness, I don’t even think that’s a word, but I would make it a word (laughs). Um, I definitely think I would talk about exploitation. Um, because, I don’t know. I have to think about that one. I take that back. Can I take that back? I have to think about that. (Pause). Oppression of the body, that’s what I would call it. Oppression of the body.

A male Master’s student studying in a diverse program said his silence was unrelated to being a Black man and was rather a way for him to keep “balance.” However, in his job, particularly as a new employee, race stereotypes of Black men as combative and aggressive were reasons he was uncharacteristically “tame.” A female participant reflected on her childhood being Black in a predominantly white elementary school where her teacher disliked her and expected her to do poorly on a standardized test because she was Black. Although the participant scored in the top 5% in the test, she said,

If I ever did well in school it was either because my mom instilled in me a love of learning, or because I just didn't want to be in the bottom. (Laughs). But it was never because I had any, um, well, 'You can do it and you're a smart girl.' It was just kind of like, you know, so that's, that's been my, so for me, I've always kind of questioned, am I smart enough?... even if I might have something relevant to contribute, or something intelligent to contribute, or something interesting to say, or provide my own perspective, I always, in the back of my mind I'm questioning, 'Am I smart as these kids? Am I supposed to *be* here? I mean, *physics*? What the hell was I thinking?' (Laughs).

### **Strategic Silence**

Three participants considered silence, at least at one point in time, a way to keep from being intruded upon. A female senior said that in the past her silence was her "rebellion," a freshman male described his silence as "a guardrail" that protected him from people thinking he was "dumb" for saying something that was "not thought out well," and a male senior said in the past his silence was his "defense."

### **Bodily Responses to Silence**

Many participants said their bodies responded to their imposed or self-selected silences. A male senior said that when feeling unheard or disconnected from peers or when disagreeing with racist and sexist perspectives heard in class, he spoke briefly, he frowned, and slouched in his seat. When rebutted by a professor, a male participant remained silent for the rest of class, and his peers later told him he looked like he'd been "hit with a brick." A male freshman said that when he wore a uniform in his high school he spoke more to keep his collar from choking him, but in his college without uniforms he felt more relaxed to "just sit there and listen." A male freshman said that his limited "physical vocabulary" and avoidance of making eye contact

caused conversations to be awkward. He said, “It’s like mostly just awkward things, like I have trouble making eye contact, and that, like, in a way is silence.”

Experiences of racism caused a female sophomore to feel “shut down” and another female junior to feel “tight and constrained.” A female senior recalled how a friend’s racist mother directed “abhorrent energy” towards her and how she felt the same “cold look” coming from white people of “older generations.” She described her bodily responses to their racism,

I would shut down in the sense of maybe not looking up at them because I don’t wanna feel that energy, or it’ll be like, I’ll keep my words to myself...I don’t feel like sitting up straight, I don’t feel like smiling, I don’t feel like having my eyes wide with joy because I feel like all of that is shut down. So I guess it silences my energy and you can tell by looking at my body.

### **Summary**

In summary, participants from a wide range of demographic backgrounds provided rich narratives on their classroom silence and silence in their family and social lives. Most participants perceived that a culture of competitiveness, academic knowledge over personal knowledge, being in the minority, and speaking properly often led to feelings of intimidation and discomfort to express opinions in class. Some participants, however, spoke out against blatant race, religious, gender, and heterosexist discrimination. Most participants felt uncomfortable speaking in class because of stereotypes of Black people as “angry” and “overemotional.” Many participants negotiated appropriate silences with family and friends and often avoided expressing certain sociopolitical beliefs or using certain “academic” terms to maintain connected to their home communities. Many participants considered silence a process where they observed their surroundings, reflected on class material, listened to peers’ perspectives, and protected

themselves from stereotypes or judgment. Some participants perceived that past racist experiences with teachers or students led to enduring feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt in their intelligence and contributions to discussions. Many participants described corporeal responses to being silent or silenced such as passivity and low energy. The following chapter will discuss the findings and explore the interactions between the themes while analyzing the findings in relation to the demographic data collected.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory study was to describe Black students' classroom silence in predominantly white institutions (PWIs) of higher education. The study question was *How do Black students describe, explain, and understand their own classroom silence in PWIs?* This study used snowball and purposive sampling to gather 15 current college students in the northeast United States. Data was collected through in-person individual interviews. Student responses were coded and organized into themes. This chapter will be arranged according to the three themes that emerged from the findings: "Culture of Higher Education," "Social Identity and Belonging" and "Qualities of Silence." In addition to the three themes, limitations, and implications for research and social work policy will be discussed.

#### **Culture of Higher Education**

To revisit findings from this theme, all but one student perceived that being in the sociodemographic minority, learning a Eurocentric curriculum, and expecting that instructors would discourage emotions and fraught topics influenced whether they spoke out in class or were silent.

#### **Being in the Race, Gender, and Social Class Minority**

Students believed that being in the social identity minority in classes in PWIs was related to their level of comfort. This finding was consistent with past research ("Branching Out and Coming Back Together," 2010; Byrd & Sims, 1987 as cited in Ralston et al., 1991; Davis, Dias-

Bowie, Greenberg, Klukken, Pollio, Thomas & Thompson, 2004). In the current study, shy, or anxious students felt increased discomfort speaking when in the race, gender, and social class minority. This finding was also consistent with past research on Black students and communication anxiety (Byrd & Sims, 1987 as cited in Ralston et al., 1991). In the current study, responses varied on how students felt being in the sociodemographic minority related to their comfort in the classroom.

Some students said they felt uncomfortable and intimidated when in the minority, particularly when they were one of a few people in the sociodemographic minority. A few students felt no discomfort based on the demographics of the class because they considered their classes racially diverse. I think that those students who perceived that their comfort level was unrelated to being in the minority either had not previously explored their social identities, were not perceived as Black by in-group or out-group members, or were tolerant of peers' teasing about racial differences. In a similar vein, some students felt more comfortable when taught by professors of color, which was noted by past research (Davis, Dias-Bowie, Greenberg, Klukken, Pollio, Thomas & Thompson, 2004; Feagin, Vera & Imani, 1996). Perhaps students felt a connection based on shared experience with professors of color and therefore felt emotionally comfortable. Students who felt more comfortable with professors of color may have perceived that professors of color were committed to "going the extra distance" (Moore & Toliver, 2010, p. 941) for Black students, had high expectations of Black students' academic abilities, (Rowser, 1994) and developed kin-like relations with Black students (Guffrida, 2005).

### **Racism in class**

Many students spoke about how racism was pervasive in the classroom at their PWI. Although students experienced racism on personal and institutional levels, students often



remained silent when observing racism. When encountering blatant racism, homophobia, and sexism, some students spoke out even at the risk of being stereotyped or judged.

Many students countered their perceptions of racial oppression in the classroom by infusing personal information and cultural perspectives from people of color into the classroom. Some participants realized that their self-selected roles as race advocates may have silenced other students but did not indicate the race of the other students. Students who took the role of educating peers and professors challenged what Morrison (2002) called the “graceful, even generous, liberal gesture” (p. 269) of ignoring race in literature and scholarship.

### **Risks of speaking out**

Some men expressed that when they objected to policies or voiced sociopolitical beliefs, they experienced various types of retaliation from professors, administrators, and staff. This finding concurred with past research on passive submissive and assertive styles (Haralson, 1995), where Black males in PWIs perceived that professors lowered their grades because they had spoken out in class. Women stated that they were often ignored or rebuffed, rather than retaliated against when speaking out against discrimination. I think a reason for the gendered treatment of students’ outspokenness may have reflected different ways men and women portrayed their emotions. Women in the current study spoke of feeling pressured by stereotypes of the “angry Black woman” to appear unthreatening and pleasant. Some men in the study spoke of being openly angry, bored, or shocked, and reported no efforts to curtail their expressions of strong negative emotions. Peers and professors may also have treated Black men and women differently because of gender stereotypes of Black men as violent and aggressive and Black women as “too loud.” These gendered stereotypes were found in past studies of school age Black children (Brown, 2009; Lei, 2003; Morris, 2007).

## **Tokenism**

Consistent with past research (Adams, 2005; hooks, 1994; Strayhorn, 2011), some students refused to speak in class as a representative of their race. Some participants perceived that race stereotypes held by others were inevitable and therefore silence served a protective function. In line with previous studies on tokenism, Black students in this study felt angered and silenced when being called on to “represent their race.” However, Black students who made the *choice* to educate others about their race felt empowered, which was found in past research (“Branching Out and Coming Back Together,” 2010; Harper, 2007; Strayhorn, 2011). Likewise, students in this study who chose to be silent due to personal values felt comfortable in their silence but when forced into silence due to oppression, they felt angry, exhausted, and fearful.

## **Can We Talk About Race, Class, Gender---and Religion?**

This study confirmed past research findings that students spoke more in classes when discussing race, gender, class, and other social identities (Adams, 2005; hooks, 1994; Lee, 2006, Sealey-Ruiz, 2007). In a departure from the past literature, some students perceived that religion had no place in academia and were silent when religion arose in class and with friends. A Muslim participant spoke more to friends and coworkers after 9/11 but not more in class. Her response may have reflected her background as a Somali woman because at a young age, family members instilled in her a cultural pride in standing up for herself when others told her she was unimportant. In the current sociopolitical climate of hostility towards Muslims post 9/11, speaking out against Islamophobia is especially risky. I imagine that many Black Muslim women might have responded to Islamophobia with silence as a self-protection, which was consistent with research on Muslim women of color in the United Kingdom (Housee, 2010).

### **Speaking “improper” and “unacademic” English**

Nearly a third of participants noted that being in an environment where they could not understand many of the words of professors intimidated them. Only one said that her way of speaking deterred her from speaking in class. Here I note that in the literature reviewed, definitions of what constitutes Black English Vernacular (BEV) were insufficient. Students in this study who reported being BEV-speakers suggested that BEV included slang and vocabulary that few white people comprehended.

Past research showed that Black and white students viewed BEV-speakers as unfriendly (Koch, Gross, & Kolts, 2001), uneducated (Robinson, 1996), and incompetent (Payne, Downing, & Fleming, 2000). Interestingly, past research neglected to include whether the raters of BEV were themselves BEV-speaking students. Self-identified BEV-speakers in this study said they retained their vernacular to remain connected to their racial and ethnic communities. However, BEV-speakers found tensions with using vernacular among students of color, white people in academia, and in social interactions. Some of the students noted incidents in college when they themselves had been criticized by others of the same race for speaking BEV. These incidents reflect the intra-community dialogue about how speaking Standard English (SE) may assist in upward mobility for Black people, while disconnecting Black people from their community (Ogbu, 2004). The question for future research in education to consider is, can BEV take place in the classroom, and can it be considered a medium of communication alongside SE? The topic of including BEV into classrooms is controversial. Advocates for classroom BEV argued that SE reading and writing improved when teachers developed lessons that compared SE and BEV. Further, supporters believed that inclusion of BEV upheld multicultural values that increased BEV-speaking children’s academic success and self-confidence (Lee, 2006; Piestrup, 1973;

Whitney, 2005). Opponents contended that when teachers incorporated spoken BEV or taught using BEV in the classroom, they were holding low standards for Black students and blocking them from gaining social success in a SE-speaking world (Holman, 1997).

In the current study, students who had grown up poor or lower middle class were often reluctant to speak because they perceived they lacked “middle class verbosity” (Lavob, 1994) which they believed peers and professors equated with intelligence and knowledge. Lower income students were also aware that their inability to “speak the language” of academia reflected inadequate resources in their communities of origin due to poverty. However, the literature reviewed in this thesis seldom addressed how microaggressions (Caplan, 2011; Solorzano et al., 2001; Sue et al., 2009) towards poor and lower class Black people caused feelings of inadequacy in academic ability, silencing, and social alienation.

### **Knowledge, intelligence, and social status**

Many students said, in agreement with past research (Adams, 2005; hooks, 1994; Lee, 2006, Sealey-Ruiz, 2007), that when material reflected their personal identities, they spoke more in class. In a departure from past research, some students in the current study felt distant from cultural norms of competitiveness and self-importance that was a successful practice for being seen as intelligent. Women particularly noted that they felt intimidated to speak when other students took up “the space.” Because some women perceived that white male students were argumentative and dominating in the classroom but perceived men of color as silent or monosyllabic in discussions, it seems likely that Black women perceived men of the dominant culture as more intimidating than Black men.

Graduate students noted competitiveness among peers and perceived that professors favored Ph.D. students over Master’s students. I imagine that Ph.D. and Master’s students of

color develop a new layer of identity. Black students in Master's and Doctorate programs may need to define themselves either as superior to other students or as "the Blackest" in order to receive affirmation of their identity and academic ability.

### **Personal knowledge and book knowledge**

Consistent with past research (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1994), some students perceived that professors and peers disputed their cultural and experience-based beliefs. A student who was told her opinion was "wrong" no longer spoke in class afterward. However, it was unclear whether the person's objection to her point was an acceptable part of classroom discussion and debate or whether she was discounted because of racism.

### **Sexism in Class**

Both male and female students reported feeling uncomfortable hearing sexist and sadistic language and views from peers and professors. Surprisingly, none of the females in the study recounted being targets of explicitly sexist treatment. This may be because female students viewed their experiences as intersections of race, class, and gender and therefore located discrimination as an assault on the combined identity of being Black, poor, and female for example, rather than solely as a female. Although one male student spoke out against sexist material in class, most of the male students reflected on their complicity and silence when sexism occurred in class. The reason only one male said that he challenged sexism could be that he encountered more sexism than other males as a student of criminal justice where sexist thinking was pervasive. However, half the males in the study were unique because they were committed to challenging their own sexism, patriarchy, and homophobia. Not surprisingly, although two men were queer, none of them expressed challenging homophobia in the classroom. However, one male, who described himself as politically queer as opposed to sexually queer, spoke out to

his friends from home about using the word “gay” as an insult. Given the rampant homophobia in United States culture and the religiously-based and culturally-based homophobia in the Black community (Boykin, 1996; hooks, 2001), Black men’s silence on matters of homophobia in class, or of being out as queer, is characteristic.

### **Class Size**

In large lecture classes, many students remained silent even when hearing racist views. Students’ responses indicated that when their racial identity status as a minority was more intimidating the more white people there were in the class. One male mentioned feeling more comfortable sitting in a circle where he could “read” other students. His perception indicated that in larger classes that are arranged in a hierarchical fashion, emotional connection may be lost among peers. I wonder whether Black students prefer a culture of unilateral learning, group participation, circular seating, and small discussion settings over hierarchical seating, large lectures, and instruction that elicit single students to respond. For example, a researcher who studied Cherokee children observed that their classroom participation increased when the teacher allowed students to work in groups. He concluded that in Cherokee culture, children disliked the attention of speaking out in front of others and preferred being considered part of the group (Dumont, 1970).

### **Race**

#### **Danger stereotypes, being “overly sensitive,” and the “angry Black” person**

Participants in the current study confronted a variety of stereotypes, including intelligence stereotypes as well as stereotypes of emotional display. Black students perceived that peers stereotyped them when they expressed strong emotion about slavery and racism. Given the post-race climate wherein racism is ignored, Black students may have perceived that

stereotypes functioned as a way for others to dismiss their opinions. However, it is also true that since racism is, in fact, endemic in the United States society, Black students' perceptions of racism will often be accurate. One of the most disruptive and traumatizing aspects of racism is that it often leaves the victim in a place of heightened self-doubt. Citing a major study recently reported by Gates and Nettles, Caplan (2011) noted that "Due to the relative subtlety of microaggressions, students feel self-doubt and torment when someone does or says something that is not blatant hate speech but seems to be based on race or sex bias or both" (p.2). It is my belief that the term microaggressions, a term coined by Pierce (1970), describe the subtle race stereotypes that silenced Black people in the current study. Under Pierce's definition, microaggressions are subtle mistreatments that ignore, tyrannize, and terrorize people of minority status.

### **Social Identity and Belonging**

This theme captured how many of the participants said that their race, gender, social class, and sexual orientation influenced what and how they communicated with family and friends.

### **Gender and Sexual Orientation**

The two women in all-female colleges had different experiences of how silence related to their gender. One woman noted that the compounding oppression of being Black and a woman often kept her from speaking in class. The other woman spoke out more to distinguish her race and social class from the "liberal umbrella" that she perceived allowed her peers to ignore race and class differences.

## **Sociopolitical Beliefs and Same Group Member Connection**

Most students anticipated feeling calmer, happier, and more accepted if they were with students of the same social identity which was consistent with past research (Davis et al., 2004). The finding that two students believed that when among other Black students they encountered microaggressions is in agreement with past research on Historically Black Universities and Colleges contending with classism and colorism (Johnson-Bailey, 2001). This point is very important as many studies erroneously perceive Black communities as homogeneous and therefore neglect the complex in-group biases including rampant homophobia, sexism, colorism, and internalized racism that are present.

Perhaps the students who were attracted to the study were specifically dedicated to understanding their own racial identity and therefore represented a high stage of racial development. In the current study, many students from a particular public university had participated in a performance group for women of color developed by the university. These women were unique in that they had developed deep insights into how race, class, gender, and sexual orientation intersected in their experiences.

### **Dialect, academic words, and connecting to same group members**

Although all students connected to their Black identity, some students felt inhibited from expressing their opinions as a Black person because their dialect, word choice, beliefs, and upbringing fell outside of what they perceived was “stereotypical” Black culture. Contrary to past research, all students who “spoke white” nevertheless felt connected to their Black identity (Ogbu, 2004) and felt, like the other participants, that they would be more comfortable speaking in class if in the racial majority.



## **Qualities of Silence**

In this theme, students spoke about how silence helped them gain confidence in their abilities, reflect on their surroundings, and learn new information.

### **Silence for Learning**

The varied meanings students attached to their silence mimicked the broad sociocultural understandings of silence found in past research (Li Li, 2004). For some students in this thesis study, silence reflected religious values of right speech and action and humility, while for other students, self-silencing served to maintain social cohesion within the classroom. Inherent in the beneficial aspects of student silence is the element of choice. I believe students who linked their silence to contemplation and self-inquiry were describing what Quashie (lecture, June 4, 2012) termed “quiet.” According to Quashie, unlike silence which connotes resistance, a person’s state of quiet serves as a metaphorical understanding of their inner desires, fears, and hopes.

### **Imposed Silence**

Some students’ racist childhood teachers caused them to doubt their intelligence and self-worth. For these students, their silence exemplified insecurities about whether they were a valuable contributor to the classroom. Many of the students saw their engagement in social groups and organizations instrumental in building their self-confidence to speak in classes, which augmented past research (Harper, 2007; Strayhorn, 2011).

### **Bodily Responses to Silence**

Regarding silence due to racism, students’ responses such as feeling shut down, angry, and hopeless were consistent with past research on microaggressions (Solarzano, Ceja, & Yasso, 2001; Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009). One participant noted that a professor’s body language impacted her silence, for example rolling of the eyes and overlooking her raised

hand, which was also consistent with past research on microaggressions (Carter, 2007; Pierce, 1970; Sue et al.). In the current study, the students' narrative leaves open questions about whether the professor's behavior was an attempt to move the lesson forward or to avoid uncomfortable discussions about race.

Students who anticipated a quality difference in silence among people of the same social identity may have been describing a feeling of support of their bodies and minds. Future research might explore the emotional and nervous system changes students of color experience when in classrooms with other students of color. Differences on minority status stress (stressors related to racial and ethnic background including discrimination, intergroup conflict, and pressures to maintain loyalty with in-group members) were found among Black students in PWIs and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Black students reported lower minority status stress levels in HBCUs than PWIs. The study also found that, across institution type, Black students who denied or downplayed racism reported lower levels of stress. Although this study is inadequate in assessing biochemical components of stress, the findings indicate there are stress level differences for Black students in PWIs and Black students in HBCUs.

### **Research Implications**

One participant in this thesis explained that when being taught racist or sexist material he “clicks outta class” meaning he reached a threshold where he no longer paid attention. Research has proposed a link between the instruction of culturally relevant material and increased participation for students of color. Future studies might conduct comparative research across a variety of institutional settings such as PWIs with varying percentages of students of color and HBCUs. These comparative studies would explore whether Black students' exposure to classes

focused on critical feminist and critical race concepts relate to Black students' level of coping with racism, increased ethnic pride, and speaking out in class.

Almost all of the participants in the current study had analyzed, questioned, and challenged their classroom silence. Gathering a larger sample from universities across the country would open the study to those who were unaware of their silence and perhaps unable to cope with being silenced. Because the sample was non-clinical, future research may gain a deeper understanding of silence by interviewing counselors and professors about Black students at risk of failing out of the institution.

Li Li (2004) argued that for oppressed people, in addition to not speaking, silence includes being unheard. Although some participants risked social judgment and career and academic demotion when speaking out against gross discrimination, many participants' fear of being misunderstood, judged, stereotyped, and unheard kept them silent. A question to consider is, what are the social identity forces enacted by white people when they deny the experiences of people of color and refuse to hear perspectives about racism, white-domination, and sexism? Certainly, the problem of being silenced impacts all students' learning, because if any student, regardless of race, feels uncomfortable speaking, the entire class loses an opportunity to learn. So, can students of other races listen to the voices of Black students? And can Black students allow peers to blunder through discussions of race, or will the perceived ignorance of peers cause Black students to remain silent or leave the institution itself? Another consideration is to explore how among Black people, silencing occurs through in-group oppression. Participants in the study recognized that colorism, pervasive stereotypes of "authentic Blackness," classism, homophobia, and sexism were issues students faced among other people of color.

Some participants placed their arguments in direct opposition to “mainstream” views, meaning perspectives of white dominance and also perspectives of white male peers. An area of future exploration might address Black students’ racial melancholia or failure to assimilate into dominant white male culture. Eng and Han (2000) argued that for people of color, the impossibility of achieving identification with white culture becomes internalized which could lead to the “denigration and ruination of self-esteem” and the “psychic erasure of one’s identity-- racial, sexual, or gender identity, for example” (p.672). One student noted an intergenerational silence passed on by a line of men in his family, showing the importance of studying historical silencing to understand Black males’ classroom silence. Cultural trauma, including messages about slavery and oppression passed over generations through text books and family narratives may provide an explanation for Black students’ silence. Smelser (as cited in Everson, 2001) defined cultural trauma as,

a memory accepted and publicly given credence by a relevant membership group and evoking an event or situation which is (a) laden with negative affect (b) represented as indelible, and (c) regarded as threatening a society’s existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions. (p. 2)

Since a majority of participants perceived that they shared a “common experience” with Black people, including ideas about slavery, politics, and history, Black students may collectively be experiencing cultural trauma.

### **Implications for Program Development and Social Policy**

In the current study, Black students described that learning academic material from various sociocultural perspectives, analyzing history through a lens of racism and sexism, and being among students of diverse sociodemographic backgrounds helped them feel comfortable

speaking in class. These student descriptions support the current tenets of multicultural education, specifically pluralist multicultural curriculum instruction and inclusive campus policies that counter racism, sexism, and microaggressions.

### **Pluralist Multicultural Curriculum**

I urge college and university presidents, deans, faculty, and curriculum councils to develop and mandate the instruction of multicultural curriculum. Faculty and staff must be trained in implementing multicultural curriculums to avoid pitfalls of this new instruction such as tokenizing people of color and causing divisiveness among students (Blum, 1993). This curriculum must reflect the historical and cultural narratives from major ethnic and racial groups in the United States. In addition, I argue that multicultural curriculum must call for the study and inclusion of many dialects and languages, including Black English Vernacular, to enhance learning for all students. Colleges and universities must require that all students take an annual course on culture, ethnicity, power, and privilege. Several studies highlight how multicultural curriculum, or content integration, helped students' critical thinking skills by exploring their complex identities (Adams, 2005; Zirkel, 2008). Studies (Adams, 2005; Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004; Hurtado, 2005; Nagda, Kim, & Truelove, 2004) have indicated that white students who took required diversity courses showed positive gains in learning and complex thinking, refuting the claim that multicultural education does not benefit white students. Critics must also recognize that pluralistic multiculturalism supports respect for *all* cultures. Therefore, white students' own understanding of their race identity will be developed and perspectives of the sociocultural diversity among white people will be studied (Abrams & Gibson, 2007).

According to Blum (1997) and Coggins and Campbell (2008), pluralist education strives to teach individuals how to interact, learn, and live with others in a culturally pluralistic society

and world, which upholds civic values of tolerance, democracy, and respect. Therefore, pluralism in education aims to develop curriculum that reflects the varied historical experiences of all ethnic groups that exist in society. Hilliard (1991) argued that curriculum that reflects truth through exposing multiple perspectives is, in essence, a pluralistic curriculum. He says,

The primary goal of a pluralistic curriculum process is to present a truthful and meaningful rendition of the whole human experience. This is not a matter of ethnic quotas in the curriculum for balance; it is purely and simply a question of validity.

Ultimately, if the curriculum is centered in truth, it will be pluralistic, for the simple fact is that human culture is the product of the struggles of all humanity, not the possession of a single racial or ethnic group. (p.13)

Researchers contend that curriculum exploring narratives from Native American, African American, Asian American, and other minorities upholds the “truth” and sets the historical record straight (Blum, 1997; Hidalgo et al., n.d.). Hidalgo et al. further hold that pluralist education, in contrast to Western traditionalism, defines knowledge as a democratic representation of all members and not a static, singular concept held by a minority of the population. An example of local policy on multiculturalism was Montana’s recent passage of the Indian Education for All Act (Carjuzaa, Jetty, Munson, & Veltkamp, 2010). This act mandates that Native American history and culture is included into curriculum to uphold a quality, equitable, and socially just education. The educational resources implemented into the curriculum were developed in collaboration with Native American tribes, tribal colleges, and tribal governments. Stakeholders included not only Native American students and parents but non-Native American students as well. Superintendent of Public Instruction, Denise Juneau said, “This constitutional, ethical, and moral obligation, known as Indian Education for All, is not only

for Indian students. In fact, its principal intent is that non-Indian students gain a richer understanding of our State's history and contemporary life" (p. 3).

In contrast to pluralism, the Afrocentric approach centers on Africa's role in the development of Western civilization while the Western traditionalist approach upholds the canon of white-male dominated literature and scholarship. I argue that pluralistic multicultural curriculum will be more effective and unilaterally beneficial than curriculum based on Afrocentric or Western traditionalist approaches. Scholar and novelist Tony Morrison (2002) likewise posits that curriculum must do more than replace Eurocentric scholarship with Afrocentric scholarship and must rather critically deconstruct whiteness in history and literature. Similarly, Blum (2007) calls for educators who develop and teach multicultural curriculum to focus on anti-racism and the impacts of systematic exclusion of minority groups by those in power to avoid divisiveness and tokenism.

### **University Programs and Policies for Inclusion of Minority Students**

Administration, staff, and faculty who are concerned with maintaining an inclusive, hate-free, and bias-free campus must be ready to implement programs to protect students of color and other minorities from harassment, discrimination, and microaggressions. I offer examples of two universities that implemented successful policy and program changes to uphold a climate that respects diversity and inclusion.

University California-Davis' Health System Framework for Diversity (2011) championed by the vice chancellor, associate dean, the student diversity director, and other administrators developed a task force aimed at retaining and recruiting faculty, staff, and students from varying sociodemographic backgrounds, and preventing mistreatment and violence. The task force envisioned developing a Center for Culture and Inclusion to monitor the

campus for safety through its non-hate mission by educating staff about racial profiling and sexual harassment. Another example of inspiring program initiatives was reported in an article by Caplan (2011). Louis Gates, Jr. and Nettles studied 200 mostly students of color across four universities and found high instances of race and sex microaggressions. After presenting the findings to Missouri State University, the President of the university made racial diversity and inclusion an institutional priority and began to implement diversity initiatives. The President and top-level cabinet were trained through workshops on inclusion, held cross-campus discussions of white privilege, and created a theater group on racism and sexism to perform for faculty and students.

In summary, Black students and students of all ethnic backgrounds will benefit from multicultural curriculum taught from a pluralistic standpoint. To ensure the complete benefits of multicultural education such as prejudice reduction, intergroup dialogue, and critical thinking skills, university administrators, boards, and governing groups must train faculty on implementing the principles of multicultural education. Finally, universities must implement policies that enhance the campus climate's inclusiveness through intergroup discussions, passing anti-hate policies, and training all levels of administration in how to create a learning environment where all students feel respected, valued, and heard.

### **Limitations**

Limitations of the study were recruiting students from snowball sampling, having a small sample, and having the sample drawn from a small number of colleges and universities. Sampling limitations also included that students with disabilities and of various body sizes were not specifically recruited. Furthermore, participants in the study had "tolerated" being in a PWI, which may show biases that may have been avoided in a larger, quantitative study. I am aware



that my recruitment of people who identify as “Black” may have yielded a population with specific political stances, and social experiences. If I had recruited people using the term “people with African ancestry,” I may have enlisted light-skinned Black people who “pass as white” or mixed-race students to participate. One third of the sample came from the same university, which may have impacted the results of the study, as the university’s classroom structures and courses may have yielded similar experiences. Lastly, one question about the meaning of silence was added after the fourth interview which may have affected the results.

### **Conclusion**

The study of Black students’ classroom silence in PWIs was an important undertaking for me. As a mixed race, Black woman of color who has felt silenced in classrooms, I hoped to capture the breadth of experiences among students who had felt silenced. I aspired to draw attention to the subtle silencing of Black students that often goes unnoticed by peers and by professors. Responses yielded some surprising findings. I had not anticipated that stereotype threat would be a common reason for students to feel reluctant to speak out against racism. I was saddened to hear that students perceived their professors as passive when racist, homophobic, and sexist comments were made by peers. I was also surprised that many students believed professors used oppressive language and taught white-centered material without critically exploring the implications of a one-sided perspective.

Policy makers and educators must debate how to bring people of various racial backgrounds, experiences, and education levels into a learning environment where each student can reap the benefits of all scholastic and extracurricular opportunities. Black students also have a task of being open to having their opinions and experiences challenged, for this is the rigorous nature of learning in higher education. However, being a target of race stereotypes, racism, and

microaggressions should never be a tolerated condition at a PWI. I argue that learning about different identities and cultures, a concept paramount in multicultural education, can be achieved through learning the linguistic, psychic, and intellectual experiences of people from varying social backgrounds. But when institutions uphold the concept of knowledge synonymously with white supremacist ideas of what culture is, and ignore the narratives of people of color, history and culture is not only grossly inaccurate, but experiences of people of color are homogenized into a single perspective. Higher education institutions must be called on to value the diverse perspectives of all students and to champion inclusive policies and practices that will support the intellectual, emotional, and physical safety of all students.

## References

- Abrams, L. S., & Gibson, P. (2007). Reframing multicultural education: Teaching white privilege in social work curriculum. *Journal of Social Work Education, 43*(1), 147-160.
- Adams, T. A. (2005). Establishing intellectual space for Black students in predominantly white universities through Black studies. *Negro Educational Review, 56*(4), 285-299. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com.libproxy.smith.edu:2048/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=20477093&site=ehost-live>
- Anastas, J. W. (1999). *Research design for social work and the human services (2nd ed.)*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Anderson, G. M., Daugherty, E. J. B., & Corrigan, D. M. (2005). The search for a critical mass of minority students: Affirmative action and diversity at highly selective universities and colleges. *Good Society Journal, 14*(3), 51-57. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=20919760&site=ehost-live>
- Beck, A.T., Ward, C.H., Mendelson, M., Mock, J., & Erbaugh, J. (1961). An inventory for measuring depression. *Archives of General Psychiatry, 4*, 561-571.
- Blum, L. (n.d.). *Multicultural education as a values education*. Retrieved from Working Papers: Harvard Project on Schooling and Children.
- Bowman, P.J., & Smith, W.A. (2002). The racial crisis in American higher education: Continuing challenges for the twenty-first century. In W.A. Smith, P.G. Altbach, & K. Lomotey (Eds.), *Racial ideology in the campus community: Emerging cross-ethnic differences and challenges* (pp.103-120). State University of New York Press.

- Boykin, K. (2005). *Beyond the down low: Sex, lies, and denial in Black America*. New York, NY: Carroll & Graf.
- Branching out and coming back together: Exploring the undergraduate experiences of young Black women. (2010). *Harvard Educational Review*, 80(1), 61-74. Retrieved from <http://www.metapress.com.libproxy.smith.edu:2048/content/j71j1882133582p7/?p=5136dc20a31246dcb0ae1448d3d3a662&pi=0>
- Brown, A. L. (2009). "Brothers gonna work it out:" Understanding the pedagogic performance of African American male teachers working with African American male students. *Urban Review: Issues and Ideas in Public Education*, 41(5), 416-435. doi:10.1007/s11256-008-0116-8
- Caplan, P. J. (2011). We do not live in a postracial, postfeminist world: This is news? *Psychology Today*. Retrieved from <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/science-isnt-golden/201104/we-do-not-live-in-postracial-postfeminist-world-is-news>
- Carjuzaa, J., Jetty, M., Munson, M., & Veltkamp, T. (2010). Montana's Indian education for all: Applying multicultural education theory. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 12(4), 192-198.
- Carr, J. G., Gilroy, F. D., & Sherman, M. F. (1996). Silencing the self and depression among women: The moderating role of race. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 20(3), 375-392. doi:10.1111/j.1471-6402.1996.tb00306.x
- Carter, D.J. (2007). Why the Black kids sit together at the stairs: The role of identity affirming counter-spaces in a predominantly white high school. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 76(4), 542-554. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com.libproxy.smith.edu:2048/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eax&AN=508007943&site=ehost-live>

- Carter, R. T., & Reynolds, A. L. (2011). Race-related stress, racial identity status attitudes, and emotional reactions of Black Americans. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 17*(2), 156-162. doi:10.1037/a0023358
- Chavez, R.C., & O'Donnell, J. (1998). *Speaking the unpleasant: The politics of (non) engagement in the multicultural education terrain*. Albany: State of New York Press.
- Coggins, P., & Campbell, S. D. (2008). Using cultural competence to close the achievement gap. *Journal of Pan African Studies, 2*(4), 44-59.
- Cole, D., Bennett, C., & Thompson, J. (2003). Multicultural teacher education: Implications for critical mass and all-minority classes at a predominantly white university. *Journal of Classroom Interaction, 38*(1), 17-28. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ672340&site=ehost-live>
- Crockett, W.H. (1965). Cognitive complexity and impression formation. In B.A. Maher (Ed.), *Progress in Experimental Personality Research* (pp. 47-90). New York, NY: Academic Press.
- Cross, W. E., Jr. (1991). *Shades of black: Diversity in African American identity*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Crowne, D.P., & Marlowe, D. (1960). A new scale of social desirability independent of psychopathology. *Journal of Consulting Psychology, 24*, 349-354.
- Daiby, D. (1972). The African element in American English. In T. Kochman (Ed.), *Rappin' and 'stylin' out: Communication in urban Black America* (pp. 170–188). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

- Davis, M., Dias-Bowie, Y., Greenberg, K., Klukken, G., Pollio, H. R., Thomas, S. P., & Thompson, C. L. (2004). "A fly in the buttermilk": Descriptions of university life by successful Black undergraduate students at a predominately white southeastern university. *Journal of Higher Education*, 75(4), 420. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com.libproxy.smith.edu:2048/>
- Dedoose (Version 4.2.83) [Computer Software]. Los Angeles, CA: Sociocultural Research Consultants, LLC.
- Discourse in the classroom (2006). In U. Ammon, N. Dittmar, & K.J. Mattheier (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics: An international handbook of the science of language and society* (2nd ed., pp. 2351-2366). Berlin, Germany: de Gruyter.
- Dumont, R.V. (1972). Learning English and how to be silent: Studies in Sioux and Cherokee classrooms. In C. Cazden, V.P.Johns, & D.Hymes (Eds.), *Functions of language in the classroom* (pp.29-62). MA: Cambridge University Press.
- Eng, D. L., & Han, S. (2000). A dialogue on racial melancholia. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 10(4), 667-700.
- Feagin, J. R., Vera, H., & Imani, N. (1996). *The agony of education: Black students at white colleges and universities*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Foley, D.E. (1996). The silent Indian as a cultural production. In B. Levinson, D. Foley, & D. Holland (Eds.), *The cultural production of a person: Critical ethnographies of school and local pride* (pp.79-92). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Fordham, S. (1993). 'Those loud Black girls': (Black) women, silence, and gender 'passing' in the academy. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 24(1), 3-32.  
doi: 10.1525/aeq.1993.24.1.05x1736t

- Fries-Britt, S.L. & Turner, B. (2001). Facing stereotypes: A case study of Black students on a white campus. *Journal of College Student Development*, 42(5), 420-429.
- Galassi, J. P., DeLo, J. S., Galassi, M. D., & Bastien, S. (1974). The College Self-Expression scale: A measure of assertiveness. *Behavior Therapy*, 5(2), 165-171. doi:10.1016/S0005-7894(74)80131-0
- Gee, J.P. (1996). *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourse*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Gilmore, P. (1985). Silence and sulking: Emotional displays in the classroom. In D. Tannen & M. Saville-Troike (Eds.), *Perspectives on Silence* (pp.139-162).Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Glatzmaier, L., Myers, M., & Bordogna, M. A. (2000). *American Indians' construction of cultural identity*. (Research Report No. 143). Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED454011&site=ehost-live>
- Gomez, M. R. (1990). Biculturalism and subjective mental health among Cuban Americans. *Social Service Review*, 64(3), 375-389. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com.libproxy.smith.edu:2048/login.aspx?direct=true&db=swh&AN=23736&site=ehost-live>
- Greenson, R. (1961). On the silence and sounds of the analytic hour. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 9, 79-84. doi:10.1177/000306516100900105
- Guiffrida, D. (2005). Othermothering as a framework for understanding African American students' definitions of student-centered faculty. *Journal of Higher Education*, 76(6), 701-723. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/>

- Gurin, P., Nagda, B. A., & Lopez, G. (2004). The benefits of diversity in education for democratic citizenship. *Journal of Social Issues, 60*, 17–34.
- Haralson, M. R. (1995). *The Influences of gender, school year, and socioeconomic status on assertiveness for Blacks at predominantly white universities* (Report No. 143). Atlanta, GA: Georgia Educational Research Association.
- Harper, S.R. (2006). Peer support for African American male college achievement: Beyond internalized racism and the burden of ‘acting white.’ *The Journal of Men’s Studies, 14*(3), 337-358. doi:10.3149/jms.1403.337
- Harper, S. R. (2007). The effects of sorority and fraternity membership on class participation and African American student engagement in predominantly white classroom environments. *College Student Affairs Journal, 27*(1), 94-115.
- Helm, E. G., Sedlacek, W. E., & Prieto, D. O. (1998). The relationship between attitudes toward diversity and overall satisfaction of university students by race. *Journal of College Counseling, 1*(2), 111. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=5188662&site=ehost-live>
- Hidalgo, F., Chavez-Chavez, R., Ramage, J.C. (n.d.). Multicultural education landscape for reform in the twenty-first century. Retrieved from [http://education.nmsu.edu/faculty/ci/ruchavez/publications/8\\_MULTICULTURAL%20EDUCATION.htm](http://education.nmsu.edu/faculty/ci/ruchavez/publications/8_MULTICULTURAL%20EDUCATION.htm)
- Hilliard, A. G., III. (1991). Why we must pluralize the curriculum. *Educational Leadership, 49*(4), 12-16.



- Holman, K. (1997). *The Ebonics debate moves to the Senate* (Transcript). Retrieved from [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/politics/jan-june97/ebonics\\_01-23.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/politics/jan-june97/ebonics_01-23.html)
- hooks, b. (1989). *Talking back*. Boston, MA: South End Press.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- hooks, b. (2001). Homophobia. In D. Constantine-Simms (Ed.), *The greatest taboo: Homosexuality in Black communities* (pp. 64-81). Los Angeles, CA: Alyson.
- Housee, S. (2010). When silences are broken: An out of class discussion with Asian female students. *Educational Review*, 62(4), 421-434. Retrieved from <http://www.informaworld.com/openurl?genre=article&id=doi:10.1080/00131911.2010.486475>
- Hurtado, S. (2005). The next generation of diversity and intergroup relations work. *Journal of Social Issues*, 61, 595–610.
- Infante, D.A., & Wigley, C.J. (1986). Verbal aggressiveness: An interpersonal model and measure. *Communication Monographs*, 53, 61-69.
- Jack, D.C., & Dill, D. (1992). The Silencing the Self scale: Schemas of intimacy associated with depression in women. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 16, 97-106.
- Jawarski, A. & Sachdev, I. (1998). Beliefs about silence in the classroom. *Language and Education*, 12(4), 293-92. Retrieved from <http://www.cf.ac.uk/encap/resources/publications/jaworski-adam/papers/jaworski%20and%20sachdev%20language%20and%20education.pdf>
- Jensen, J.V. (1973). Communicative functions of silence. *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, 30(3), 249-257.

- John, V. P. (1972). Styles of learning-styles of teaching: Reflections on the education of Navajo children. In C.Cazden, V.P. Johns, & D.Hymes (Eds.), *Functions of language in the classroom* (pp.331-343). MA: Cambridge University Press.
- Johnson-Bailey, J.J. (2001). *Sistahs in college: Making a way out of no way*. Malabar, FL: Kreiger.
- Kingston, M.H. (1989). *Woman warrior: memoirs of a girlhood among ghosts*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Knaus, C. B. (2009). Shut up and listen: Applied critical race theory in the classroom. *Race, Ethnicity & Education*, 12(2), 133-154. doi:10.1080/13613320902995426
- Koch, L. M., Gross, A. M., & Kolts, R. (2001). Attitudes toward Black English and code switching. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 27(1), 29-42. doi: 10.1177/0095798401027001002
- Labov, W. (2004). Academic ignorance and Black intelligence. In O. Santa Ana (Ed.), *Tongue tied: The lives of multilingual children in public education* (pp. 134-152). Lanham, MD: Roman & Littlefield.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1996). Silences as weapons: Challenges of a Black professor teaching white students. *Theory into Practice*, 35, 79-85. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/>
- Lee, C. (2006). 'Every good□bye ain't gone': Analyzing the cultural underpinnings of classroom talk. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 19(3), 305-327. doi:10.1080/09518390600696729

- Lei, J.L. (2003). (Un)necessary toughness?: Those “loud Black girls” and those “quiet Asian boys.” *Anthropology Education Quarterly*, 34(2), 158-181.  
doi: 10.1525/aeq.2003.34.2.158
- Lippert, L. R., Titsworth, B. S., & Hunt, S. K. (2005). The ecology of academic risk: Relationships between communication apprehension, verbal aggression, supportive communication, and students' academic risk status. *Communication Studies*, 56(1), 1-21.  
doi:10.1080/0008957042000332223
- Loewenstein, R. M. (1956). Some remarks on the role of speech in psycho-analytic technique. *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 37(6), 460-468. doi: 10.1037/11306-017
- McCroskey, J.C., & Richmond, V.P. (1987). Willingness to communicate. In J.C. McCroskey & J.A. Daly (Eds.), *Personality and interpersonal communication* (pp. 129-156). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- McCroskey, J.C., & Young, T.J. (1981). Ethos and credibility: The construct and its measurement after three decades. *Central States Speech Journal*, 32, 24-34.
- Minh-Ha, T.T. (1990). Not you/like you: Post-colonial women and the interlocking questions of identity and difference. In G. Anzaldúa (Ed.), *Making face, making soul/Hacienda caras: Creative and critical perspectives by women of color* (pp.371-375). San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books.
- Moore, P. J., & Toliver, S. D. (2010). Intraracial dynamics of Black professors' and Black students' communication in traditionally white colleges and universities. *Journal of Black Studies*, 40(5), 932-945. doi:10.1177/002193470821107
- Morris, E. W. (2007). "Ladies" or "loudies"?: Perceptions and experiences of Black girls in classrooms. *Youth & Society*, 38(4), 490-515. Retrieved from

- <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ764901&site=ehost-live>; <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0044118X06296778>
- Morrison, T. (2002). Black matters. In P. Essed & D.T. Goldberg (Eds.), *Race critical theories* (pp. 265-282). Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Mulac, A. (1976). Assessment and application of the Revised Speech Dialect Attitudinal scale. *Communication Monographs*, 43, 238-245.
- Nagda, B., Kim, C., & Truelove, Y. (2004). Learning about difference, learning with others, learning to transgress. *Journal of Social Issues*, 60, 195–214.
- Nwoye, G. (1985). Eloquent silence among the Igbo of Nigeria. In D. Tannen, & M. Saville-Troike (Eds.), *Perspectives on silence* (pp.185-191). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Ogbu, J. U. (2004). Collective identity and the burden of "acting white" in Black history, community, and education. *Urban Review: Issues and Ideas in Public Education*, 36(1), 1-35. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ732316&site=ehost-live>; <http://dx.doi.org/10.1023/B:URRE.0000042734.83194.f6>
- Payne, K., Downing, J., & Fleming, J. C. (2000). Speaking Ebonics in a professional context: The role of ethos/source credibility and perceived sociability of the speaker. *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, 30(4), 367-83. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ622775&site=ehost-live>
- Pierce, C. (1970). Offensive mechanisms. In F. Barbour (Ed.), *The Black seventies* (pp. 265-82). Boston, MA: Porter Sargent.

- Piestrup, A. M. (1973). *Black dialect interference and accommodations of reading instruction in first grade*. (Monograph No. 4). Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED119113&site=ehost-live>
- Quashie, K. (2012, June). Quiet, blackness, and the grace of being human. *2012 Summer Lecture Series*. Symposium Conducted at Smith College School for Social Work, Northampton, MA.
- Ralston, S., & Ambler, R. (1991). Reconsidering the impact of racial differences in the college public speaking classroom on minority student communication anxiety. *Communication Reports*, 4(1), 43-50.
- Robinson, J. A. (1996). The relationship between personal characteristics and attitudes toward Black and white speakers of non-standard English. *Western Journal of Black Studies*, 20(4), 211-20. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ554855&site=ehost-live>
- Rokeach, M., Smith, P.W., & Evans, R.I. (1960). *The open and the closed mind*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Ronningstam, E. (2006). Silence: Cultural function and psychological transformation in psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic psychotherapy. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 87(5), 1277-1295. doi: 10.1516/d6w0-3e0n-mr79-j7ja
- Rowser, J. F. (1994). Teacher expectations: The forgotten variable in the retention of African American students. *College Student Journal*, 28(1), 82-87. Retrieved from

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=psyh&AN=1994-39270-001&site=ehost-live>

- Saunders, G.R. (1985). Silence and noise as emotion management styles. In D. Tannen, & M. Saville-Troike (Eds.), *Perspectives on silence* (pp.165-183). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Saville-Troike, M. (2003). Contrasts in patterns of communication. In *The Ethnography of Communication: An introduction* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., pp. 144-182). Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Schmader, T., Major, B., & Gramzow, R. H. (2001). Coping with ethnic stereotypes in the academic domain: Perceived injustice and psychological disengagement. *Journal of Social Issues*, 57(1), 93-111. doi:10.1111/0022-4537.00203
- Schultz, K. (2009). *Rethinking classroom participation: Listening to silent voices*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Sealey-Ruiz, Y. (2007). Wrapping the curriculum around their lives: Using a culturally relevant curriculum with African American adult women. *Adult Education Quarterly: A Journal of Research and Theory*, 58(1), 44-60. doi: 10.1177/0741713607305938
- Smelser, N. (2001). Cultural trauma and collective memory. In *Cultural trauma: Slavery and the formation of African American identity*, (pp.1-22). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Solarzano, D. Ceja, M. & Yosso, T. (2001). Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus climate: The experiences of African American college students. *Journal of Negro Education* 69, (1/2), 60-73. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2696265>
- Strayhorn, T. L. (2011). Singing in a foreign land: An exploratory study of gospel choir participation among African American undergraduates at a predominantly white

- institution. *Journal of College Student Development*, 52(2), 137-153.  
doi:10.1353/csd.2011.0030
- Sue, D., Lin, A.I., Torino, G.C., Capodilupo, C.M., & Rivera, D.P. (2009). Racial microaggressions and difficult dialogues on race in the classroom. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 15(2), 183-190. doi: 10.1037/a0014191
- Swim, J.K., Hyers, L.L., Cohen, L.L., Fitzgerald, D.C., & Bylsma, W.H. (2003). African American college students' experiences with everyday racism: Characteristics of and responses to these threats. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 29, 38-67. doi: 10.1177/0095798402239228
- Tannen, D. (1985). Silence, anything but. In D. Tannen & M. Saville-Troike (Eds.), *Perspectives on Silence* (pp.93-111). Norwood, N.J.: Ablex.
- Taylor, E., & Olswang, S. G. (1997). Crossing the color line: African Americans and predominantly white universities. *College Student Journal*, 31(1), 11. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com.libproxy.smith.edu:2048/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=9705042131&site=ehost-live>
- UC-Davis Health System Framework for Diversity (2011). *Excellence in people and campus climate*. Retrieved from <http://www.ucdmc.ucdavis.edu>
- Valencia, R. & S, D. (2004). Today's deficit thinking about the education of minority students. In O. Santa Ana (Ed.), *Tongue tied: The lives of multilingual children in public education* (pp. 134-152). Lanham, MD: Roman & Littlefield.
- Whitney, J. (2005). Five easy pieces: Steps toward integrating AAVE into the classroom. *English Journal*, 94(5), 64-69. doi: 10.2307/30047356

Wijeyesinghe, C. L., & Jackson, B., III., (2001). *New Perspectives on Racial Identity*

*Development: A Theoretical and Practical Anthology*. NY: New York University Press.

Zirkel, S. (2008). The influence of multicultural education practices on student outcome and intergroup relations. *Teacher College Record*, 110(6), p.1147-1181.



## Appendix A

### Letter of Informed Consent

Dear Participant,

My name is Mahajoy Laufer and I am a second year Master's in Social Work student from Smith College. The completion of a Master's thesis is required of every student as part of the program. In my MSW thesis I am focusing on Black college students at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). The purpose of the study is to explore Black students' use of silence in classrooms where they are in the racial minority in their institution. Findings of the study will be included in my thesis and it will be presented at Smith College, and may be submitted for publication.

You have been selected because you self-identify as Black in addition to various other social and personal identities, you are 18 years old or older, you are currently enrolled in a predominantly white university or college where you perceive that enrollment for students of color is less than 35%, you are English-speaking, and you are a graduate or undergraduate student.

As a participant you will be asked to fill out a brief form with personal and family information. I will also ask you several questions in an open-ended face-to-face interview. The interview will take about 60 minutes. I will tape the interview, and transcribe the interview myself at a later date. If I hire someone to help with the transcription, they will sign a confidentiality agreement.

Risks involved in participating in this study include distress when recalling interactions with faculty or other students. You may experience discomfort with questions asked, or from being tape recorded. You will not receive any monetary compensation or any reward for participating in this study. A list of mental health clinics in your area are attached to this Informed Consent form should you need services. Benefits of participation in this study include the opportunity to think about how your many identities may impact your silence in classrooms in PWIs. Your contributions may enhance research in the area of Black identity and education.

Your privacy is important to me. Confidentiality will be maintained to the fullest possible extent. Since face-to-face interviews are the methods used, confidentiality will be limited, and anonymity will not be possible. I will protect your identity by attaching a code number to your Informed Consent form; therefore your identifying information will be removed from analysis of your personal and family information, and data from the interview. I will keep the Informed Consent forms separate from interview notes, and audiotapes. I will be the only one with access to identifiable information. My research advisor will have access to your data after disguising your name. Identifiable information will not be included in potential publication of the thesis or in presentations where quotes or vignettes are used. I plan to transcribe data myself, but should another transcriber be used they will sign a consent form to ensure confidentiality.

Data such as notes, transcripts and tapes will be kept in a secure location for three years and then will be destroyed as required by federal guidelines.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you can refuse to answer any or all interview questions. You can withdraw your data from the study without penalty. You may withdraw from the study in the first three weeks after the interview. Should you withdraw, all information collected from you will be destroyed immediately.

Should you have a concern about your rights, or any aspect of the study please contact me at **(personal information deleted by Laura H. Wyman, 11/30/12)** or contact the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee at (413) 585-7974.

**YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.**

**Signature of Participant** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Researcher:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

Mahajoy Laufer  
**(personal information deleted by Laura H. Wyman, 11/30/12)**

Please keep a copy of this consent form for your records.

Thank you for your participation.

## Appendix B

### Internet Posting, Letter or Email, Talking Points

Dear (person's name),

I am a Master's Candidate for the year of 2012 at Smith College School for Social Work writing my Master's thesis on Black students' use of silence in the classroom in predominantly white institutions (PWIs). I am hoping that you may have students, friends or colleagues who may be interested in participating. Below is the announcement/flyer to forward or give to Black students you know.

Thank you for your time,

Mahajoy Laufer

**Are you a Black student who is a racial minority in  
many of your classes?  
Are there things you want to say but find it hard to speak up in class?  
Here's a chance to talk about why.**

Volunteer in this Smith College School for Social Work Master's Thesis study about Black students' use of silence in classrooms at predominantly white institutions (PWIs).

Eligible participants will:

Be English speaking

Consider Black one of their identities

Be 18 or over

Be currently enrolled in a higher educational institute that is a PWI, meaning they perceive enrollment for students of color at their college or university is less than 35%.

Meet one-on-one with the interviewer for 45min-1hr at a time and place convenient to both parties.

Those interested please contact Mahajoy Laufer, Master's Candidate 2012 Smith College School For Social Work for a consent letter, and for more information. **(personal information deleted by Laura H. Wyman, 11/30/12)**

Please pass the information on to whomever you think might be interested in participating in this study.

Thank you

## Appendix C

### Data Collection Instruments

#### Demographic Questionnaire

1. Describe your race/ethnicity

---

---

2. Circle your gender: male female transgender, gender nonconforming, other
3. Circle your sexual orientation: heterosexual, bisexual, transexual, asexual, gay, lesbian, queer, other (describe)\_\_\_\_\_
4. How old are you: \_\_\_\_\_
5. What is your major: \_\_\_\_\_
6. What level are you at your institution? Circle: Undergrad Graduate/Master's Graduate/Ph D
7. Year of study (For example Sophomore, or 2nd year out of 4 years Master's student).

---

8. What city and state did you grow up in (List as many as apply)

---

9. Which describes your family of origin's social class, circle one. Poor/Lower Middle Class/  
Middle Class/Upper Middle Class/Wealthy

## Appendix D

### Interview Guide

1. When you are in a class and you are silent, what might be going on around you that might have led you to become silent?
  - a. Probes: Topics raised in class, teaching material, other students, professor and professor teaching style, subject studied, race-related incidents that happened on campus, race of students in class.
2. Do you also become silent outside of the classroom? If they answer yes or no I will ask where (home, events), with whom (family, friends, relatives), and under what conditions. If they answer no, I will ask probes:
  - a. Was the shift to talking less in the classroom as compared to outside the classroom intentional? Did other people influence the shift and have there been changes in their classroom silence over time?
3. Over the past year can you think of a time in class when you were aware of your silence and also a time when you were aware of your voice?
  - a. Probes: thoughts, feelings.
4. Do you perceive that your native language, dialect, or manner of speaking is an important part of your silence?
  - a. Probes: Manner is about rate of talking, amount of pauses, word-choice, gestures?
5. Which of your social and individual identities are related to being silent in class?
  - a. Probes: religion, gender, race, class, culture, personality, ones that I have not mentioned. If they ask what I mean by social identities I will explain that a social identity is the sense of who you are based on social group membership. If they ask

about the definition of individual identity I will explain that this relates to how you view yourself that others may not perceive by looking at you for example personality, talent, intelligence.

6. Do you think your silence in class would change if you were in the racial – ethnic, or sexual identity majority in your class?
  - a. If they say yes, I will ask they think that would make a difference and how they think it would impact the types of things they would say in class.
7. If you could name your silence what would it be?
  - a. Probes: Name, description, phrase. What does that (name, phrase, description) mean to you?

## Appendix E

### List of Referral Sources

- Everywoman's Center located in Amherst. Located in Amherst 413-545-0883. Free.
- ServiceNet, Inc. located in Northampton and Holyoke. Accepts MassHealth. 413-585-1300
- Neighborhood Assistance Corps. of America located in Springfield. 413-788-6220. Free.
- Clinical Support Options located in Greenfield. 413-774-5311.
- Adult, Child & Adolescent Outpatient Services located in Holyoke. 800-286-8221.
- Counseling and Mental Health (Child and Family Services)  
Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender/Queer issues, and family issues. Offices in Springfield, Easthampton, Greenfield, Worcester and Athol. Accepts most insurance plans, Medicaid, Medicare and Mass Health. 800-232-0510.
- Baystate Medical Practices in East Longmeadow. Accepts insurance. 413-525-4555.
- Baystate Medical Practices in South Hadley. Accepts insurance. 413-533-3926.
- Service Net Outpatient Mental Health Services located in Chicopee. 413-592-5414. Accepts public and private insurance.

Appendix F

Recruitment Poster

**Are you a Black student who is a racial minority in many of your classes?**

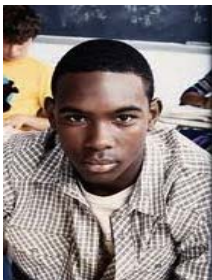
**Are there things you want to say but find it hard to speak up in class? Here's a chance to talk about why.**

**Volunteer** in this Smith College School for Social work Master's Thesis study on Black students and their use of silence in classrooms at predominantly white institutions.

Participants must:

- Be English speaking
- Have at least one of your identities be Black
- Be 18 years old or older
- Be currently enrolled in a higher educational institute where you perceive enrollment for students of color at your college or university is less than 35%.

Contact Mahajoy to schedule an individual 45-60 min interview or for any other questions



(personal information deleted by Laura H. Wyman, 11/30/12)



Appendix G  
HSR Approval Letter



**School for Social Work**  
Smith College  
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063  
T (413) 585-7950 F (413) 585-7994

January 7, 2012

Mahajoy Laufer

Dear Mahajoy,

It was a pleasure to reread your application and see how you have carefully and cautiously used the feedback and requirements offered by the Human subjects Review Committee. You did a great job! I liked the rewording, reworking of many sections, and greater depth in the literature review and also the reworking of your first question. I am guessing that that question will get right to where you need to go - wonderful! I am very excited for your project and can't wait to hear what you found. You have hereby met all of the HSR requirements for approval.

*Please note the following requirements:*

**Consent Forms:** All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

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

*In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:*

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

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

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

Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'David L. Burton'.

David L. Burton, MSW, PhD  
Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: XXXX XXXX, Research Advisor

