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ANYTHING BUT RACE: CONTENT ANALYSIS OF RACIAL DISCOURSE

by

Christopher Smith

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
Anthropology  
Western Michigan University  
April 2017

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# ANYTHING BUT RACE: CONTENT ANALYSIS OF RACIAL DISCOURSE

Christopher Smith, M.A.

Western Michigan University, 2017

This research adds to previous scholarship on colorblind racism which investigates the ways in which students at Western Michigan University use new language compared to the Jim Crow past to defend or challenge the modern racial order in the United States. Using data collected from 15 voluntary participants I conducted a content analysis of participant's responses to questions regarding race and racism with the purpose of demonstrating the use of colorblind racism or the challenge to the dominant racial order.

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## INTRODUCTION

The United States of America is a nation with a racial and ethnically diverse population of people from all around the world. The U.S. Constitution is founded on the ideas of justice, tranquility, general welfare, and to “secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.” In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the U.S. has seen the election of its first black president with a Muslim-sounding name Barack Hussein Obama, the nation’s first Latina Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States Sonia Maria Sotomayer, and respectively the first black U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder, and black female U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch. Anybody who even vaguely knows U.S. history can say that the nation has indeed made progress in terms of racial inclusion. Just by watching television and other forms of mass media we are told that the U.S. has made progress in regards to race therefore the U.S. is post-racial...isn’t it?

The online media site Huffington Post updated in March 2016 15 facts that would say otherwise: 1) affluent blacks and Hispanics live in poorer neighborhoods than their white working class counterparts, 2) the wealth gap between whites and non-whites is huge, 3) the wealth gap has continually increased since the Civil Rights era, 4) the 2007-2008 economic crisis hit black and Hispanic families worse than white families, 5) people of color were targeted more for subprime mortgages at higher rates than their white counterparts with equal credit scores, 6) people of color have higher rates of being turned down for conventional mortgages compared to their white counterparts, 7) black and Hispanic students have higher rates of attending poorer schools than their white counterparts, 8) segregated schools is still a problem, 9) black students are punished more frequently and harsher than their white counterparts, 10) perceptions of children of color are racially skewed, 11) blacks are arrested at three times the rates as whites for drugs even though both groups use drugs at the same rate, 12) black men receive longer prison

sentences than their white counterparts, 13) young white men with felony convictions are more likely to get job callbacks compared to black men with a clean record, 14) applicants with white-sounding names get higher callback rates for jobs compared to black-sounding names, and 15) blacks are often turned away from U.S. companies on the assumption that they do drugs ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/07/02/civil-rights-act-anniversary-racism-charts\\_n\\_5521104.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/07/02/civil-rights-act-anniversary-racism-charts_n_5521104.html)).

Data covering racial inequality in housing, healthcare, employment, income, wealth, education, infant mortality, incarceration, immigration arrests, drug arrests, and government surveillance and others that demonstrate the U.S. is far from post-racial. The question then becomes if the United States has made such progress in terms of race why do we still have all of these racial disparities? I would propose that part of the reason for the continuation of racism that is born out in the data is that people are engaging in colorblind racism as a means of explaining away racial inequalities as being caused by something other than race. The purpose of this thesis paper is to present to the reader the responses of 15 undergraduate students at Western Michigan University that were enrolled in courses on the topic of race and to show if they use colorblind racism in their responses to questions regarding race.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In the book “*Racism without Racists*” author Eduardo Bonilla-Silva argues that the persistence of racism in the United States is in part due to a racial ideology which he calls “colorblind racism” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, pg. 2). Eduardo Bonilla-Silva argues that colorblind racism ultimately “otherizes softly” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, pg. 3) with statements like “*they* [italics emphasized] are people too”, or “well if *those* [italics emphasized] people would just...” while also “expressing dominance at the symbolic level” (Bonilla-Silva, 2013), and ensuring the material, psychological and cultural systemic privileges and benefits enjoyed by Whites in the United States’ racial structure (Bonilla-Silva, 2013).

Furthermore, Gallagher (2003) argues that embracing this racial ideology “allows white to imagine that being white or black or brown has no bearing on an individual’s or a group’s relative place in the socio-economic hierarchy”, and adds that this racial perspective/ideology “insinuates that class and culture, and not institutional racism, are responsible for social inequality. Colorblindness allows many whites to define themselves as politically progressive and racially tolerant as they proclaim their adherence to a belief system that does not see or judge individuals by the color of their skin.” (Gallagher, 2003, pg. 22).

Bonilla-Silva (2006) says that there are four frames of colorblind discourse used to explain issues involving race: abstract liberalism, naturalization, minimization of race, and cultural racism. Abstract liberalism uses ideas associated with political liberalism and economic liberalism in an abstract manner to explain racial matters: “equal opportunity is part of abstract liberalism — or — regarding each person as an individual with choices — and using the liberal principles for whites having the right of choosing to live in segregated neighborhoods or sending their children to segregated schools. This claim requires ignoring the multiple institutional and



state-sponsored practices behind segregation, and being unconcerned about these practices' negative consequences" (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, pg. 28).

Naturalization is used to explain away racial phenomena by suggesting they are natural occurrences: "Naturalization is a frame that allows whites to explain away racial phenomena by suggesting they are natural occurrences. For example – whites can claim "segregation" is natural because people from all backgrounds gravitate toward likeness. Although, the above statements can be interpreted as "racist" and as contradicting the colorblind logic — they are used to reinforce the myth of non-racialism. How? By suggesting these preferences are almost biologically driven and typical of all groups in society, preferences for primary associations with members of ones' race are rationalized as nonracial because "they (racial minorities) do it too" (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, pg. 28).

Minimization of racism suggests discrimination is no longer a central factor affecting minorities' life choices: "Minimization of racism is a frame that suggests discrimination is no longer a central factor affecting minorities' life chances ("it's better now than in the past" or "There is discrimination, but there are plenty of jobs out there." this frame allows whites to accept facts such as the racially motivated murder of James Byrd Jr. in Jasper TX" (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, pg. 29). And cultural racism uses culturally based arguments to explain the standing of minorities in society such as "Blacks are lazy and lack role models in their lives" (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, pg. 28).

Gallagher (2003) examines the socio-political functions of colorblind ideology and what it does for white people in the U.S. He utilizes interview and focus group data from white respondents at 13 different colleges and universities in the age range of 18-22, and two rural areas in Georgia from people who either have had little or a lot of interaction with people of

color. Gallagher's argument is that "colorblindness maintains white privilege by negating racial inequality" (Gallagher, 2003, pg. 24). The colorblind perspective does not factor race as a means of explaining a person or group's social conditions in what Bonilla-Silva calls a "racialized social system" (Bonilla-Silva, 1997, pg. 469). Therefore, Gallagher states that the colorblind ideology "removes from personal thought and public discussion any taint or suggestion of white supremacy or white guilt, legitimating the existing social, political and economic arrangements which privilege whites" while also suggesting that it is things like class, cultural socialization and enculturation, or natural outcomes that produce racial inequality and not race (Gallagher, 2003, pg. 26). The results of Gallagher's research show that his respondents utilize colorblind discourse to explain many issues on race.

Researcher Amy Ansell (2006) conducted a comparative study of colorblind discourse in the United States and South Africa looking at its function in safe guarding white people's positions in a post-segregation, post-apartheid context. She utilized two sets of data conducting discourse analysis on public submissions on the issues of racism and slavery. The first set of data was from 1997 by the request of former U.S. Representative Tony Hall into his proposal for a national apology over slavery. The second set of data came from a submission given to the Human Rights Commission on the topic of racism in South Africa, and was discussed in 2000 at the National Conference on Racism in Johannesburg. The results were that both data sets "provides little evidence of expected differences" (Ansell, 2006, pg. 332) and that the similarities in the use of colorblind discourse by whites' is "salient and remarkable" (Ansell, 2006, pg. 332), noting that even though the content of colorblind discourse has not changed, the "context of its production and reception has altered significantly" (Ansell, 2006, pg. 332).

Research was conducted (Lewis, et. al., 2000) to inquire into the impact of colorblind discourse on students of color on a college campus with specific attention paid to their experiences and interactions with their white peers on a mostly white campus. The data shows the negative impact white students behavior has had on students of color in regards to racial stereotypes, pressures of assimilation, exclusion and marginality, white ignorance and hostility, and colorblindness with the authors suggesting that in order to best understand race relations on campus researchers must place the students “within the larger organizational and social contexts that frame and support them” (Lewis, et. al., 2000, pg. 74). An interesting point the researchers found from respondents of Asian, Latino/a, and Native American descent is the frustration with the Black-White dichotomy on racial discourse that further excludes and marginalizes members of other racial/ethnic groups as well as the curriculum and faculty members that the respondents felt excluded their cultural experiences and history from some of the courses taught.

I conducted content analysis of one-on-one interviews in 2016. This paper presents the responses to questions that attempt to illicit use of colorblind racism of 15 undergraduate students here at Western Michigan University with the intent of highlighting millennials voice to how they talk about race, and whether or not if they use colorblind narratives as others have as cited in previous work on colorblind racism.

The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis also known as the Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis suggests that “language determines and resolves the thought and perception of its speakers” (Mahadi, 2012, pg. 232). Language also has real consequences in regards to “thoughts about reality” as it “embodies an interpretation of reality and language can influence thoughts about that reality” (Lucy, 1997, pg. 4). What this means is that certain patterns of thought that are revealed in language show perceptions about the speaker’s reality e.g. their interpersonal relationships,

everyday experiences, and their native socio-cultural exposure. It is these patterns, taken collectively together, that creates an “ideological common sense” (Fairclough, 1989, pg. 84) with the consequence of establishing and reinforcing unequal relations of power along lines of class, race, gender, etc. There is also a dialectical relationship between language use and the broader culture.

European linguists Ruth Wodak and Norman Fairclough argue “describing discourse as social practice implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s), which frame it: the discursive event is shaped by them, but it also shapes them. That is, discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned – it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people. It is constitutive both in the sense that it helps to sustain and reproduce the social status quo, and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it.” (Zienkowski et. al., 2011, pg. 51). Therefore, language cannot survive outside of culture as it is the foundation that resolves social thinking and cognition, and vice versa culture cannot survive without language as it is the glue that helps bind social relations together.

## METHODOLOGY

This research is a critical discourse analysis of colorblind responses of 15 undergraduate students at Western Michigan University. I solicited interviews by asking former professors I had at Western if I could announce in their classes that I am recruiting subjects to voluntarily participate in one-on-one interviews regarding issues of race. All interviews took place in the Media room located in the anthropology department at Moore Hall and all participant's names were given pseudonyms.

I chose to use a directed content analysis approach to investigate the use of colorblind ideology of students. I used open-ended questions followed up with probes specifically to illicit as much information as possible from respondents. Then using operational definitions i.e. the frameworks of colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2003) I coded and analyzed responses that represent the use of colorblind discourse by decontextualizing, recontextualizing, categorizing and compiling the data. The following are the questions asked:

1. Can you describe for me where you grew up?

\*Probe for name of city/town and state where Subject spent formative years IF they do not mention it in their answer.

\*Probe for RACIAL and ETHNIC makeup IF they do not mention it in their answer.

2. Can you describe for me the people who lived in your neighborhood?

\*Probe for RACIAL and ETHNIC makeup IF they do not mention it in their answer.

\*Probe for CLASS background if they do not mention it in their answer.

3. How did you feel about the kind of people that lived in your neighborhood?

\*Probe for like /did not like/did not mind

4. Can you describe for me the kind of schools you attended while you were growing up?

\*Probe for public/private, large/small, inner city/suburb

5. Can you describe for me the student body in the schools that you attended?

\*Probe for CLASS and RACE

\*If Subject responds saying schools were diverse ASK for school composition i.e. what percentage was white, black, Hispanic, etc.

6. How do you define the word “race”? If you had to explain it to aliens from outer space what race is all about, what would you tell them?

\*This question attempts to get a sense of how people DEFINE and/or UNDERSTAND race.

7. What is racism in your view?

\*Probe for an example.

8. Do you think that races are naturally different in any way?

\*If Subject asks for clarification then say “For example, that whites are naturally less athletic, or musical than blacks?”

\*Probe: What do you think are the roots, causes, or origins of these differences?

9. People may have mixed feelings about marrying out of their race. What is your view on this matter?

\*Probe “And why is that?”

\*If subject says “For” or “Yes and no”, then ask: Would you yourself consider, or have considered marrying someone from a different race?

10. America has lots of all-white, all-black, all-Hispanic, all-Arab, all-Hispanic, and all-Native American neighborhoods/communities. What do you think about this situation?

\*Probe: Do you think the government should do something about this situation

\*If subject thinks this is a problem ASK: What do you think can be done to increase the mixing of the races in neighborhoods?

11. Some people may claim that blacks or other racial minorities are hard to approach and that they don't mix with other races (segregate themselves). On the other hand racial minorities may claim that they do not feel welcomed by whites in colleges. What do you think?

12. Many blacks and other racial minorities may say they experience a lot of discrimination in their daily lives. Other people may say that this is not the case. What do you think?

\*Examples are subtle discrimination in stores, renting apartments, racial profiling, etc.

13. On average blacks and Hispanics have worse jobs, incomes, and housing than whites. Why do you think this is?

\*Encourage Subject to explain.

14. Some people may say that racial minorities are worse off than whites because they lack motivation, are lazy, or do not have the proper values to succeed in our society. What do you think?

15. Do you think that being white is an advantage or a disadvantage in America?

\*Ask for explanation.

16. Blacks and other racial minorities have suffered lots of prejudice in this country in the past. Do you think that because of this history the government should spend money and have specific programs on their behalf?

\*Subject may ask "What kind of programs" therefore respond with "We want to know your views. What do you support and what don't you support?" And ask why. Probe subject.

17. Some people believe that crime may be due to poverty, others due to lack of morals, and yet others due to the lack of parental supervision. What do you think?

18. Do you believe that blacks and Hispanics are more likely to be involved in crime? Why?

Questions 1-5 are intended to get information on the demographics in which they were socialized in. After analyzing the data I can say that question 7 was a question not to see how they define and understand racism, but how do they talk about it. Question 8 was asked to see if they believed that the races are naturally different in any way. Question 9 was asked to see what their thoughts and feelings are on interracial marriage that might illicit responses of disapproval. Questions 10 and 11 are looking for their thoughts on segregation while questions 12-14 are looking for responses that are similar to statements by people on the political Right that posits people's position in life to personal behavior or poor morals. Question 15 simply asks for their thoughts on white privilege as having an advantage or disadvantage in the U.S. Question 16 kind of falls into questions 12-14 in regards to see what their thoughts are on government programs geared towards people of color for the oppression they have faced looking for a conservative or liberal response. Finally, questions 17 and 18 are looking for their thoughts on race and crime.



## PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

### Defining Racism

The following statements are in response to the question: What is racism in your view?

Barbara, a black 21-year-old sports medicine major, defined racism as “I think racism is still around. Its...it’s pretty much its people, prejudice. That’s what I’d say.”. Barbara’s response highlights racism as at the individual level and making people feel “uncomfortable”.

Robert, a white 22-year-old aviation major, defined racism as “Racism is (sighs) excluding someone because of their pigment. That’s how stupid it is ya know what I mean?”. Just like Barbara, Robert views racism at the individual level involving someone being excluded. He also views racism as being “stupid”, failing to see that racism is sensible both in the past and the present. Racism can be sensible if one racial group is “superior” over other racial groups in gaining political, economic, social, and psychological primacy over “inferior” racial groups in a society that is in part structured around race.

Angela, an Asian 20-year-old chemical engineering major, defined racism as “Well all the isms means that there’s a minority and they’re being oppressed by someone so whoever’s being racist has power over the people who they’re being racist towards and racism is being treating people unequally as if they weren’t humans or like not giving them the same rights or the same respect that you would give other humans.”. Angela views racism as racists’ having “power over” in “treating people unequally”, but it is individualized because the minority group is “being oppressed by someone.”

Sally, a Hispanic 19-year-old criminal justice major, defined racism as “Umm I think it’s something that a lot of people don’t even realize they’re doing. A lot of people like you’ll hear a lot of people be like “ohh we’re not racist anymore” like “we don’t have slaves anymore”,

“we’re not like we’re not mean anymore” ya know like “you guys are just different and we know that”, but I don’t think people realize some of the comments they make umm whether they’re just kind of joking around or they’re just kind of umm just like making a comment about something and how it can be offensive how they are being racist. So, I just think like racism is something that’s really prominent still but a lot of people are just aren’t aware that they are that something that’s as big as they think it is.”

While Sally places racism at the individual level she also places it at the unconscious level, that “people don’t even realize they are doing” it, while also highlighting comments that view racism as something of the past e.g. “ohh we’re not racist anymore”, or “we don’t have slaves anymore.”

Pam, a white 19-year-old social work major, defines racism as “Discrimination ya know. I don’t think anyone, I wouldn’t consider myself racist because I judge people individually.”. Pam defines racism as discrimination and concludes that she doesn’t think herself to be racist because “I judge people individually.”. This yet again individualizes racist behavior, but bases this on discrimination.

Mary, a white 21-year-old criminal justice major, defined racism as “Umm being like prejudiced toward another group or like umm I don’t know not treating them equally or seeing them as unequal.”. Mary individualizes racism as being “prejudiced toward another group”, or as treating or viewing them unequal. She uses the Ku Klux Klan as an example which is a step up from individualizing prejudice to a group belief and behavior, but it still possesses no systemic way of defining and understanding racism.

Hillary, a black 21-year-old family studies major, defined racism using an example of her white stepmother and her extended family. Hillary stated that her stepmother was watching a

Tigers game and her father “wanted to watch Love and Hip-Hop”. Her stepmother posted a message to her Facebook page stating “When you’re trying to watch the Tigers game and your husband is trying to watch Love and Hip-Hop” with the grandfather on the stepmother’s side of the family responding to the post “Well what do you expect? You married a black man.”. For Hillary, she stated that “the comments that they make I don’t define them to be racist remarks I feel like I define them to be ignorant.” followed up with “I know a lot of white people that watch Love and Hip Hop. I’m black I don’t really watch Love and Hip Hop so for me racism is just it its seen predominant on a black on white scale. For me however one could classify me as racist because I necessarily don’t care for Indian Americans.”

I asked Hillary to clarify what she meant by her being racist towards “Indian Americans” and she stated “Like umm the ones from like India. Like the ones that have like the cuz’ well this is why I don’t care for them. I used to work at a creamery in high school and they would always come in really really late and they can’t eat dairy but then you want you come in to the ice cream shop and then we’re closing at nine and its eight fifty-nine and you’re talking about what doesn’t have dairy in it so that would piss me off. And then I left there and went to work at Qdoba and they would come in and they are vegetarians so they don’t eat meat and they want extra corn all the time so all my experience with them was just very annoying but so one could say oh cuz’ I don’t like that group of people that I’m racist against its not I mean I just don’t care for them or their eating habits how bout’ that. So, umm racism I feel like its viewed in our society as a black and white thing and its deeper than that.”

I asked her to explain what she meant by racism being deeper and she replied “Because...well I’ll say it like this there are whites against blacks but there are also blacks against whites.”, and when I asked for examples she stated “Like there are black people who

don't like white people and like won't mess with them, won't associate with them, will call them all type of derogatory names and things like that, but what we see on tv always and a lot of white people really like black people it's just it's just that a handful of them will not be friendly will die off soon cuz' well they were around in the 60s and stuff they're about to be gone so that's that the people we see and hear from."

There is a lot to unpack with Hillary's response, firstly that people of color can be racist towards other people of color. She states that she does not care for Indian Americans stating "I just don't care for them or their eating habits". If we are to say that people of color that hold negative beliefs towards other racial groups are racist, then yes, the way she defines it makes sense to her, but she like the other respondents fail to see institutions and systems of racial domination. She also states that "there are also blacks against whites" that "don't like white people and like won't mess with them", but if we view racism as something which is "embodied through attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, laws, norms and practices" (Paradies, 2006, pg. 145), then we can define racism as "A societal system in which actors are divided into 'races', with power unevenly distributed (or produced) based on these racial classifications." (Paradies, 2006, pg. 145) which whites have possessed both past and present.

Candice, a white 20-year-old business major, defined racism as "Umm...(sigh)...just judging being very critical and judgmental and one-minded of other people and oh my gosh I can't think of the word! It starts with a "d". I replied with the word "discrimination" and after she confirmed that that was the word I asked for her to give me an example and she responded with "Like old white men who hate Black like every Black person ever. Just all those people who are racist towards Black people.". Once again racism is viewed at the individual level of

people that are “very critical and judgmental and one-sided of other people...like old white men who hate every black person.”

Sam, a white 19-year-old undeclared major, stated that racism is “Umm racism is holding prejudice or uhh ya know holding any kind of stereotyping a group of people that look similar without having really any kind of proof you can’t really justify those things just by the way someone looks or dresses.” Sam individualizes racism as a person that holds prejudices and stereotypes of similar looking people without proof to justify those prejudices. It is therefore an irrational psychological phenomenon at the individual level.

Stewart, a Hispanic 20 year old business major, defined racism as “Racism uhh...that’s actually a good question umm I guess I mean it would be kind of the umm the prejudice towards I guess just how a certain person looks I guess if you if you kinda break it down and when you break it down like that it actually sounds like racism is stupid in general but when you break it down like that your like “wow that’s really stupid”, but yeah I guess I would say like racism is just is just the prejudice against how somebody looks and that person can’t really do anything about it it’s just it’s how it is so.”

Stewart just like Robert views racism as something that is “stupid”, and it is an individual that holds prejudicial views towards someone’s looks. I would argue that racism is not “stupid”, but actually quite reasonable because of the economic, political, and social benefits and privileges it grants to the dominant racial groups. And even if there are no economic or political benefits, for some whites there is in the words of W.E.B. DuBois the “psychological wages of whiteness”.

Melissa, a white 20-year-old family studies major, defines racism as “Close-mindedness.” and when asked for an example she stated “I guess an example of racism is

somebody being mad because Barack Obama is our president because he's black.". Melissa simply puts racism as an individual that are "closeminded" of others.

Sherry, a white 19-year-old organizational communication major, defined racism as "I think it's when people...umm...discriminate or make derogatory unfair comments about someone who is from a different background.". Racism is viewed here at the individual level involving discrimination or derogatory comments.

Carol, a 20-year-old biology major, defined racism as "Umm discriminating towards any person or group of people based on something you perceive as a factor that makes them other than you like they look different then you so their different race or like "Ohh hey their white, your black, their Hispanic, we're Italian, you're like Indian" like...like just treating someone badly based on an arbitrary like thing like "Ohh well we're gonna treat you different". Carol individualizes racism as discrimination towards people who look different and treating that person or people "badly".

Lisa, a 19-year-old Hispanic creative writing major, defined racism as "Umm awful (laughs). I would define it as like for some reason people mistreat others because of the color of their skin.". When asked for an example she stated "Umm well I think an example would be like me going to the middle school that I went to and them calling me a dirty Mexican and making heroine jokes.". Racism is individualized and made as a conscious decision involving the mistreatment of others based upon skin color.

And John, a black 20-year-old social work major, defined racism as "Umm, it has to be discrimination against a skin color.", and when asked for an example he stated "if a Caucasian denies somebody else outside of his culture a job, that's that's uhh what racism...if he was

qualified and was willing to do the job, but he gave it to a person with a lighter skin complexion that's closer to his.”

The thing that sticks out in the responses on defining racism is that each respondent individualizes racism. Dr. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva argues (Bonilla-Silva, 1997, pg. 467) this view on racism is problematic because it does not view institutions or society in general as racist. For example, when data shows a disproportionate number of black people are incarcerated at higher numbers than white people (<http://www.prisonpolicy.org/profiles/US.html#disparities>) it could be stated that this is a problem of a few racist people in our criminal justice system, and not the criminal justice system in general. The problem with this is that if racism is chalked up to a psychological phenomenon of individual racist being bad apples, then the respondents fail to see the institutional and systemic nature of racism.

I will add that the respondent's individualization of racism are using what Jane Hill refers to as the “folk theory” of race and racism (Hill, 2008, pg. 4). She states that the folk theory “is an interpretation, a way of thinking about racism, that is crucial to the perpetuation of White racist culture” which believes that racism “is entirely a matter of individual beliefs, intentions, and actions” based upon ignorance and those considered not a part of mainstream culture (Hill, 2008, pgs. 4-6). What is important here is not just that some respondents believe this particular part of the folk theory, but also that students of color have internalized this as well which demonstrates that even people of color can be socialized into the dominant racial ideologies of the day.

#### Whiteness as Advantage or Disadvantage in America

The following statements are in response to the question: Do you think that being white is an advantage or a disadvantage in America?

Barbara stated “Umm like I think if uhh it could have to do with like how we have problems with police brutality. Like if I, I could get pulled over for the same thing as a white person and like my I’m they might penalize me more because I’m Black.”. I asked her to explain what she meant by being penalized more and she replied “Like if I’m, I could get a ticket and maybe because they’re white they won’t get a ticket, or they won’t get pulled over or they’ll just get a warning. That’s where I have to I have to be careful because now it’s just not like their like...there, it’s not like it’s just there’s Black men cuz’ it’s been some cases with Black women to so I have to be more careful with what I do, and what I say, and how I go about doing things, but white people they can I feel like they can just do they can do as they please and they won’t, it’s not a problem.”. Barbara believes that being white gives an advantage when it comes to being pulled over by the police that black people do not have. She also states the role gender plays stating that she has to be “careful” because there have “in some cases with Black women to” incidences of black women like Sandra Bland who have died in police custody.

I asked Robert whether or not being white is an advantage or a disadvantage in the U.S. and his response was “Uhh 15 years ago, yeah it was an advantage. Now with everything being more they’re focusing on diversifying the work environment, diversifying things it’s kinda like become a main focus in things now I don’t think there’s any advantage.”. Robert’s response got interesting when I asked him if the races were biologically different which I believe highlights why he thinks being white is not an advantage.

He stated that he believes the races are not biologically different and when asked if there are cultural differences he replied “Culturally like okay umm uhh I always viewed ya know the Asian race as very cut clean like very disciplined I guess, and you know the white man as not. So, I think culturally in my point of view there is a difference, but biologically actually not.”, and



when I asked him what he thought the root causes are of these cultural differences he said”  
Umm...I don’t know because there’s there are whites that really struggle, and then there’s  
American whites that feel like everything’s handed to them so then they get lazy.”

When I asked him to clarify the difference between whites and American whites he stated  
“I mean American whites as in “Murica” like ya know like the typical college frat guy who  
takes dad’s money and goes out every weekend. That’s my version of the American white guy,  
but then the other white guy he ya know Irish hardworking ya know nothings handed to me kind  
of guy ya know what I mean? But there there’s definitely that I wouldn’t even call it white  
privilege I’d call it like American privilege ya know what I mean?”, and asking for further  
clarification on the word “American privilege” he states “American privilege as in we’re the best  
country in the world when we’re not ya know?”

I followed up by asking him if he thought there was such a thing as white privilege and  
he stated “Uhh...I think...it depends on your perception of it cuz’ you could see (sigh) I know  
this is gonna sound stupid yeah you could see ya know white boy walking down the street with  
old shoes, short shorts, and a bright colored shirt with a backwards hat and he’s got flow I’d say  
he’s got white privilege taking daddy’s money and all that stuff. That’s kind of what I think and  
then you also have ya know the 78-year-old ya know congressman you know what I mean where  
it’s like yeah we got old white men running the country so that’s what I think.”

I think for Robert the idea that workplaces and other environments are being diversified  
signify to him that racism is not the problem, but that class position is important. Remember that  
he believes that being white has no advantage, but in his response the depiction of a “white boy  
walking down the street with old shoes, short shorts, and a bright colored shirt with a backwards  
hat and he’s got flow I’d say he’s got white privilege taking daddy’s money and all that stuff”, or

a “78-year-old ya know congressman” highlights class dynamics and not racial thus using the framework “minimization of race” (Bonilla-Silva, 2013). Race is minimized because he does not see race as being a determining factor in people’s lives.

I would also add that Robert identified himself as “white and Mexican”, and from physical appearance and without knowing any background information about him he does pass as white. I believe that Robert growing up in an “Irish neighborhood” in Chicago coupled with his skin tone allows him to say the things he has said. George Lipsitz argues “As the unmarked category against which difference is constructed, whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relation” (Lipsitz, 1995, pg. 369). To be white or to pass as white not only gives certain benefits to people, but it is from those benefits in conjunction with our many cultural beliefs, unconscious as they be, for whiteness to never be questioned or scrutinized therefore making the minimization of race and racism all the more prevalent.

Angela’s response to whether or not being white is an advantage or disadvantage was “I think it can be both. I think umm your accused of racism more especially if you use the wrong words or you make a mistake and not invite someone that you didn’t know was standing right there to an event that you invited everyone else to. I think your accused of racism more or umm like if you don’t pick like if I had the 2 resumes and if I picked the white one over the black one and you’re like I interviewed the white one and he was more qualified we got along more better than the other one so you just get accused of being racists more.”

I asked her if she thought that being racially cognitive was a disadvantage for white people and she responded “Yeah because (sigh) yeah because you have the power when like when you’re a white person you have the power to oppress other people because you’re the

majority and so I think it's a disadvantage because people can call you racist when you're not racist. You can be an active non-racist and fight against racism and people still be like "ohh you're doing this because you're being racist" and you think race is real and your gonna be like "of course race is real. That's weird."

Angela's, who defines herself racially as "2 or more" and she can pass as white, statement makes me wonder if she has been confronted or knows a white person who was confronted about their personal racial sentiments or statements they may have made. There is this weird sense of white guilt in her response where not being racially cognitive involves being accused of being racist, but also being racially cognitive and an "active non-racist" involves the possibility of being called a racist for doing something deemed as racist. Her response reminds me of a concept called "White Fragility" which is a state where "even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves" (DiAngelo, 2011, pg. 54).

Angela did not demonstrate defensive moves such as anger, silence or emotional incapacitation, but her sigh coupled with her struggling to answer the question demonstrated to me as I watched her respond that there was a level of awareness and guilt but also a sort of tug-of-war going on when she states "Yeah because (sigh) yeah because you have the power when like when you're a white person you have the power to oppress other people because you're the majority and so I think it's a disadvantage because people can call you racist when you're not racist.". At the end of the day I think she does not understand the advantages that being white brings in the U.S. which is not her fault, I just think these are questions that white people are rarely if ever confronted with and by growing up in "a social environment that protects and

insulates” whites from racial stress “builds white expectations for racial comfort while at the same time lowering the ability to tolerate racial stress” (DiAngelo, 2011, pg. 54).

When Sally was asked if being white was an advantage or disadvantage she replied “both”, and when I asked her to explain her response she stated “Uhh sometimes umm being white like there is like I do believe in the so called white privilege umm I mean I think that there is such a thing like some people just automatically like take you more seriously or just give you a few more opportunities or they’re gonna be the successful ones because like whites especially like are their just a dominant ya know they’re usually the doctors, they’re usually the nurses, they’re the lawyers that sort of thing. Umm but on the other hand I also think that umm it can also be a disadvantage because some people are trying to be so conscious like “ohh I don’t wanna be racist. I don’t wanna be this.” so they’ll try to go on the other side of the spectrum kind of like the whole thing going on with affirmative action and things like that like I had a couple friends who they didn’t get into some of the schools because like you’ll look at some of the kids that got in over them that where minority and they were white but they didn’t get into those same schools so where like if you just put them on an even playing field you look at the white person would have gone to school whereas the minority actually got in so I feel like it’s kind of on both sides like some people are trying to really be conscious like “I don’t wanna be racist” umm “I don’t wanna discriminate” that sort of things so they go too far and other times I feel it can be the other way where people make these conscious uhh decisions or they say like that was their gut feeling or whatever without even realizing what they were doing.”.

Sally states that on the one hand there is a privilege in regards to higher job occupations for being white in the statement “they’re usually the doctors, they’re usually the nurses, they’re the lawyers”, and that they are taken “more seriously”, but as with Angela’s statement Sally

believes there is a disadvantage for being white because “some people are trying to be so conscientious like “ohh I don’t wanna be racist.”, and she follows this up with affirmative action and a couple of her white friends not getting accepted into college over minority students.

First, how would she know that her white friends were not accepted into these colleges because of affirmative action? Secondly, I find Sally’s racial storytelling to be fascinating in the way she tells the story. Dr. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva argues that racial ideologies are nothing more than “racial frameworks, or “grids,” that racial groups use to make sense of the world, to decide what is right or wrong, true or false, important or unimportant” (Bonilla-Silva, 2004, pg. 556). And seeing as most societies are built and structured on domination these types of stories become and are commonsensical to both oppressor and the oppressed.

Dr. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva goes on to state that there are two aspects to racial stories: story lines and testimonies. He defines story lines as “the socially shared tales that incorporate a common scheme and wording”, and testimonies are “accounts in which the narrator is a central participant or is close to the character” (Bonilla-Silva, 2004, pgs. 556-557). Sally’s response is a story line in the sense that it is ideologically based on race and affirmative action, but more importantly it is a testimony in the fact that she places herself close to other characters in the racial story i.e. her friends and states “like the whole thing going on with affirmative action and things like that like I had a couple friends who they didn’t get into some of the schools because like you’ll look at some of the kids that got in over them that where minority and they were white but they didn’t get into those same schools.”.

This storytelling reinforces her belief that being white is made a disadvantage because of affirmative action that prevented her white friends from being accepted into the same schools as minority students, mind you without any proof to her statement. This once again demonstrates

how people of color can, as in the case of Sally who defines herself as “Hispanic and Latina”, be inculcated and manifest on the individual level the internalized white racial ideologies and values that are continually broadcasted by the dominant white society (Pyke, 2010, pg. 553).

Pam’s response to the question was “Advantage. Everything’s easier if you’re a white man in my opinion viewing from everything else. If you’re a white man everything is easier your assumed your innocent and in all parties like everything’s like ya know I feel like I wish I was a white man”. While Pam states that it is an advantage she also highlights the role of gender in stating that she wishes she “was a white man.” This in conjunction with Barbara’s statement of having to be careful in police stops as both black and a woman, and what appears to be Robert’s concern of class makes me wonder how much gender and class play a role in informing respondent’s view on race.

Mary’s response to the question was “Advantage.”. I asked her in what ways it was an advantage and she said “Umm for example what you just said money. Umm or like job opportunities unfortunately. Housing.”. I then asked her how does being white give advantages and she replied “Yeah I don’t know. I don’t know because ya know if I had anything to do with it it would be that way, but I myself can’t change everything and I was born into it and it’s not something I can change and I don’t know why, I don’t know why and I don’t know how, don’t know how it happened.”

Hillary replied to the question with “Heck yeah it’s an advantage!”. When I asked her to explain she said “Umm because why is it not like...I had umm a professor who admitted which is the first time I’ve ever heard someone do it she said “I’m white and I have white privilege” like and I’m like “oh my goodness” because what they do is they pretend like it’s not there like we know your white we know like come on don’t don’t play these games you are where you are

based off of the fact that you are white and instead of like it's the elephant in the room it's the dirt on the carpet they try to sweep under. The majority of you are here because of the simple fact that you identify or you classify yourselves as white Americans, white Caucasian Americans so but that's not their fault ya know what I'm saying it's not their fault that they're white but it's also in my opinion they're I'm gonna say they're duty to know the history of how their ancestors have enslaved people, of how they treated people, and why we the minority respond to them the way we do."

Candice stated "(sigh) To me, right now I think it's a disadvantage because...(sigh) I think that all white people are racist and that all like I don't think all white people are racist. I think that the majority of white people are racist and that other minorities see other white people as racist so they're gonna stereotype those white people and then they'll be disadvantaged but then like coming from your point of view...I don't like I think you would probably say they're advantaged because how we grew up is probably I don't think it's different or anything but we probably had more different experiences and how we were treated differently just because of our skin color but I would say they're disadvantaged but also advantaged because of white privilege and I know that it is out there."

When I asked her to clarify she stated "(sigh) Like...(sigh) I don't know I just feel like everyone hates white people. I'm sick of everyone's like all the white people like the crap that everyone else like Donald Trump I'm sick of his shit and like what he's saying to everyone and like all the hicks and all the country people and all those people that are just so set in their ways. That can be stereotyped to a but like all of us (white people) and that's a big disadvantage because but.". When asked why that is a disadvantage she said "Because (sigh) we're being stereotyped. And just like everyone else..."

I asked her what impact stereotyping has on white people and she replied “(sigh) It doesn’t really I don’t think it really has a major impact. It doesn’t impact their daily lives like other like how it would other people, but I think in a long run it could potentially have a great disadvantage.”, and so I asked her for examples and she said “Like if...if there’s more police brutality, there’s more white cops beating up black or Hispanic kids, stuff like that then that’s gonna grow and that’s gonna fuel more hate and fuel more anger and fuel more racism towards like...the white people I don’t know I’m just sick of every...I don’t know that’s just how I feel. Even white people are sick of white peoples’ crap because of the stuff that they say and they just think that cuz’ they’re white they can get away with everything. I think that’s they think it’s an advantage but it’s not. Like they it’s an invisible advantage.”

I asked her to explain what she meant and she said “Like white privilege. That exists in everything but it shouldn’t and that’s everyone thinks that they’re white that they have this advantage and they have that. I don’t know I kinda feel like I’m going around in circles right now but (laughs) umm what were we saying?”, I replied with the original question and then she stated “Okay, I would say yes, it’s an advantage in America. Yes, it’s an advantage right now, but...”, and I replied “Earlier you stated it was a disadvantage” and she replied “I know but people have it way worse and we’ve gotten away with it way to long so it needs to stop and people need to be treated like normal human beings that we are.”

Candice’s response rings similar to Angela and Sally’s response in regards to whiteness being a disadvantage. I believe as with some other respondent’s answers to this question that they do not have to think about these things in their lives thus making it a difficult question to answer. It is one thing to have heard of the word white privilege, discrimination, and so on, but it is a completely different thing to have to engage with what that word means, or to understand



the social processes in which these words are trying to show. I would also point out with Candice's response that she is engaging in white fragility as discussed by DiAngelo (2011) in her frustration and anger noticed in the interview with the statement "I'm sick of everyone's like all the white people like the crap that everyone else like Donald Trump I'm sick of his shit, but also she is engaging in Hill's (2008) folk theory in individualizing racism in Donald Trump or "hicks and all the country people".

Sam stated "That's a really hard question to answer. I feel like ya know it has been an advantage for a long time. It probably still will be in certain aspects.". When asked in what aspects he replied "Ya know there's like uhh the voting the government for sure you see politicians they're all white. Most of them are we're starting to see more people of ethnic diversity ya know that's few and far between. Umm let's see there there's probably certain occupations I'd say art forms you know like music you see a lot of ya know especially the African American community they lead the music they shape that ya know but that's not an official occupation."

Stewart stated "Trying to uhh without being race about it umm yeah I do actually I think that being white is uhh is an advantage because you look at umm ya know different things you look you look at uhh the Ferguson, Missouri trial which you were talking about where I mean he didn't he was doing his job and all that stuff but he had all these supporters because he was white ya know not because he was a police officer but because he was white."

Melissa stated "No not anymore.", and when asked for clarification she stated "I think that people are coming around to black people and I think even though I didn't like Barack Obama he did help a lot by raising like the people coming around to black people and knowing your apart of our community now it's not just white people anymore I think black people have an

equal opportunity now”. It should be noted that I mention later in this chapter about the fact that in response to a question regarding racial inequalities based on housing and income she believes that blacks and Hispanics need to apply themselves which I believe she bases on the fact that her black girlfriend’s family “have great jobs all of them they have wonderful jobs they have beautiful houses” which I think informs her perspective on the matter. She is using her personal experiences with her black girlfriend’s family, in part, to state that white is not an advantage anymore.

Sherry said “Hmm...I think in today’s society it is.”, and when asked for clarification she stated “Yeah. Like what I said about like the job market and likes there’s been a lot of studies where umm like the same job application, the same qualifications but different names and then the white one was accepted. And I’m like “That is so bad”. And then like if you see like umm like the film industry it’s like white washed and so it gives the white actors more advantage because umm even if the role cuz’ like even if the person is supposed to be Asian American they cast a white person. And so, that’s definitely still yeah.”

Carol stated “I think there’s a definite advantage like maybe you don’t see it but I know a lot of people like it took my eyes to be open to like racism in America and discrimination based on race. Like I was unaware of it for a large portion of my life and I still think I’m unaware of most of what goes on which would like I don’t really think about it most of the like you don’t think about it unless it like it happens to you which being white it doesn’t happen as much I mean being a woman you get like that kind of like discrimination, but that’s like different and I think that comes out as an advantage and in the past from...what we were talking about with the loans and stuff and that transfers down through so many generations and it affects how you grow up and like your uhh socioeconomic background.”

Lisa stated “I think that there’s certain privileges that come with being a white male”. I asked her if she thought there are privileges that come with being a white female and she stated “I feel like that umm is a little double edge because their female and I feel like there’s still a lot of umm like prejudices that go on like females to but I feel like they do they may have little slighter advantage because their white.”. When asked what type of advantages there are she stated “I feel like it brings like whole other type of world I guess ya know when umm people of like that were of white they obviously apply for like jobs I feel like they’re gonna be taken more seriously even if they have the same umm education as someone else. I also feel like umm if they’re white I don’t know it’s easier to adapt and blend into society and just go with the flow. I just feel like there’s definitely advantages when it comes to working in like the systems of like law. I feel like there’s definitely more skewed towards white passing’s and just being like uhh “your fine, your white, you’re just a kid making mistakes” to where if its someone of ethnicity.”

John stated “I would say that being white does have privilege in America because we still face racism and usually the racism is coming from whites. So, you still have privilege over blacks, especially in the South.”. I asked him why he specifically said the South and he replied “Within the south you know there’s still like a...my family owns the uhh land that like our family used to slave on. So around that area there’s nothing, like we are the only black family within a five-mile radius. So, there’s, you know, a lot of things we do and a lot of things we don’t do. We primarily, when we go down there, we primarily stay on our land because you never know which family is, could, is could be a member of the Ku Klux Klan. There’s people still get lynched, but there’s not media coverage on it. You know you can still find these things like I know for example when I go down south there certain stores my family tell me do not go to. And for my brother who went down there to live at his job he was kicked out because I white

man called him a monkey and said he would spit on his family, and my brother struck him and he was fired and the white man still work there.”

Out of all responses only five students stated that whiteness was either both an advantage and disadvantage, or a disadvantage with three of the five being students of color. I once again find myself going back to Lipsitz’s argument (1995) that whiteness is never a unit of analysis that measures differences between other groups of colors. It is in this manner that what it means to be white and how it operates in our racialized society is never scrutinized, never placed under the microscope for inspection, and therefore allows the continuation and preservation of white privileges and white supremacy at the expense of people of color. And given the fact that some of my respondents that are students of color believe there is no advantage, or that it might be both demonstrates that even people of color can believe that being white has no advantages i.e. engage in the minimization of racism framework.

It is not all bad though as most respondents, including white students, believe that being white was an advantage. This should demonstrate that even dominant narratives in a given society do not take hold of everyone’s minds including members of the dominant group.

### Racial Discrimination

The following statements are in response to the question: Many blacks and other racial minorities may say they experience a lot of discrimination in their daily lives. Other people may say that this is not the case. What do you think?

Barbara stated “I think...I think everybody is discriminated like Blacks discriminate against whites, whites discriminate against minorities. I think that’s how it is. Like...I mean it could be just like how it could be a group of Black kids and...okay alright so it could be a group of Black kids and they could all be like standing on this corner (points finger) and uhh if no wait

if, if, if it could be a group of white kids standing there on the corner ya know doing things that ya know doing things that are negative like smoking, drinking, stuff like that so and then and African American person could walk by and they feel like because those kids are doing those things like they're bad and it's like because of where they group up like they say people are white trash and things like that. I think that like the like Black person can feel, how white people can feel like that's like I'm gonna walk like on the other side of the street because of this group of Black people I think Black people can do the same with white people."

What Barbara states as discrimination is not discrimination, but more of a fear of the "other" in terms of their behavior. I would also state that in terms of "blacks discriminate against whites" as absurd because in order for blacks to discriminate in the legal sense would require blacks to be collectively empowered in many political, economic, and social institutions.

Robert stated "I mean I so going back to this 50% Mexican in me umm I did growing up ya know beaner, spic, wet back, all that stuff I've heard it all. And before I'm like I didn't stand up for myself I was like "fuck". I was kinda bullied in grammar school, and then I made a group of friends and I started firing back and then it became playful and then I just didn't really care anymore but before I did but now I don't so maybe I've just kind of grew up maybe because I just dealt with it so much, I don't know but umm once again it depends how exposed you are to it."

Angela stated "I think it's just word choice." I asked her what she meant and she replied "Like I think if people get discriminated against or if they get like they feel segregated from like the majority group or whatever they feel like they're not getting included. It's kind of hard to say because sometimes people will use words that aren't politically correct and it's hard to get everyone on the right track of what's politically correct and not everybody knows what

everyone's okay with using words and I think people stick to their groups just because like they know what that community does and how that community reacts and they won't get backlash from that community if they don't know what to say because their a part of it."

Sally stated "Umm it kinda go back to the whole like people are racist without meaning to. Umm there I have dealt with like discrimination sometimes like when I like I said cuz a lot of these events I do where everybody's white and there's me umm and there have been times where people like in a sense try to give me like special like treatment or they'll try to help me more because they think I need the help more or you know they think that I umm you know I might not be understanding as well or something like that like I didn't ask them for help. I didn't give like any like signs like I didn't understand, but they just kinda assume or I've had some people umm automatically like not take me as seriously just because they don't think I know as much or that I'm not gonna understand what they mean. Umm on the same notion like a lot of people also say "ohh well you're just saying that" umm like the whole thing I told you that I was getting followed around in the store more than like I like that was umm that's kinda something where people will be like "ohh well you just think you are probably" but it's something that I definitely do think is prominent. I mean can I say that sometimes I make assumptions that maybe weren't necessarily there. I can't say that one hundred percent it was not but I definitely think that there is discrimination without even necessarily meaning to but your kind of like just assume like "ohh that person doesn't look necessarily as trustworthy" and like you don't even put it together that you're doing it because of their race."

Pam stated "I don't know, I don't know, I don't know I think I really I don't know. Like I've never personally called, I've never like discriminated against someone so I don't, I don't

know. I mean maybe they feel discriminated but I don't know because I've never done it. I've never I've never done so I'm not sure."

Mary stated "That they do experience discrimination in whatever case it may be. When their like maybe someone else wouldn't like notice but it's like obviously very prevalent."

Hillary stated "I feel like everybody gets discriminated against. Umm I don't feel like I don't feel like umm it can necessarily be about race umm skin tone umm I feel like you get discriminated because of I personally discriminated against Indian Americans because of how they eat you know what I'm saying so it happens. Black people discriminate against other black people all the time.". I asked her how and she replied "Like I've had people of my like my type of people or my folk discriminate against me because of how I speak: "Well why you talk like that?", "Well how am I talking?". For example, like sometimes my line sister, it pisses her off she's like "Can you stop talking like can you get out of that voice?" like kinda hard to turn it off sometimes and like I don't even consciously turn it on. I also feel like the environment that I'm in that I'll do it a little more umm but we discriminate. Everybody discriminate you can discriminate against an old person we can discriminate against our professors "ohh I don't like them cuz they talk slow and they have an accent ya know stuff like that."

Candice stated "You have no room to talk because it's not your life. You are not living in their skin. You're not seeing what they see. You're not hearing what they hear. So, if they feel like that they well could be done to them so basically just be conscious of what comes out of your mouth and who you surround yourself with and how you act."

Sam stated "I don't know what it's like to be black. I'm gonna put that up there but uhh ya know I definitely know there's racism and that there is prejudice that whether people think or not ya know that that it exists."

Stewart stated “Umm I think that sometimes maybe the context isn’t looked at and I’m not saying that there isn’t discrimination or that there is discrimination I think that sometimes context kinda gets kinda gets a little twist a little bit I mean you’ll get like the ya know all the recent events in the news about umm police brutality ya know and how police discrimination and all this stuff umm but then there’s the one in uhh uhh Ferguson about a year, year and a half or two years ago where there’s all ya know the police discrimination and they shot and killed this guy and you kinda look at the context and everything that happened and its like that kid kinda ran up to him and tried to shooting at the police officer and ya know so it’s like...”

Melissa stated “I think if they’re saying it they’re not just making it up. If they feel if they its discrimination, then it’s probably have something. I mean sometimes the jokes they make about black people it’s not a joke it’s not funny like you if you don’t know how that persons gonna react to it, if you’re not their friend even if your heard them make their own jokes then you shouldn’t be making them cuz’ that is discrimination.”

Sherry “Umm...well I don’t have the personal experience umm but I definitely think that people could experience maybe not every day but probably sometimes in their lives like umm going back to my boyfriend’s mother umm like he didn’t get a job and she automatically said it’s because of his race. And so, umm I definitely see like that in her life she experiences it daily at her job which is awful umm but like looking at my boyfriend who is like a younger generation...I don’t really see it.”

Carol stated “I think that if someone feels that they are being discriminated against racially it’s not your call to say “No you’re not”. Like I think it’s, like I can see the whole like “Is it because I’m black joke” when somebody gets arrested or like I see it made on like Family Guy I see that a lot but like but I think it does happen a lot many people are just it goes blind to



it. Like it takes like...if you're not the one being discriminated against its harder to see so I think that's where that idea "Ohh you're just making it up" like comes from so I feel like if someone says they're being discriminated against then you should give them the benefit of the doubt."

Lisa stated "I wouldn't say it happens to me on my daily life. I would say like maybe it happens like a monthly or like every week or so like something will happen that I'm just like that's not okay but I don't experience it every day."

John stated "Growing up I have experienced quite a bit of discrimination. I remember in high school there was this youth of the year event where it's like you write a couple essays, and you sent them in and if yours is selected for the boys and girls club you go on to compete for like your district. So, I won for the southeastern Michigan, and I went on to compete for youth of the year for Michigan. Now when I got to the conference I was the only African American there. I was surprised when people knew I was from Detroit they shook their head and say how have I made it this far, how did I make it out my region."

Many of the respondents make discrimination interpersonal. Barbara's believes that "blacks discriminate against whites" and "whites discriminate against minorities" thinking "that's how it is." Robert talks about how he received a lot of racially derogatory comments from him peers in school. Angela's response is somewhat confusing because she states that discrimination is "word choice", which it is not, and then shortly thereafter follows it up with people not knowing what is politically correct which has nothing to do with discrimination. Hillary's response of "Black people discriminate against other black people all the time", and "Everybody discriminate. You can discriminate against an old person we can discriminate against our professors "ohh I don't like them cuz they talk slow and they have an accent ya know stuff like that."

I think part of the confusion by respondents comes from not understanding what discrimination is. In the legal sense, unlawful discrimination is the unfair and unequal treatment of a person or group of people based on characteristics like race that takes place in things like education, employment, voting, housing, etc (<http://civilrights.findlaw.com/civil-rights-overview/what-is-discrimination.html>). This theme of discrimination as something that people do to other people interpersonally is once again problematic because it does not take into account structures of racism. I am not saying that discrimination does not happen at the interpersonal level, but discrimination is more than someone using politically incorrect language or using racially derogatory words.

I think the biggest problem for some respondent's confusion around discrimination is once again the lack of being systemically aware and seeing our society as a structurally "racialized social system" as Bonilla-Silva (1997, pg. 469) argues. He states that racialized social systems are "societies in which economic, political, social, and ideological levels are partially structured by the placement of actors in racial categories or races" and that these social systems are structural because in contemporary times societies like the U.S. possess "two or more forms of hierarchal patterns" (Bonilla-Silva, 1997, pg. 469). It is from this logic that racism therefore has a structural foundation, in part, based on race that gives advantages to the dominant racial group and disadvantages to the dominated racial group. I would therefore suggest that by not possessing a structural framework to interpret racial phenomenon in a given society.

## Causes of Crime

The following statements are in response to the question: Some people believe that crime may be due to poverty, others due to lack of morals, and yet others due to the lack of parental supervision. What do you think?

Barbara stated “I don’t think that’s the case. I mean in some situations it could be, but not in all cases.”

Robert “Umm (sighs) morals, no I don’t think, but poverty slash lack of parental supervision yeah. Umm I mean there you get the people that I gotta put some money or some food on the table, sorry seven eleven I don’t wanna shoot you but im gonna rob your store and then you get lack of parental supervision and that’s where you get the Crips and the Bloods and all that stuff so but lack of morals I mean you can have...I don’t know, I don’t, I don’t think it has to do with that.” Robert thinks that “poverty and lack of parental supervisions”, but what jumps out is how he describes people who “gotta put some money or some food on the table” by robbing a “seven eleven” and then jumps to the lack of parental supervision that gives rise to the street gangs the Bloods and the Crips.

This lack of historical context creates an inaccurate reason simply because as detailed in the documentary “Bastards of the Party” the formation of these gangs grew out of the lack of black leadership at the end of the Civil Rights movement, government instigated rivalry between the Black Panthers Party and the Us Organization under COINTELPRO, the deindustrialization of black communities and the introduction of crack cocaine in these communities under what’s referred to the Iran-Contra Affair.

Angela stated “I think your parents can only do so much. So, umm lack of morals it has to be. I think it has to do with your mental as well. I think it might be because of poverty

because once you're in a situation that makes you if you're in a situation like that your gonna want to eat, and your gonna want stuff like that so your morals might decrease a little bit your like "ohh I can steal like a Twinkie bar from a store. I'll be fine.", but if you're not given the correct like nutrition or shelter or like water source like your gonna resort to things you wouldn't usually resort to, but other than that I don't think anything else really depends on it." I would remind the reader that the question asked does not make mention of race, but Angela is somewhat hinging on the use of the culture of poverty theory. It is not in line with what Oscar Lewis argued that the conditions of poverty create sets of cultural beliefs and behaviors that are practiced by a family or community from one generation to the next (Small et. al., 2010, pg. 7), but that poverty itself coupled with a "lack of morals" explains crime.

Sally stated "Umm in a sense I feel it's like an entire dynamic umm because you do have to have some structure and things like that to kind of know where to go but at the same time I mean I've had friends where they didn't really have umm like parental guide in a sense they kind of had to do it for themselves. Umm the biggest things are umm sometimes getting that reality check umm because I have a couple friends uhh couple white friends that uhh they didn't grow up with much and now they're successful. They did all these things because they didn't want to end up where they started. They wanted to become more than that but I have other white friends that they grew up like that and they're like "I can't do any better than that. I might as well just stay there." Umm I mean I've had some friends that were especially in the minority that were going down the wrong route where they were like "I can't do this why bother to do it", but they had that one teacher or that one person that started telling them like "I know you can do it and it might be a little harder and I know I don't understand totally" where just having like even one person or somebody to help guide you."

Sally's response is interesting because she states that it is an "entire dynamic" pointing to having "structure", but then she states that she had friends that didn't have guidance and they "had to do it for themselves", and the need for people to get a "reality check" because she has a couple white friends that uhh they didn't grow up with much and now they're "successful." She also suggests a sort of psychological defeatist mentality when she states that she had other white friends who as she infers "can't do any better than that" as well as minority friends who she infers "I can't do this why bother to do it", but that there was that "one teacher" or "one person" who gave them encouragement. What she misses is that people do not choose to be born into poverty, and that regardless of personal and fiscal responsibility of that person, it is the condition of poverty itself that is the problem (Fehr, Haushofer; 2014).

She is also once again engaging in storytelling with the statement "because I have a couple friends uhh couple white friends that uhh they didn't grow up with much and now they're successful. They did all these things because they didn't want to end up where they started." while adding "that but I have other white friends that they grew up like that and they're like "I can't do any better than that. I might as well just stay there". On the one hand she states that she has white friends who grew up poor but are now "successful" while also having white friends who are not using what I find to be using personal examples of both white friends that are out of poverty and those that are not. What gets tricky in her statement is that she follows it up with how she has had some minority friends that "were going down the wrong route", but that they had the support of a teacher or the like to guide them in the right direction. It's a nice, warm story all too common in movies that while highlighting the nice acts of a Michelle Pfeiffer-like character coming to save the poor downtrodden black student, but fails to understand and highlight the social structures that has and keeps that person in the conditions they are in.

Pam stated “Probably all of the above. I was taught stealing was wrong. Later on, I learned it’s kinda I guess I was ya know the questioning age I was like “Dad why do people do they wanted it? Why couldn’t they wait? Why didn’t they ask their parents to buy it for them? Why couldn’t their grandparents have gotten it for them? In my family ya know I would ya know if you really want something and your parents can’t do it whether it be shoes because they don’t fit and your dad can’t afford them and you want a PlayStation for Christmas your grandparents get it because in my family my grandpa worked for Ford motor company for ever and has all the money and that’s how. The only time I think I would ever steal is if I had a child and there was no possible way in the world I could feed that child. I feel that is truly the only explanation you could ever steal or if I feel like if maybe like if cuz you can’t like let the baby die but I feel like stealing is wrong like you need to earn your things. Like we have programs in this country like where the food pantries we had to go to those sometimes ya know my dad never stole food and ya know we had to sometimes go there and that’s what you had to eat. So, there’s no reason I don’t know the only reason to steal is if you have a hungry child ya know?”

Pam’s response is interesting because of the moral foundation she uses in her statement/argument. In her mind, she has grandparents who are able to buy the things that her parents could not afford not realizing that everyone’s grandparents did and do not work at Ford or any other company that offers wages to where the family has support to lean on. Secondly, the programs that she speaks of like food pantries have problems because they do not address the root problem ([http://www.salon.com/2013/03/15/the\\_problem\\_with\\_food\\_banks\\_partner/](http://www.salon.com/2013/03/15/the_problem_with_food_banks_partner/)) for why people are using these services in the first place: poverty! But for Pam, unknowingly, it is morally wrong to steal unless you have a baby to feed which also makes me think what makes a baby’s life more precious than anyone else who is hungry.

Mary stated “Umm all the above. I don’t know you could go to an impoverished white neighborhood and your gonna see the same stuff that you do anywhere like (infers quotation) in the ghetto or whatever. It’s all the above.” Mary as well is using this culture of poverty theory to explain the conditions of both black and white people. Patrick Moynihan’s central argument in “The Negro Family” is that “At the heart of the deterioration of the fabric of Negro society is the deterioration of the Negro family” (Moynihan, 1965, pg. 5) which is rooted and can be traced as he argues from slavery, urbanization, poverty and unemployment to the growth of black people as a population (Moynihan, 1965, pgs. 15-27).

Hillary stated “Hmm I feel like it’s a combination. You are for example it’s very easy common for a person or for a child who has had a parent or guardian who has been incarcerated to be incarcerated. That’s all they know. I don’t feel that’s necessarily has anything to do with their morals cuz there are really good people in the world who wanna do the right thing but what I’m faced with on an everyday basis you can’t expect me to do the right thing every single day. You cannot expect people who grow up in these urban households and these cities to do the right thing every single day you can’t have the expectation that’s all they know that’s all they have.”

Candice stated “A mixture of both. Umm like people wanna like partake in deviant behavior just cuz’ they wanna test their parent’s boundaries sometimes, peer pressures, societal pressure umm they might feel like they have to. They could be forced like umm or they could just be crazy and wanna do all these things. Yeah, I just think it’s a mixture of both like lack of supervision of the kids. Like if a kid is running around the kitchen with a knife and he’s not being told “no” like he’s not gonna learn that that’s not something you do.”

Sam stated “Umm well it depends on the kind of crimes your committing ya know like some people they sell drugs to help their family. You can’t say it’s an immoral thing to help

your family maybe the selling drugs part isn't the most moral thing but I don't think someone's gonna say don't support your family don't support your kids that's just the situation their living in. I don't think we can really judge them based on that."

Stewart stated "Umm I guess this would go back to the trend we were talking about where I think that could be because umm that's what they grew up in ya know if that makes any sense because if they had an older brother that ya know maybe causes some violence maybe causes some issue or whatever it is and just was kinda deviant and maybe that same individual just follows that trend into "okay well you did this and you didn't get really into that much trouble but so I'm gonna do it" then maybe that could be why potentially".

Melissa stated "I think that you can't blame that on race so much but you can blame it on a lack of morals and a lack of supervision because those kids are just acting out to get attention because they don't know how else to get it".

Sherry stated "I think a lot of it could be because of umm lack of parenting. Umm social influence such as gangs. Umm yeah those are like and also like lack of morals. There's people uh all over the world that kills people like hundreds so yeah I think all three of those things definitely contribute and could be anywhere ya know. And like unfortunately there's plenty of school shootings all over the country so people can't pinpoint "Oh so it's in this neighborhood. This is a bad neighborhood", and so it happens across the country."

Carol stated "Hmm...I think a lot of it has to maybe there is like a little bit environmental and like personality factors but I think a lot of it is due to the circumstances that you get put in like in a like at each point in time like if you're at the wrong place at the wrong time you're gonna be like "okay I'm gonna do this right now" and then but then there's a difference between thought out crime and then like crime you just do. Like premeditated like "I plan to go do this to



somebody next weekend” or like “I’m gonna go rob Jerry of his car” (laughs). Other than like you don’t have any money, your starving, you’re like “I need food right now or I’m going to die!” so you go rob a store. Like I think those are two entirely different things. Like there’s a lot of different things that go into it and like from a psychological standpoint when I took a psych class there’s just “Well we really don’t know but we can guess kind of.”

Lisa stated “I think crime comes from like 2 places. I feel like it comes from one psychological condition obviously cuz like there’s evidence of like what you see as a child has impact on you as your bringing up and stuff so if you’re raised in a house where like bad things happen and you’re gonna have more likely to do that thing and I feel like crime comes from umm sometimes just your own personal just like you’re in a situation and you choose to do that.”

John stated “I think it’s a combination of all three. Because uhh, I can see it in my neighborhood because when you have people who have nothing they tend to don’t care. So, they will take what you have so to say they have something their own. And the way they choose to get something may not be the best way, but it may be the only way they know. There’s a lot of people where you can go and say my family has lived in this neighborhood for decades and generations and we’ve all did the same thing cuz’ nobody has that opportunity to make it out. You know it’s like, it’s a trap. Once you get in the hood it’s very hard to like get out.”

There are two things that stick out to me the most in these responses. First is this running narrative that crime has to do with a lack of morals, the neighborhoods people grow up in, and for some it had to do with parenting. Now I will say that there are a few respondents who stated psychological factors, but this was overwhelmed by notions of the culture of poverty models laid out by Oscar Lewis in his book “La Vida; A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty—San Juan and New York”, and Patrick Moynihan’s “The Negro Family” which fundamentally are

blaming the victim for their condition that can lead to discourses that patronize the poor. The second thing is the internalization of these narratives by some respondents of color namely Angela, Andrew, and Sally. Their statements ring of the culture of poverty, but makes me wonder if this question included race would the logical conclusion point to cultural racism. I think it is safe to say at least that there can be many dominant ideologies at play at the same time.

### Racial Culture

The following statements are in response to the question: Some people may say that racial minorities are worse off than whites because they lack motivation, are lazy, or do not have the proper values to succeed in our society. What do you think?

Barbara stated “I mean I feel like people, people that are minorities they could like they can be lazy and they can be that to, but there are people that like there are people that are minorities that feel that like “this isn’t me” like “I’m better than that”, like “I’m gonna make it to where they are”. I don’t think it has to do with race, I think it’s just people’s mindset and sometimes it has to do with the way they grew up.”

Sally stated “Umm I don’t think that’s necessarily true if anything I think that’s the opposite cuz umm like you’ll have like I kinda referenced back to a lot with the Hispanic and Latino because that’s like where I’m from but like you’ll have a lot of people that will try to like they’ll break the law like to try to illegally cross the border so their family will have a better education umm or a better life or they’ll do it so at least their kids are born in the United States. Like you’ll hear about where they weren’t meaning to get pregnant and they got pregnant and he tries to bring over his wife that is pregnant so that the child can be born in the United States so they can have those privileges that they didn’t umm so I don’t necessarily think that it’s not that

they're not motivated or they don't want to or it's just that it is a little bit harder when you are in the minority."

Pam stated "I think its individual like the like I think its individual I don't wake up as a white person and say I have motivation I had a research paper due I had a research paper due Wednesday and I'm not gonna lie I didn't do a portion of it til Friday and that has nothing to do with it I think its individual because you its individual like it's between you I mean like you could be the person that gets things done the first day it doesn't matter and I think its individual because everyone's different but maybe I think all people procrastinate because I think why would you ever wanna do something when you can nap?"

Mary stated "I don't agree with that because you can't generalize a population. There's lazy white people. You can't there's no way you can generalize an entire population. And because I've seen hardworking every race. You know what, race doesn't define the work that you put in and nor would the people of that race say that "oh because I'm Hispanic I'm lazy" like it doesn't work like that."

Hillary stated "I feel like minorities are probably...(pause)...we know that the odds are against us. We're taught that growing up we don't come into the world, we come into the world with challenges like for example and this is why you can't make it an excuse you absolutely can't make it an excuse my mother and father separated in 2006. From 2006 to 2012 I moved nine times. Now I could use that as an excuse well I didn't have stability and cuz you know what we're so motivated because you know I didn't have that stability growing up guess what I want: stability."

Candice stated "I don't think that's true at all. Like people have different work ethics and everything and there are some lazy people out there like there's gonna be lazy people no matter

what race you are. There's gonna be people that don't wanna work and that just wanna benefit from you but that doesn't mean that its one type of people in the world, its everyone and...yeah (laughs) just I don't know. I don't think people just they just stereotype everyone just cuz' your one thing and just cuz' of what other people have done like that kinda look like you don't make you them and that's what a lot of people just don't understand."

Sam stated "You can't just say that about a group of people that they have lesser mortals (laughs) that's so awful. You can't look at someone and tell their story. I don't think that's true (laughs)."

Stewart stated "Umm yeah that's interesting I think I think it could be that the reason that ya know African Americans and uhh Hispanics and all these different races that are minorities I think their deemed as kinda lazy or umm umm oh what's the other word ya used lazy umm lack of motivation. I think the reason that all is there is because the word unemployment, low income housing, or low socioeconomic status and low income is all kinda attached to these races so I think it's not necessarily that they are lazy and that they are umm lack motivation and uhh don't care, don't wanna get a job or anything like that. I think it's just the fact that these words of unemployment and low socioeconomic status low income are also attached unfortunately to these to these umm races."

Melissa started "I think that's fucking stupid. Because I've seen plenty of white people that are lazy, they lack motivation, and they lack morals".

Sherry stated "I think that's terrible. Like that's a horrible thing to say. Like what gives people the right to say that? Like there's lazy people in all ethnicities and cultures. I don't know maybe people grew up around a lot of black people and so they just saw like "Oh there's like to lazy black people so like all black people are lazy".

Lisa stated “I think that’s also just dumb and something that a lot of white people say to try and create a system and tiers.”

John stated “I would say that some people do not have the proper drive only because that’s what they have been taught. If you like growing up most of my family members did not go to college. They kind of stood on the corner and sold drugs. That was their little hustle. But you know it takes, there is very few little people that say that’s not what I want you know. But that’s just something we’ve been taught, as a kid like you know this is okay.”

Stewart’s response of “African Americans and uhh Hispanics and all these different races that are minorities I think their deemed as kinda lazy” followed by “I think the reason that all is there is because the word unemployment, low income housing, or low socioeconomic status and low income is all kinda attached to these races” highlights the stigmatization of poor blacks and Hispanics. Sherry’s response of “I think that’s terrible... I don’t know maybe people grew up around a lot of black people and so they just saw like “Oh there’s like to lazy black people so like all black people are lazy” demonstrates the cultural racism framework.

John’s response is interesting because of the idea that people that do not have the “proper drive”, whatever that is, are not taught it. He predicates this on the fact that most of his family did not go to college and “stood on the corner and sold drugs” as their “hustle”, but particularly with Stewart who was raised in Detroit neglects unwillingly that Detroit has suffered a lot due to the collapse of the automotive industry. This also shows the storytelling testimonies engaged in with the use of his family and through this process John is demonstrating internalized oppression because his thoughts on the matter have served to “recolonize” negative images of black people as often portrayed by the dominant white narrative therefore dominated “members believe the

dominant group's version of reality, in turn, ceasing to independently define themselves" and their realities (Speight, 2007, pg. 130).

Somewhat similar to John's response Hillary stated along the lines of "you can't make it an excuse" leading into a story about how her parents separated and wanting stability. Barbara and Pam as well argued along the lines of either the individual or the culture while recognizing the absurdity of the statement as well. What still is troubling though is the notion that while that statement sounds illogical to these few respondents they immediately fall onto blaming the victim for their condition not recognizing the role race and class plays in a person social position in life. And once again while most found the statement to be untrue, including white students, the students of color particularly John, Barbara, and Hillary demonstrate once again the internalization of cultural racism and to a lesser extent the culture of poverty theory.

#### Racialized Crime

The following statements are in response to the question: Do you believe that blacks and Hispanics are more likely to be involved in crime? Why?

Robert stated "Umm it depends what kind of crime." I asked for clarification and he replied "Cuz' I have cousins that Mexicans and blacks are more prone to...(sighs) violent crime. I guess but then you also see you know the white average white male going around beating the shit out of his wife. So, I think that Mexicans and blacks are more prone to violent crimes?" I asked him why and he replied "Just like I said from my predisposition. I've seen blacks shoot up stores, I've seen Mexicans shoot up stores, my cousins have done it. Like I've just seen it so that's what just that's my perception is of so I haven't read much so that kind of makes me shallow I guess but that's just what I've seen so."

Robert basis his answer on the personal experience that he has seen blacks and Hispanics “shoot up stores” and are therefore “are more prone to violent crime”. He also points out “you also see you know the white average white male going around beating the shit out of his wife” which is equally a violent crime, but he does not state that white guys are prone to violent crime. I think what is dangerous with this line of reasoning, and maybe this ties in with arguments particularly from Right-wing organizations, is the bias use of crime statistics that use race as the sole measure for criminal behavior. I would also couple this with how the media portrays black and Hispanic male bodies helps reinforce the idea that they are a danger versus their white peers. This is not to negate Robert’s personal account and experience, but I think that part of his “predisposition” comes from the fact that he was raised on the outskirts of the Southside of Chicago, and I would assume that with then nature of crime in black neighborhoods of Chicago that are constantly shown on local news outlets helped play a role in his line of thinking.

Angela stated “I think that people expect blacks and Hispanics to be more involved in crime. I think they’re convicted of crime more than they should be like a lot of innocent people go to jail because stupid law system and stuff like that. Umm I think that there’s a lot of white people that commit crime and a lot of Asian people that commit crime. I think it’s it doesn’t have to do with your race it has to do with your morals and it has to do with, I hate to say it, but like kind of the community you grew up with. I think the media advertises not advertises like covers more people who are black or Hispanic that getting arrested or are like more violent arrest and like we did a research project in my senior year of high school about race and crime and we saw that yeah like black people and Hispanic people were umm convicted more of these crimes. I don’t know I think there’s a stigma towards “ohh this Hispanic person is gonna steal” and people get convicted of it.”

Angela states “people expect blacks and Hispanics to be more involved in crime”. She continues to states that for her it is not a matter of race but “morals”, and the “community you grew up with” which falls in line with the framework of cultural racism. I also disagree with the statement that morals play a role because it should be noted by data (Harrell, et. Al; 2014) that poverty and the rate of non-fatal violent crimes whose households fall at or below the Federal Poverty Level have “more than double the rate of violent victimization as persons in high-income households” between 2008-2014 demonstrating that poverty and not moral or the neighborhood you grew up in account for crime.

Sally stated “Umm a lot of people will say so umm and I guess like statistically some statistics can show that umm but the biggest thing is it kinda ties back into a lot of uhh minority like essentially Hispanic and uhh Latino and African American umm they are already living in like the lower income cities where there’s not as much protection ya know. Where umm people just kinda feel like they have to kinda take matters into their own hands. Where they’ve gotta figure it out themselves uhh because they can’t like necessarily trust the system and things like that. Umm I defiantly think that as people are more like getting up into like the higher classes and things like that that’ll even out but it’s just because the fact that there already kind of already usually like sitting in the lower class that it’s a little bit harder.”

Pam stated “Yeah.” I asked why and she replied “Were gonna go back to the same as everything else if their parents probably don’t have a lot of money because their parents didn’t have a lot of money so either I don’t know why. Okay I feel like crime is very broad (sigh) crime is so broad because most the average serial killer is a white man but that’s serial killing but that’s still terrible thing ya know rape is still done by people you know? It’s not based on race because some people don’t have morals regardless of color or race because of whatever reason



but I don't know. I would say they're more likely to get caught in crime because we as a society view them more as a threat and I'd say that I feel more uncomfortable around black men than white men even though I feel uncomfortable around white men so I'd be like their more likely to get caught because they're viewed automatically are more than a threat when a white man could be ya know."

We can see here for Pam she is struggling a bit with this question when she starts with the lack of finances of the parents i.e. poverty, then she realizes crime is very broad pointing to the "average serial killer is a white man", and while she states that it is not a matter of race but a lack of morals "regardless of color" but still she states in her entire response "I don't know". She does state however that blacks and Hispanics get caught in crime because "we as a society view them more as a threat" followed up with that she feels "more uncomfortable around black men than white men" but with a disclaimer of "even though I feel uncomfortable around white men".

Hillary stated "Mhmm.". I asked her why and she replied "I take that back. No. We're more likely to get caught when we do a crime because of race. And simply because of the color of our skin. White people steal all the time embezzlement like seriously millions and millions of dollars disappear every year. There's no minority getting that close to a million dollars so we might do something and we get caught but there are a lot of real bad white people out here who don't get caught. So, then you'll see more of us in jails and that and it's also because of that privilege. We don't have the lawyers, we don't have the point the court appointed lawyers suck especially depending on the environment that you live in the demographics of that area you're not gonna get somebody that really cares about you cuz honestly think about it they got you they got 40 other people that day so privilege has a lot to do with that in my opinion."

Candice stated “No.” I asked her why and she replied “Cuz’ it’s just statistically white people are.” I asked her for clarification and she stated “Like there’s more incarcerated white men or like I feel like there are but there’s like more ethnic people in jail like getting arrested but I also feel like you need money to win a court case and if you don’t then you’re more likely to get into trouble so but I definitely think white people are more likely to partake in crime because they partially feel they can get away with it because they do think that they are privileged and everything and that they’re like ‘O yeah if it’s between me and this black guy this black guy is going down hands down’ that’s probably the mindset of it but I definitely don’t think that.”

Once again there is a lack of knowledge on race and crime in her and some other respondents when it comes to incarceration. That said, she does highlight in her opinion the idea that the reasons whites engage in crime is because “they partially feel they can get away with it” putting a conscious decision on their behavior by stating “they do think that they are privileged...that’s probably the mindset of it”.

Sam stated “Uhh (sigh) that’s interesting. I think it just I think it goes more with class rather than race.” I asked him what he meant and he replied “Cuz’ ya know if you’re a lower-class citizen you don’t have the opportunities to make the money that upper-class citizens do and your gonna your gonna want that money so your gonna commit the crime to get that kind of money. That’s the way I see it.” Sam’s response, while having a class-based argument, is still under the framework of the minimization of racism because it relegates the cause of crime committed by blacks and Hispanics to an issue of race. What he does not see or ask is if that is the case then why do we not hear more about poor whites committing crime to “get that kind of money”. While a class analysis is indeed necessary in understanding people of color’s conditions, this sort of class reductionist view of race and racism that places it at an

epiphenomenal space, if that, suggests sociopolitical struggles must erase the centrality of race and racism in understanding class structure.

Stewart stated “Umm...what type of crime what sort of crime because I don’t mean to get specific but...”, and I asked him why he was getting specific and he stated “Because I’ve heard that and there are statistics that uhh Hispanics and African Americans do cause uhh more crime unfortunately umm and it could be because of the poverty issue.” It’s very interesting that I think the crimes African Americans and Hispanics commit are broadcast more.”

I asked Stewart why he thought that was and he stated “Umm...I just think it’s just uhh an issue of just prestige against certain races I guess. I think there is this kinda just this thought this value in people’s minds that maybe minorities can cause more violence, can cause more crime and I think maybe that’s why its broadcast more because when it happens its every day its normal ya know so to speak.”

Melissa stated “No.”, and I asked her why and she said “Because I know plenty of white people that are involved in crime and black people standing there saying “Dude don’t do that, that’s fucking stupid.”

Sherry stated “No.”, and I asked her why and she said “Because it’s just a bad coincidence. I think that umm you see the black neighborhoods on the news and then white people in school shootings. Like it’s just...it’s so hard to explain and people try to say people try to stereotype those things, and umm...I forget what the question is. Umm no I don’t think they are. I think its lack of moral, mental instability, and no guardian of that sorts and bad social influences.” Once again, we see signs of cultural racism basing crime committed by blacks and Hispanics being caused by “and no guardian of that sorts and bad social influences.”.

Carol stated “No it just it sounds horrible. I think they’re just more likely to be caught cuz’ people...”, and when I asked her why she stated “Because law enforcement I feel is more likely to crack down on someone whose black or Hispanic and I because prejudice in law enforcement and I feel like people that are not considered white and are don’t get as much of a break as other people when coming into contact with law enforcement and I think there’s a lot of things that go unnoticed where people with the same crime someone whose black will get a harder slap on this wrist than someone whose not black for example.”

Lisa stated “I feel like they’ve gotten more caught then white people so that’s why people say that.”. I asked her why and she replied “Because I feel like ya know umm it just you see all the time in the media the minute that a white person is caught they’re just like “ohh he was mentally like ill” he had like or “he was just a young kid that didn’t know the law” but the minute that someone of color has an ethnic background they’re like “ohh well they come with this so obviously this is why they do it” and they don’t take time to like look or understand the things that are going on in that persons mentally to.”

John stated “I think it depends on where you are and what the person you are. I mean that’s not to say there aren’t crime in the white neighborhood. It is you just don’t like hear about it no more. People tend to cover it up. But when there’s a crime in the black neighborhood “Oh there’s another stereotype” let’s put this on the news ya know. Like people tend to cover up their own.” I asked John to clarify what he meant and he said “Like if I’m a news caster I am not going to show crimes in my area. I’m going to cover it up because I don’t want my area to look bad.”

As previously stated, Robert’s statement demonstrates his predisposition to the belief that blacks and Hispanics engagement in crime stem from some of his family members engaging in

crime, and Sherry's belief that it is due to lack of morals and such demonstrate a form of cultural racism, but the overwhelming majority recognize, as best as they can, that the statement is not true to them. I think the problem with the lack of articulation comes from the fact that these can be difficult questions to answer, and this is not their fault, it's just as a society we do a poor job of teaching this stuff and if we do who really is paying attention to information around crime and race.

### Racial Inequality

The following statements are in response to the question: On average blacks and Hispanics have worse jobs, incomes, and housing than whites. Why do you think this is?

Barbara stated "Because of how it's been in the past. When I was in I think my anthropology class we watched a video on how after think it was World War 2 when people came back and they started building neighborhoods and suburbs were started and there were mostly white people, and when African Americans tried to move in they like let them move in but they would tell the white people that already lived there like 'because your neighbor is Black its bringing down the price of your house' so it's making white people move out".

Robert stated "Well...(sigh) actually I don't have an answer because I've met very successful black men and I've met very ya know low, what's, low life black men. I've met ya know successful Mexicans and low life Mexicans and the same thing for whites so I don't really understand why umm I can't answer that I don't know". While Robert states that he doesn't know why there is this racial disparity he basis this on the fact that he's met "very successful black men" and "low life black men" meaning those that engage in socially unacceptable behaviors i.e. crime.

Angela stated “I think it’s because we put em’ in a situation, we as in America the federal government. We have like put like sector them in situations that were hard to get out of like we put em’ in on poverty and they grew up with this feeling that they have to stay this way or that’s what I believe anyways that they have to be like this and their expected to be like this and I think that some of them might not reach for further because they know that this is what their expected to do. I know they did research on a different resume like a resume of like a black name and a resume with a very white name and they had the same qualifications, everything was the same but they put the white guy over the black guy and I just I feel like it’s all over that your supposed to be like the news media says that your supposed to be treating like these people a type of way and their not all that people say they are like nobody gives the time or takes the time to get to know them”.

Sally stated “Umm I kinda think it is kinda that notion of umm they don’t you don’t necessarily have as much help like trying to get to like a secondary education”.

Pam stated “Because they weren’t because they didn’t have that opportunity. Ya know whites have hundred and fifty years of well lots of more years”.

Mary stated “Its built in. Maybe that’s institutional racism I don’t know.”. I asked her what she meant by this and she said “I’m gonna compare it to like how women make like a little bit less than men in that situation like it’s just something that everyone knows about but for some reason it hasn’t been addressed or like changes haven’t been made”. While Mary is on track in pointing out institutional racism as being the reason for racial disparities in jobs, housing and incomes, however vague it might be, she is falling into the trap of talking about these racial disparities using a false equivalence in highlighting gender pay gap. A false equivalency is a fallacy that describes a situation where there is a logical and apparent equivalence when in fact

there is none. The reasons and social processes for these racial disparities is not similar to how women make less money than men.

Hillary stated “Because of how the system was set up to begin with. Umm they purposefully made areas for black people to tear down, not so much for us to tear down, but you give us, you give us a project and you expect that to flourish. You have these people who live in poverty, you have these people who don’t have education, and then you expect us to do what with it? Its gonna diminish itself. It has no the foundation on which it was built on. It was not built for success. You give people or you give the minority scraps and expect them to flourish? That’s backwards. It can’t happen. So, like even the housing market back in the day it literally was like ‘no blacks here’ and it was like red zones and that type of stuff was totally unfair”.

Candice stated “(sigh) Because they tend to be viewed in the media or like in the past as very negative like (sigh) have negative factors associated with them like umm or they could be seen as like lazy, not hard workers just like inferior basically I wanna say but I don’t know why people do this”. For Candice, it is a matter of how media portrays blacks and Hispanics that accounts for the racial disparities. I would not disagree with her statement but add that the ways in which mass media portray people of color helps solidify the idea of dog whistle politics with statements like “welfare queen” of the 1980s.

Sam stated “Uhh alright ya know inheriting money that takes generations ya know from the Civil Rights Movement onward that’s where I think ya know black people have gotten a little bit more freedom and it takes a lot of time to inherit the money and white people have definitely had a lot more time ya know to build those connections, build the families, get the money going ya know. Other racial minorities they’ve been neglected so they haven’t ya know I don’t think

the opportunities but that's just what I think". Sam highlights intergenerational inheritance of wealth to explain racial disparities.

Stewart stated "Umm...hmm...it could be it could be where they're from.". I asked Stewart what he meant and he replied "Umm I think and so let's yeah I think it could be actually kinda where what they were predisposed to. I don't think its necessarily an issue on the white individuals but maybe it's because if you grew up in low income housing, low unemployment, low umm socioeconomic status. Maybe that's what your kinda put into unfortunately ya know if ya think about it where you don't really know anything other than trying to just get by. Ya don't really know anything other than unemployment or making it hard to find jobs. You don't know anything other than low socioeconomic status so maybe that could that's the trend and you kinda follow throughout your life because you just don't know any better if that makes any sense so.".

Stewart's argument for racial disparities is that it does not fall on "white individuals", which does not take into account structural impediments around race and class that prevent upward social mobility, but that growing up in low income housing and poor neighborhoods coupled with the lack of knowledge of knowing anything else except "to just get by" places responsibility on these poor individuals of color. This just neglects the historical and contemporary fact of institutional and systemic forms of racism and class oppression's effects on communities of color i.e. cultural racism framework and blaming the victim.

Melissa stated "I think that it's because they think they can't apply themselves because they'll be shut down by the white people maybe". I asked her what she meant and she replied "Like they think somebody like a white person will come in and they'll give the white person a job over them just because they are a minority. But that's not true if you apply yourself and you



work at it, I just I've met like my girlfriend's family they have great jobs all of them they have wonderful jobs they have beautiful houses".

Melissa states that blacks and Hispanics "think they can't apply themselves" based on the idea that "they'll be shut down by white people" adding that blacks and Hispanics just need to "apply yourself and you work at it". She basis this on the fact that her black girlfriend's family has "great jobs", "wonderful jobs", and "beautiful houses". She is using anecdotal evidence by engaging in racial storytelling to base her statement on even while Pew Research (<http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2016/06/27/on-views-of-race-and-inequality-blacks-and-whites-are-worlds-apart/>) states that income and wealth inequality persists amongst whites versus blacks.

Sherry stated "Hmm...back to that one. Umm I'm probably gonna say because the past has caught up to us and umm with all the discrimination laws in the past with the discrimination in housing and in jobs umm that has still carried over into today and I think that needs to be fixed.". I asked her what she meant by "carried over" and she replied "Hmm...it's like...let's see...carried over...like a lot of people try to say that "O we're past this" but it really takes a while for a nation to recover and so I think that like umm some people didn't agree with the new laws about uhh everybody needs to be included and so I think that a lot of people kind of under like what is it like secretly kind of discriminated on their own and like kinda looped through the law a little bit so yeah I still think some people were discriminating".

Carol stated "Ohh I just read an article on this (chuckles) which made me very upset. Umm the article was talking about how umm with the communities for like giving out loans to help move out to the suburbs and stuff they were predominantly more were given more favor to white people than nonwhite people so it's more due to circumstance created by people in power.

It's mostly due to circumstances that were created by like local, state, federal governments and other people in power in discrimination in the past that many people don't see it or ignore it and that's my thoughts on that".

Lisa stated "Umm I feel like it gets it has to do with like the fact that the people that are in power are majority white and they fell like they need to control the system in some way and there's all these prejudices and biases against people of color and minorities umm yeah just the yeah".

John stated "I would say that African Americans and Hispanics we come from public schools so we're not properly equipped with education and the chances of a black or Hispanic kid coming from a public school to college to make more money is very low. So, we tend to like settle with that high school education GED, and that's the wage we uhh get. Nobody's fighting for those types of jobs". John places racial disparities on ill equipped schools which plays a role, but the only point of contention is the idea that blacks and Hispanics "settle" not realizing the ways in which race and class influence and impact these communities outside of the classroom.

Most respondents point to structural reasons such as media portrayal, institutional racism, and past actions like the passing down of wealth or the lack thereof for the racial disparities. I still find Stewart's response of cultural racism to be interesting because of all the frameworks used by my respondent's cultural racism comes up the most. I think this is made possible because of our belief in this society that everyone's position in life comes from their ability or lack thereof. This meritocracy narrative coupled with hard work and self-responsibility of the individual I think helps make it possible to not see race as a determining factor.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

When I began collecting data for this thesis I was expecting to come across a lot of responses of colorblindness, but surprisingly I found very little from my millennial respondents. It should be noted that all of my respondents, unintentionally in regards to data collection, either were currently enrolled or previously had classes on race at Western Michigan University at the time of data collection. That said, if we revisit Dr. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's frameworks for colorblind racism in conjunction with the results of the data presented the only frameworks that I see much use of is cultural racism which "uses culturally based arguments to explain the standing of minorities in society", and to a lesser extent the minimization of racism which "suggests discrimination is no longer a central factor affecting minorities' life choices" (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, pg. 28).

I believe one of the limitations of my research lies in the questions used. Beyond questions that ask for background information like where they grew up, where they went to school, and the racial demographics of the neighborhoods and schools they attended, questions like their feelings on interracial marriage, government programs that specifically target racial minorities, or causes of crime revealed no use of colorblindness. I think that white millennials are more exposed to racial minorities, particularly in college, therefore I find that if future research that is conducted on millennials and usage of colorblindness needs to be revamped with questions that specifically target current racial events and the data around them to see how informed they are.

Questions around specific events of police brutality, data that shows racial inequality around things like healthcare, employment, education, life expectancy, incarceration rates, housing, etc. that requires them to answer that question directly. An example is the question I

asked “On average blacks and Hispanics have worse jobs, incomes, and housing than whites. Why do you think that is?”. Looking back on this I would suggest that the question be broken down and to query a response specifically in regards to jobs, then income/wealth, housing, education, etc. giving specific examples e.g. quantitative and qualitative data that provides context around the question.

The other limitation with my research is that all respondents had classes on race and so I wonder how much those classes may or may not have influenced their responses. On one hand, I think the data collected is valuable in the sense that it reveals what students that were enrolled in classes around race think about racism broadly speaking, and specifically the responses to the question of how they defined racism where each respondent placed it at the individual and interpersonal level. This shows that there needs to be changes in how institutional and systemic racism is taught in the classroom which demonstrate that there are levels to racism that include both institutional racism which is 1) the racist policies and practices practiced in a given institution e.g. schools, prisons, businesses, etc. that produce unjust outcomes for people, and 2) systemic racism which are the practices that are played out among all institutions and society as a whole. By focusing on the individual level of racism they fail to think about systemic racism therefore they are systemically unaware. Highlighting policies and practices within and among institutions to students with the constant disclaimer that what is being taught is to show what institutional and systemic racism is and how it operates will hopefully make systemically aware students.

But on the other hand, I feel that future research on college students should collect data from all academic disciplines. I would also suggest gathering data from first-year students or students who have not had a class on race, or who has just started their first week of a class on

race as to get, if possible, respondents who have not been academically exposed to information on racism. I would also think that it would be interesting to solely target first-year students who are starting a class or classes on race to see what their responses are before and after to see if there is a change in how they view issues surrounding race if educators are teaching the many dimensions of racism.

As I write this it has almost been four months since the United States elected Donald Trump to be its 45th president. This is an individual who has in part ran on a platform that has played to the racist, xenophobic, white nationalist sentiments of many white Americans. He has made statements that he would enact as policy such as “Build the wall” and implementation of a database that would register Muslims coming to and in the United States.

Donald Trump has picked individuals who have a record of promoting white supremacy such as Steve Bannon as White House chief strategist who is an executive chair of Right-wing website Breitbart News which is deemed by the Southern Poverty Law Center as catering to extremist and fringe ideas of the Right using language that is racist, anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, and anti-immigrant (<https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2016/04/28/breitbartcom-becoming-media-arm-alt-right>).

He has also picked U.S. Senator Jeff Sessions as U.S. Attorney General who has a track record of making comments such as “The NAACP, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Operation PUSH and the National Council of Churches were all un-American organizations teaching anti-American values.”, “I thought those guys [the Ku Klux Klan] were OK until I learned they smoked pot.”, and “You know the NAACP hates white people; they are out to get them. That is why they bring these lawsuits, and they are a commie group and a pinko organization as well.” that demonstrate Session’s racial sentiments towards the black community

([https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2016/12/02/jeff-sessionss-comments-on-race-for-the-record/?utm\\_term=.7685488d0f46](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2016/12/02/jeff-sessionss-comments-on-race-for-the-record/?utm_term=.7685488d0f46)). It is in this political context that educating people and particularly the young about what racism is and how it operates is needed more now than ever if we are going to effectively confront and combat it.

## APPENDIX

### HSIRB Approval Letter

Date: June 17, 2015

To: Vincent Lyon-Callo, Principal Investigator  
Christopher Smith, Student Investigator for thesis

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 14-11-09

Thank you for submitting revisions to your research project titled “Anything but Race: Ethnographic Investigation in Colorblind Racism and Undergraduate Student Behavior at Western Michigan University” has been **approved** under the **expedited** category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may **only** be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project (e.g., ***you must request a post approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your application under “Number of subjects you want to complete the study.”*** Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

**Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date stated below.**

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

**Approval Termination: June 16, 2016**

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