White Male College Students: An Examination of Identity Development, Masculinity, and Institutional Connections

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WHITE MALE COLLEGE STUDENTS: AN EXAMINATION
OF IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT, MASCULINITY,
AND INSTITUTIONAL CONNECTIONS

by
Randy Ott

A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
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White, male college (WCM) students have been a central focus of researchers in higher education throughout its existence, but have not been studied as a group whose identity development is a key issue. This study looked at WCM, their masculinity levels, and how their past connections with peers, instructors, or staff influenced their White identity development. In this study I utilized a phenomenological research approach to learn about the lived experiences of eight WCM. The eight WCM were at least junior status at a medium size, Midwestern, public university.

The results point to multiple conclusions and themes. This study supported and deepened prior research that all groups within the university impact WCM. WCM can make connections with peers, instructors, and or staff, but those connections typically happen within different contexts and start under different circumstances. Participants felt that their peer connections were most important and influential. The masculine tendencies of the participants did not hinder them from connecting with others within the university. Interesting pieces of information tied to how WCM view instructors differently than peers or staff emerged. In addition, this study presented data detailing how students use humor to talk about race with their peers, and how their participants felt their education and current views about race began at home before entering college.
A positive White identity typically brings about stable psychological health, higher quality of life, comfort in multicultural environments, and less prejudice towards differing cultures (Ponterotto, Utsey, & Pederson, 2006). Thus, these findings can have implications for an entire university community.
I first want to share my appreciation to the men who participated in this study. This study would not have been possible without the help of the eight men who agreed to be interviewed. We spent many hours together and they taught me volumes about college men and about myself. Their willingness to be open about their pasts and endure my questions is a testament to their characters and commitment to teaching others.

I would like to address the individuals in my committee. Dr. Bill Arnold, our paths crossed late in the writing process, but your insights about interviews and keeping me focused on the end product were tremendous. Your calm and level-headed persona is contagious. To Bradford Winkler, who was my go-to for a unique perspective and someone who has gained years of experience thorough student development work: I will always remember our days together in law class. Dr. Donna Talbot, you have watched me grow and change over the past ten years. I learned from you that I had to see and understand myself before I could truly assist students. You pushed me to always strive for better and although being outside of my comfort zone is difficult, the knowledge gained is worthwhile. To Dr. Andrea Beach: Words cannot describe how you helped me through this process. I remember before my first class with you, fellow students told me that you were a “tough instructor.” They were right. Your high expectations are only matched by your patience and commitment to your students. Thank you for everything.

I would also like to thank my family. To my dad, who always supported my choices, and told me when I was 18, “No matter what you do, give yourself choices.” I
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To my son Teague: As I write this you are just learning to read and write. Throughout this dissertation process you were always in the back of my mind. It was hard choosing to read or write for this dissertation when I could have been with you, but worthy sacrifices can be hard. This research taught me that your world will be filled with change and people who are different than you. Those differences are what make us great. I hope in the coming years I can share with you what I learned so that you can do more and see things I never imagined.

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Randy Ott
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

All college students enter the university with a wide range of perceptions, expectations, and varying knowledge about their identity. Whether or not these expectations are met, perceptions are found to be true, or identity developed is determined by many factors. These factors can be influenced by the students’ interactions with peers, parents, teachers, and connections made to the college or university being attended (Kuh, Gonyea, & Williams, 2005). One group that is highly influenced by their past experiences before coming to campus is White college men (WCM) (Edwards, 2007). I have worked in higher education for over 10 years and held positions that allowed me to have in-depth discussions with many students. Possibly because of the student demographics of the university I work for, many of my conversations have been with White males. I have listened to their struggles, admitted mistakes, naivety, arrogance, and questions. Those who needed help I tried to guide. Some were successful and some were not. Too many times students have left my office overwhelmed, likely to leave the university, or made to leave the university. On many occasions I would ask myself, why are these White males struggling, have they connected with anyone at this university, and what can be done to help them? On a few occasions students have sat before me and I could relate to their struggles or see traits we share. From my experience, getting a college education can be the most emotional, challenging, enlightening, and
rewarding experience of a person’s life; I can relate to this as a university administrator, researcher, and student.

All students benefit from connecting to the institution they attend (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). Students who connect to their institution have a higher level of success in areas of academic achievement, personal and intellectual development, and persistence (Astin, 1993; Kuh & Hu, 2001a, 2001b; Miller, Bender, Schuh & Associates, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). WCM are rarely considered an “at-risk group” of students requiring campus connections to be successful. Success for the purposes of this study is based on my experiences, and from my perspective means earning passing grades in the classes taken, deciding on and working toward a degree program, and being open to learning and connecting inside and outside of the classroom. However, with campus resources stretched to provide services to those historically identified as at-risk, WCM often have to find their own sources of connection to the institution. This study intends to examine who WCM connect with while attending college.

I acknowledge that my lens of connecting while attending a university, whether with peers, staff, or instructors, are based on my past experiences. In this work I am defining a connection between a WCM and others within the university as someone a WCM would talk with about their lives outside of day-to-day routine things, go to for help with a problem, or discuss things typically not between students and instructors or staff within the university. An example would be for a WCM to talk with their instructor about a romantic relationship or for a WCM to be invited to a staff person’s house. As will be described in the literature review, positive connections with instructors can
include time together outside of class; with peers the connections include common interests and making the students feel as if they matter. Staff connections can take many forms, but commonly include helping students feel a part of the university in non-academic ways.

Another term that is vital to this research and is influenced by my own experiences is masculinity. Masculinity within this research will be guided by the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ) (Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1974), which is designed to measure masculinity by personal characteristics. By means of using the PAQ’s constructs and my own views on masculinity I hope to gauge whether the masculine levels of the research participants impacted their connections. My personal definition of masculinity involves how open or closed a person is to showing and talking about their feelings, their personal habits such as consuming alcohol or participating in sports, and what an individual does and talks about with others.

The connections WCM have made within their college or university may also influence their own White identity development. White identity refers to the acknowledgement of a shared European descent racial group (Helms & Carter, 1990). Shared racial heritage can take many forms, such as African or Indian heritage, all of which can then be associated with that particular group's identity. White identity development is an examination of psychological development considering race (Helms & Carter, 1990). In common terms, this means that White identity refers to a White person identifying with others who assume the same racial heritage; being White. The development piece is crucial to understanding White identity development and how WCM may be influenced by peers, staff, or instructors. Developmental theory for White
individuals has commonalities with other race-based identity theories, as well as unique differences. The commonalities and three “racial identity components” that influence development include “potential patterns of the personal, reference group, and ascribed identities” (Helms & Carter, 1990, p. 49). The potential patterns of the personal can be how an individual’s personality influences him towards choices, such as an appreciator of art visits art galleries. An individual’s reference group is those people with whom a particular person associates: a devout Christian may have a reference association with others of similar faith. Ascribed identities are what individuals identify with in addition to their race such as a student, mother, and employee. According to Helms (1990), these components are vital to an individual’s development and in combination with environmental factors, individual attributes, and personal life experiences, influence identity development. The one unique difference between White identity development and other race-based identity developments is the role of the referent group. Research has shown that for White individuals to progress in their development, largely because they exist as the dominant racial group, they must interact with individuals of other races (Mercer & Cunningham, 2003). Helms (1984) describes this process as seeking out true information from other races and acknowledging what it means to be White. Other race-based identity development models encourage individuals to learn and develop their identity by being with others of the same race (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1989). WCM have the opportunity to experience the three racial identity components and have their identity affected by their environmental, individual, and personal life choices.

Some of the choices and sources of connection to the university for WCM traditionally include peers, staff, and instructors. How WCM develop connections, and if
their level of identity development is influenced by these same connections, is another focus of this study. This research may prove to be important because WCM who are exposed to developing their White identity have greater chances for higher quality of life (Helms, 1990). The quality and quantity of the connections between WCM and others within the institution often lies with the student making efforts to seek connections. However, student perceptions of interactions with differing groups may vary greatly. When asked about interacting with instructors, students mention feelings of intimidation, embarrassment, or insignificance (DiGregorio, 1996). Students are more likely to interact with staff than instructors because these interactions do not involve eventual grading and graduation, but males can be hesitant about these interactions because of the perceived pressures to be masculine (Edwards, 2008). Often the most comfortable relationship for students to seek and create is with peers (Bank, Slavings, & Biddle, 1990). For the purposes of this study the term peers will be interchangeable with friends. This is because the participants described the people who they considered friends and peers as one in the same.

Statement of Problem/Purpose Statement

Extensive research has addressed White identity development (Hardiman, 1982; Helms & Carter, 1990; Hornak, 2003; Scott & Robinson, 2001), masculinity (Spence & Helmreich, 1978), and the connections (Dungy, Rissmeyer, & Roberts, 2005; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004) students make while attending college as separate study areas. However, very little research has been conducted that brings the concepts of how White identity development is influenced by student connections. Further knowledge about White identity development and specifically the identity development
of WCM is important for several reasons. A positive White identity typically brings about stable psychological health, higher quality of life, comfort in multicultural environments, and less prejudice towards different cultures (Ponterotto, Utsey, & Pederson, 2006). A developed White identity brings about multiple benefits to that person and the ideal times to be exposed to identity awareness are the late teens, i.e. college years (Helms, 1990). Thus, there are multiple reasons why studying White identity development amongst college men is important. The U.S. Census Bureau is projecting double digit increases in minority representation within the population over the next 40 years, which will also hold consistent for the make-up of college graduates. If White men begin to feel the pressure from other groups for occupations or find themselves in social settings they are not accustomed to, the negativity toward others groups could increase (Scott & Robinson, 2001).

It is a responsibility of higher education to prepare all students for future success socially and professionally. And thus, learning more about how and with whom WCM connect at the university will lend to more knowledge about aiding this group. In summary, because of their potential future, increasingly diverse society, and needing help on-campus, more information is needed to deeply and specifically understand how White identity develops for WCM. The following questions were proposed and used to add to the body of knowledge.

**Research Questions**

How do connections White college men have with peers, instructors, or staff influence their achievement of Helms’s stage 2 of White identity development?
1. How do White college men who have achieved stage 2 of Helms’s (1984) White identity describe their process of making connections with peers, instructors, or staff within the university?

2. How do they make meaning of experiences connecting with peers, instructors, or staff within the university?

3. How do the masculine tendencies of White college men who have achieved level 2 of Helms’s White identity influence their connections with peers, instructors, or staff?


**Conceptual Frame**

The conceptual frame displayed below gives a functional depiction of the proposed study. As shown, the interactions White college men have with instructors, peers, and staff are overlapping relationships that may be influenced by their masculinity and impact their White identity development. The conceptual frame was designed as a cyclical process because the masculinity levels and connections within the university may influence identity development as Helms’s (1984) White identity process describes. The phenomenological nature of this study allowed for the lived experiences of the participants to be put in the context of the conceptual frame. As White college males interact with peers, instructors, or staff; these interactions can be shaped by the male’s level of masculinity. The experiences fostered by these connections may influence the male’s level of White identity development.
Dissertation Overview

Chapter two presents past relevant literature to this study. I have given a general overview of past research conducted on college students and college men. Building upon what is known about college students the next sections focus on past work giving insight into the connections between White college men and their instructors, peers, and staff within the university setting. The last section within chapter two details information related to White identity development. Multiple theories of White identity are presented including their histories, uses, limitations, and benefits.
Chapter three, which is the research methods chapter, begins with a description of my role as the researcher followed by the research design which includes details of the sampling, participants, and recruitment. Next within the research section is information explaining phenomenological methods of research. After the research method is explained data collection is examined to explain the instrumentation, interview protocol, survey instrument, and consideration of human subjects that were used. The last section within research methods includes information on the techniques I used to ensure data trustworthiness and authenticity.

Chapter four includes the summary stories and many quotes from the eight participants.

Chapter five is dedicated to the results of the study. All four of the research questions are answered using many direct quotes from the participants. And, chapter five contains all the six emergent themes that were discovered when analyzing the data.

Chapter six presents a summary of the study, limitations, and recommendation for further research, suggestions for practice, and my personal reflection. A list of references and appendices follows chapter six.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter reviews relevant theoretical frameworks on masculinity, White identity development, and published literature on college students. Because this study will add to the body of knowledge on White identity development specifically pertaining to WCM, many areas should be reviewed. This research idea came to me from my own experiences as a White college male, my knowledge of White identity development, and college student connection data. I saw a noticeable gap in research associated with White identity development, masculinity, and student connections to their institution having never been synthesized together to find new insights about higher education serving this at-risk population and preparing them for life after college. Thus, extensive literature was needed to present the relevant theories and prior research.

The literature is reviewed in the order that allows the reader to build upon the knowledge gained from each prior section. The first section is on college students, because the study requires a basic understanding of this population. The specific group targeted in this study is White college men (WCM). Very little research exists on WCM as a specific population and thus reviews of college men, WCM being an at-risk group, and masculinity was necessary. Masculinity is presented within the section of college men because, as the literature presents, a college male’s masculinity level can be critical
to his ability and willingness to connect with others. The second section builds upon what is known about students and WCM and seeks to answer what is known about people students interact with on campus. Sections devoted to students interacting with instructors, other students, and staff are presented. The data on student-instructor and student-student connections is exhaustive and both claim to be the most significant interaction leading to a student’s success. The literature on student-staff connections had to be represented differently than the other two because staff within higher education can take on many different forms. Sections were chosen as the published literature dictated and sought to explain the roles of academic advisors, campus supervisors, and student affairs staff. The third section on White identity development presents the topic’s history and uses. I took a historical approach to detail the three most widely-cited theories of White identity development. The most detail was given to Helms’s White Racial Identity Attitude Scale (WRIAS) (1990), the model used in this study. The WRIAS is a measure seeking to assess the racial identity development of individuals. Within the WRIAS, Helms and Carter use the terms Black and White, referring to each group. For the purposes of this study and to remain consistent with Helms and the terminology used by the participants in this study I will use the term Black instead of African American. The last section details the gaps in the research that this study is designed to fill, adding to the body of knowledge.

During the literature review process I constantly reexamined the research questions and conceptual frame to ensure the intention of the study remained consistent and clear to potential readers. A wide range of sources was solicited to ensure a cross-
section of information was represented. In addition, I cited first-hand sources when possible as well as the most current information available.

**College Students**

Hundreds of studies have been conducted on college students and how going to college affects them. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, 2005) successfully categorized and synthesized the vast research on college students in their multi-edition books, *How College Affects Students*. This compilation of research is considered the fundamental information source for studies related to college students. From the original compilation in 1991 to the most recent work in 2005, *How College Affects Students: A Third Decade of Research*, the research seeks to understand college students. Given the sheer magnitude of undertaking a review of nearly 2,500 studies that have appeared in the literature between 1989 and 2001, Pascarella and Terenzini have synthesized the information with readability for all levels. The work by Pascarella and Terenzini is fundamental to college student research. For the purposes of this study and relevant past research, work focusing on college men will be cited.

**College Men**

Historically, men were the first and only group studied when research on college students began. Not until the late 1960s and 70s was gender or race factored into studies on college students. Vaillant (1978, 1979) conducted studies on college-age men and explored connections between mental and physical health, alcoholism, and predictors of good husbands and fathers.

Two notable and relevant findings for this study have surfaced in recent research: masculinity amongst college men is an important developmental factor (Edwards, 2008),
and college men are more at-risk for failure in college than had been previously perceived (Caison, 2005).

**College men: The new at-risk group.** When researchers are asked to explain why college women or students of color struggle with performance, persistence, and engagement, they cite research that has shown that the causes are rooted in sexism and racism (Capraro, 2004). However, when the same issues of performance, persistence, and engagement of college men are questioned, experts respond with no clear explanation (Capraro). Administrators who seek to meet the needs of college men are often trained in student development theories that were developed by looking primarily at men and thus err in their understanding of men (Davis & Laker, 2004). Laker (2003) argued “the early research did not study ‘men.’ Rather, it studied ‘students’ who were men” (p. 1). Men who attend college, and especially White men, have been associated with privilege and presumed success after college. Despite the many ingrained advantages White men have in the scope of higher education, academic leaders have recently been reporting negative trends in recruitment, retention, and academic success of White men (Kellom, 2004). Kellom edited *Developing Effective Programs and Services for College Men* to bring attention to the growing awareness that college men are decreasing their levels of success. Kellom brought together authors and practitioners from varied disciplines and institutions to educate readers on male issues related to spirituality, masculinity, and lessons learned from all-female institutions. Surprisingly, neither Kellom nor any of the authors of *Developing Effective Programs and Services for College Men* mentioned how the success of WCM may be associated with who these men connect with and their White identity development.
**College men: Masculinity.** Traditional notions of masculinity have been researched and discussed by scholars since the social movements of the 1960s. Brannon (1976) defined masculinity as dominant within society, related to manhood, and describing what it means to be the dominant sex. However, much of the traditional work on men and masculinity has sought to explain the general population and has not focused on specific individuals. Two seminal works that addressed the need for more specific research in men are by Pleck (1981) and Filene (1986). Pleck wrote that male masculinity is strained by the notion that masculinity is defined by the sex role of men who are perceived to be dominant over females. Pleck felt that society had more problems with the link between sex and masculinity than individual men truly experience in their lives. Filene (1986) wrote a historical account of masculinity and its connections to feminism. The research by Filene found that masculinity must co-exist with feminism for gender roles to be considered equal. In his research and publications, Kimmel (1994) wrote that the rules of manhood are too narrowly defined. Kimmel asked why men have to be the most dependable, sturdiest, and daring; these questions of manhood introduced by Kimmel tie into the masculinity of college men and the work done by Lyman (1987).

Lyman found that college men fear being viewed by others as not dependable or daring. This fear pushes men to connect with each other in the form of banter and sexual humor, which requires no emotional disclosure. Lyman, gives examples of college men’s masculine behavior, noting that this masculine behavior is especially common in fraternity cultures. Some of the behaviors include excessive alcohol consumption, degrading women, and aggressive competition. The attention given to masculinity produced research in the area and varying means to measure masculinity.
Plummer (2006) and Chambers, Tincknell, and Van Loon (2004) discovered that dominant masculine behaviors that objectify other non-masculine individuals begin before the college-age years. In both research projects, males in their early teen years were displaying attitudes that disrespected women and men who displayed feminine characteristics. Plummer discussed how males quickly learn what behaviors could open them to ridicule. These behaviors often were met with bullying, done to mask the bully’s fears of not being masculine enough. Young men felt they had to act in a certain way to be accepted.

In his recent work involving college men, Edwards (2008) found similarities to the studies by Plummer (2006) and Chambers, et al. (2004). Edwards used a qualitative approach to learn about the gender identity development of college-age men. He found that the college men in his study felt pressure to conform to society’s expectations of masculinity. All the men interviewed talked about being unemotional, aggressive, the breadwinner, and tough in order to meet societal expectations (Edwards). One of the consequences Edwards discusses is that college men described forgetting who they were and a sense of loss of authenticity. The men who began to work toward taking off the mask talked about various influences, which included peers and instructors in the university.

Recent work that extends Edwards’s (2008) findings that men are struggling with being true to themselves and that their masculinity may factor into this struggle was conducted by Harris and Edwards (2010). Harris and Edwards found that the college men surveyed felt pressure to be masculine. This pressure was a matter of acceptance by their peer groups and what they perceived as normal behavior for college men. This behavior
included consuming alcohol, being competitive, acting demeaning toward women, and being aggressive. One of the consequences discussed by these men was their actions toward women precluded them from meaningful and exclusive relationships with women. The men discussed their desire to be exclusive with one woman, but the pressure to act masculine was too great. Another consequence found by Harris and Edwards (2010) that may have connections to this study was that pressure these men felt to be masculine influenced their ability to be open with other men. The authors talk about how perceived masculine parameters held the college men back from forming close friendships with other men. Unfortunately, the article does not explore who the college men desired connections with. The article also mentioned that those college men who developed a healthy sense of their own masculinity reflect back on “coaches, faculty, work-study supervisors, counselors, student leaders, and deans…as playing key roles in the men’s growth” (2010, p. 58). Considering the work by Edwards (2008) and Harris and Edwards (2010), the masculinity levels of the participant’s connections with others within the university should be considered.

As previously explained, masculinity has been a researched topic since the 1970s. The research has produced a further understanding of men and resulted in attempts to measure and establish constructs of masculinity. David and Brannon (1976) established one of the earliest attempts to measure masculinity and identified four ideologies of masculinity that men may be labeled as. The four ideologies included “no sissy stuff,” “the big wheel,” “the sturdy oak,” and “give em hell.” Thompson and Pleck (1995) completed a resource guide of masculine ideologies and highlighted 11 measures that sought to give insight into what men actually are like or should aspire to be like.
Thompson and Pleck identified the three most commonly used measures of masculinity which include; the Gender Role Conflict Scale (O’Neill, Helms, Gable, David & Wrightman, 1986), Conformity to Male Norms Inventory (Mahalik et al., 2003), and the Male Role Norms Inventory (Levant & Fischer, 1998). Each of these measures provide its own insight into masculinity and the varying traits men possess. However, each measure is designed to label men’s tendencies to behave with particular characteristics such as restrictive emotions, violence, status seeking, avoidance, or femininity.

All of the three most commonly used measures and the constructs they measure for are valuable, but do not give the masculinity information needed for this study. To gauge connections with others on campus the participants did not need to complete a measure, but instead discussed their masculine tendencies. A measure was needed to act as a guide to give insight into males’ overall masculinity levels. Spence, Helmreich, and Stapp (1974) developed such a measure named the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ) (Appendix G). The PAQ measures Masculinity (M), Femininity (F), and Masculinity-Femininity (M-F) with items that describe personal characteristics. The constructs addressed within the PAQ include displaying feelings, awareness of self, self confidence, and social habits. These basic groups of masculinity and femininity and the overall gauging of each the participant’s masculine tendencies make the PAQ ideal for this study and a valuable tool to the qualitative phenomenological nature of this research.

**PAQ reliability and college population normative data.** The PAQ was developed in 1974; though dated, it is ideal for this study because of its overall masculinity measure and the fact that its original developmental testing was among a
college student population (Spence, Helmreich, and Stapp). The original PAQ had 55 questions, but was shortened to 24 questions. The reliability testing that compared the 55 question format to the 24 question format was conducted on college students and resulted in .93, .93, and .91 for M,F, and M-F respectively (Spence, Helmreich, and Stapp, 1974). The PAQ was tested for reliability in a grant funded program within the United States military in 1980. Over 1000 male cadets at the U.S. Military Academy were given the PAQ multiple times over a 2½ month period and the “test proved to be highly reliable” (Yoder, Rice, Adams, Priest, & Prince, 1982, p. 23). Unfortunately, exact reliability numbers were not reported, yet this research has been frequently cited. Further research on the PAQ’s reliability and validity show that many research studies have used the PAQ as a basis for measuring masculinity; this frequent use of the PAQ affirm it as a credible source. Whereas the frequent use of the PAQ in other research gives it credibility as a useable measure, none of these studies that used the PAQ did further testing to check its reliability and validity other than the 1980 military study.

This study intends to shed light on the ways that White identity is impacted by masculinity and men connecting with others within the university. Men’s masculine tendencies can factor into their ability and willingness to connect with others. The PAQ constructs will give this study the ability to ensure that masculinity is being considered for each participant within the context of their White identity development and connections (or lack thereof) to others within the university.

**Summary–College Students**

This study was not done to repeat the exhaustive research previously conducted on White college men, but to examine a distinct subset of college students who are at-risk
and should be properly prepared for their future. Torres (2003), in her research on influences of identity development for Latino students, offers an insight relevant to this study: “the same way a practitioner gets-to-know a student to gain insight as to where he or she is developmentally, could be used to explore the factors that could influence how a Latino student’s ethnic identity may evolve” (p. 544). Similarly, I was able to get-to-know some WCM to gain insight into their identity development and connections to the university. Recent data suggests that White males may be considered an at-risk group (Cabrara, 2004; Kellom, 2004) and are in need of data driven practices to better serve them. Because a study such as this has not been conducted, all the related information is presented in detail. The next section is presented to ensure a keen understanding of the existing knowledge of student connections with instructors, peers, and staff.

**Role of Instructors, Peers, and Staff in College Student Experiences**

This section discusses literature related to student experiences making connections with instructors, staff, and peers. Within the context of higher education and this research, instructors are defined as any individual hired to teach students and thus may include part time instructors, full time instructors, adjunct faculty, and professors of any level. Staff members within higher education include any person working for a college or university that is not an instructor. Peers are considered any students who also attend the university of those participating in this study and is within the traditional age range of college students, 18-23. Some of the longtime researchers of students in higher education such as Tinto, Pascarella, Terenzini, Kuh, and Astin, apply and could be restated in each section of the literature review.
Interactions of Students and Instructors

Studies focusing on higher education, with few exceptions, concur that student-instructor connections result in higher achievement for students (Astin, 1977, 1985, 1993; Bean, 1985; Bean & Kuh, 1984; Feldman & Newcomb, 1969; Kuh, Schuh, Whitt & Associates, 1991; Lamport, 1993; Pascarella, 1985; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1976, 1979, 1981; Tinto, 1993; Thomas & Galambos, 2004; Wilson et al., 1975). Research by Astin (1977, 1993) Pascarelli (1980), and Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) accounts for the fundamental works within recent higher education research that attest to many positive outcomes associated with student-instructor interactions. However, it is well documented that not enough students are spending time with their instructors outside of the classroom (Arum & Roksa, 2011).

Foundational works. Astin’s 30-year longitudinal study of college students consistently ascertained that high student-instructor interaction resulted in high student satisfaction. The satisfaction resulting from student-instructor interactions was higher than any other involvement variable or institutional characteristic (1998). When students experienced positive interactions with instructors, this encouraging feeling translated to positive impressions on behalf of students toward classes, student friendships, and administrators of the institution. In his 1993 update, What Matters in College, Astin found that out-of-class activities such as being a guest in an instructor’s house or helping with research had a positive impact on a student’s entire university experience. The positive student-faculty connection went as far as affecting a student’s attitude toward diversity, social change, and campus event participation. As reported by students, physical health was the only self-rated factor not influenced by instructors.
Pascarella’s (1980) review of research on student-instructor interaction found statistically significant associations between out-of-class contact with faculty and outcomes such as “overall college satisfaction, educational aspirations, academic achievement, and persistence” (p. 564). The research conducted by Pascarella furthered the knowledge of student-instructor interactions because the study controlled for background characteristics and other college experiences for students: some of the factors controlled for included parents’ attained levels of education, ethnic origin, high school achievement, and chosen major. Pascarella’s study confirmed Astin’s findings that positive student-instructor interactions directly correlate with persistence, class satisfaction, and overall view of higher education. Pascarella concluded that the more students and instructors interact, the more students’ aspirations for learning increase, resulting in more student-instructor interactions.

In 1991, Pascarella and Terenzini published their widely-heralded book How College Affects Students, which was updated in 2005. The completed works in 1991 and 2005 were more impactful, and broader than Pascarella’s 1980 work. The work published in 1991 concluded that student-instructor interactions resulted in “student increases in interpersonal skills, growth in autonomy, general gains in maturity and personal development, educational aspirations, and orientation toward scholarly careers (p. 620)”. As Pascarella’s previous work had, this research had control factors built in.

What follows are studies and data that add to the cornerstone work of Astin, Terenzini, and Pascarella, but have either occurred more recently or addressed student-instructors interactions with more direct research intentions. Some of the relational aspects that impact students from their interactions with instructors include socialization,
intellectual growth, retention, and leadership development. None of the research that highlights relational influences between instructors and students identifies identity development as a factor influenced, but previous aspects listed could be “racial identity components” and could surface in this study (Helms & Carter, 1990).

**Socialization.** Students seek knowledge and a social connection with instructors. According to Dey (1997), the socialization of students and instructors includes students acquiring habits, knowledge, and values that will benefit them. Students look to their instructors for examples of educated individuals who function well in society. An instructor, in the eyes of students, is someone who has enough subject knowledge and societal where-with-all to pass that knowledge on to them in a clear and practical method. A handful of studies have been conducted in the past 25 years that relate to student-instructor socialization. These studies focus on mentor relationships, informal interactions, and overall college student development, which links to socialization as described below.

Erkut and Mokros (1984) conducted one of the first studies related to instructors as role models for undergraduate students that had a true socialization element to it. This study looked at what factors led to students being attracted to having a role model and the benefits of this role model relationship. The study found that the student-role model interaction focused on support and instructors taking a personal interest in the students. Students reported being able to formulate better thoughts, set clear priorities, and communicate more effectively due to their student-role model relationships. The students were exposed to these skills via social interactions with instructors outside of the classroom (Erkut & Mokros, 1984)
Cosgrove (1986) conducted a study related to student-instructor socialization, which focused on mentoring and used student development theory measures. This research tested the effects and value of a program that included three elements: 1) an assessment of students’ interests and skills in developmental areas, 2) a mentoring component in which instructors and staff served as resource persons outside of class, and 3) a transcript of participation in extracurricular activities. The study was conducted at a mid-size private university using random sampling for the control and experimental groups. Students in the experimental group met with instructors or staff three times during the academic year. At the end of the academic year, the control and experimental groups completed the College Student Development-Self Assessment Inventory, Student Opinion Survey, and the student development transcript. The control and experimental groups were compared for 1) use of campus services, 2) satisfaction with those services, 3) satisfaction with the university environment, 4) participation in extracurricular activities, and 5) change in level of confidence in each of ten developmental areas from the pre-test during orientation to post-test in the spring of their first year. The post-test was based on Chickering’s vectors of student development. The findings of this study support that increased contact between students and instructors promotes college student development. Students in the mentoring program differed from those in the control group in three ways: they were confident to set and achieve goals, they were confident to solve problems and make decisions, and they were more satisfied with the university environment.

A more recent study was conducted in 1998 by McKinney, Saxe, and Cobb in which they studied professional and academic socialization that occurs between
instructors and students outside of the classroom. The professional socialization portion of the study included academic area student organizations, undergraduate research projects, and informal interactions with instructors. A multi-method approach was used for information gathering. The results found that instructors had failed to meet the student socialization expectations. Students wanted more time with instructors outside of the classroom, but when the pressure to lecture on material or complete lab experiments was measured, the academic requirements were held in higher priority than socializing with students. McKinney et al. found that over 40% of students were not having social experiences with instructors and they wanted more non-classroom time with them. Some barriers to the social interactions between instructors and students included instructor reward structure, financial resources, student characteristics, and instructor attitudes about the necessity for out-of-class interactions with students.

**Retention.** As previously cited and noted, the research by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) is fundamental research on students and the connections they make while in school. The study by Pascarella and Terenzini conducted in the 1990s found that students who actively engaged in learning with instructors and peers had much higher student retention rates. In recent work by Arum and Roksa (2011), they detail how instructors influence students’ commitment to their education pursuits. Other research has been conducted focusing on instructor effects on student retention but with a narrowed focus.

Braxton, Bray, and Berger (2000) studied how student views of instructors’ teaching skills affected student retention. The survey was conducted at a highly selective private university with first time in any college (FTIAC) students. Students were asked to
focus on instructors’ skills in organization, preparation, instructional clarity, and skill. The study found high correlations between strong teaching skills and students’ “social integration, institutional commitment, and intent to enroll” (p. 222). Braxton, et al. concluded that universities should connect the development of instructors to campus retention.

McShannon (2001) completed a study of how a particular form of instructor development could affect student retention. The study was conducted at a public university within the institution’s engineering program with the intent to increase positive interactions between students (n=677) and instructors. Four interaction styles of the students were considered; 1) those who learned best by interacting with instructors in class, 2) those who learn best by interacting with instructors outside of class, 3) those who learn best by interacting with other students, and 4) those who learn best by not interacting with students or instructors, the style most common to engineering programs. The students were tested to determine their learning and interaction preferences. Instructors were informed of these results. McShannon attended classes and gave feedback to instructors based on observed interactions and student learning and interaction preferences. At the conclusion of the study and when instructors followed the suggestions from McShannon, the retention increased by 9% compared to the previous term.

Lundquist, Spalding, and Landrum (2002) surveyed students (n=729) at a large public university in the western United States. The researchers sought to learn how instructor attitudes and behavior impacted student retention. Using multiple regression analysis of a 19-item survey, three responses were found to best predict students’
responses to the question “I have thought about leaving the university because of instructor attitudes and behaviors” (p. 128). The three items were: a) lack of student support from faculty; b) instructors do not return phone calls or e-mails in a timely fashion; and c) professors seem unapproachable. Lundquist et al. gave many examples of the factors that institutions cannot control affecting student persistence. However, a final data marker found that 15.3% of students surveyed said that they had considered leaving because of instructor attitudes and behaviors.

**Intellectual growth and leadership development.** Some research connects student interactions with instructors to intellectual growth and leadership development and lends to the broad impact instructors can have on students. However, the expected potential for participants to discuss how instructors have affected their intellectual growth and leadership development is low. In addition, the current study focuses more on instructors influencing student socialization and retention. Yet, some large scale and foundational work is worth discussing and citing. The National Study of Student Learning (NSSL) is believed to be the most comprehensive study of students’ learning and cognitive development (Pacarella, Whitt, Nora, Edison, Hagerdorn, & Terenzini, 1996). The NSSL included 4,000 students attending 23 institutions representing various sizes, types, and locations. The sample was made up of students who entered college during the fall of 1992 and were pretested for background characteristics, aspirations, and general skills in reading, writing, math, and reasoning. A post-test was given to the same sample in the spring of 1993 to assess the same general skills and measure students’ first-year experiences and learning orientations. The study gave researchers huge amounts of data. One of the most powerful results confirmed the notion that out-of-class experiences
had a greater impact on critical thinking than in-class learning. When instructors participated in the out-of-class experiences with students, the critical thinking of students increased. Students consistently responded positively when instructors took an out of class interest in their learning.

Terenzini, Springer, and Pascarella (1993) conducted a quantitative study seeking instructor effects on students in non-classroom experiences. This study added to the body of information related to learning outside of the classroom because it found that students’ time with friends can have a negative impact on intellectual development. If students are given the choice to be with friends or take part in intellectual activities such as being in the library or spending time with instructors, students will choose friends. Thus, institutions must entice students and give plenty of opportunities for students to participate in intellectual opportunities.

Outside Factors Affecting Student-Instructor Interactions

Instructor time allocation and accessibility. As all the previous research has indicated, instructor-student interactions have positive effects on students. However, the frequency with which instructors interact with students outside of the classroom may depend on how instructors spend their time. Reward structures within higher education, especially at research institutions, place more value on research and publications than time interacting with students (Ward, 2003).

Milem, Berger, and Dey (2000) studied how instructors spent their time over a twenty-year span. The study found that time allocation depended on institutional type and instructor pressures from state or national constituents on instructors to produce research or spend time teaching. The overall research concluded that instructor time with students
outside of the classroom decreases as time spent on research increases. Instructors are not rewarded for out-of-class contact with students even though, as previously stated, this interaction can be the most positive activity for students. Milem et al. (2000) suggested that the values of higher education are not aligned with the best interest of student learning.

In addition to the constraints from institutions or constituents on instructors for their time, the willingness of instructors to make themselves accessible to students has been researched. The first research of this kind was conducted by Wilson, Wood, and Gaff (1974) and found that the social-psychological characteristics of instructors impacted whether instructors interacted with students outside of the classroom. The instructors who were rated by students as most effective were those who spent time with students outside of the classroom. Walsh and Maffei (1994) studied whether gender factored into the degree to which instructors made themselves accessible to students. The study found that female instructors sought interactions with students for two reasons 1) because women may be more attentive to interpersonal relationships than men, and 2) female instructors had faced sexism as students and did not want to repeat the same treatment.

**Instructor expectations of students.** The National Norms for 2001-02 Higher Education Research Institute Faculty Survey (Lindholm, Astin, Sax, & Korn, 2002) reported nearly half of instructors felt it was easy for students to see instructors outside of regular office hours. In addition, more than half of instructors were interested in students’ academic and personal problems. As a word of caution to instructors, Jaasma and Koper
(1999) found in their study students were hesitant to discuss personal problems with instructors for fear that the problem would interfere with class work.

Whereas instructors have a strong interest in students and their intellectual development, instructors are not overly confident in the skills of students. The American Faculty Poll (Sanderson, Phua & Herda, 2002) identified poor student preparation as the largest obstacle to student participation in productive research. Instructors identified time, instructor attitudes toward meaningful out-of-class learning, and the instructor reward structure as factors contributing to why instructors do not socialize with students out of class.

**Student-to-Student Interactions**

Astin (1993) described students who interact with each other as being part of a peer group. Peer groups are what students use for acceptance and approval. Astin’s research described that a peer group’s level of influence depended on how strongly the student identifies with the group and how often the student interacts with the group. Astin’s research (1993) led him to state, “the student’s peer group is the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years” (p. 398). In recent research by Arum and Roksa, (2011), peers were found to be extremely important motivators who influence academic outcomes for students. This recent work by Arum and Astin’s work was confirmed and furthered in scope by several other studies.

Bank, Slavings, and Biddle (1990); and Bean (1985) found that peers had a larger impact on undergraduate students than parents or instructors. Moran and Gonyea (2003) found that instructor interactions were less useful in predicting student behavior and
success than were peers. The published literature that focuses on the effects of student peer groups is divided into how a student’s sense of community is established, how retention is influenced by peer groups, and how peer groups give a sense of mattering to the individuals.

**Sense of community.** Dewey (1958) emphasized the importance of social interactions as part of the learning process. The importance of belonging, “the deep importance of the neighborhood, of one’s own kind, class,” is at the root of forming a sense of community (Maslow, 1970, p. 44). These concepts have stood the test of time and are essential to understanding how student-to-student interactions foster learning.

Cheng (2004) found the social experiences of undergraduates during college promote students’ feelings of community. Undergraduate students experience a wide range of issues, challenges, and accomplishments when interacting with each other. Students are aware that if they were not attending the institution those experiences would not occur. Students, in a sense, bond with the institution through their interactions with peers (Cheng, 2004).

**Retention.** Tinto’s (1975, 1993) and Bean’s (1980) impact of college models designed to look at retention became overarching models to research variables that influence college decisions. These models are worth noting because they began as methods to discover why students are retained, and one of the variables considered was peer influences.

Bean (1982, 1985) studied nearly 1,800 students, measuring how ten independent variables affected retention. Bean found that institutional fit had the largest net effect on retention and that peer influence was more impactful than instructor interactions. Astin
(1993) studied over 11,000 students and looked at academic involvement, involvement with faculty and peers, involvement with work, and extracurricular activities. Results favoring high peer-to-peer interactions and high retention were found.

In a study by Napoli and Wortman (1998), first-year students were administered the Student Adaptation Questionnaire, with fascinating results. Napoli and Wortman predicted that negative life events of students occurring outside of school life would decrease retention. The results of the study found that positive college interactions with peers balanced the negative life events and likelihood of students leaving school.

As mentioned in previous sections, research by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) conducted in the 1990s found that students' active engagement in learning with instructors and peers resulted in much higher student retention rates. From the research on students’ sense of community and retention, new research is forming on the topic of mattering.

**Mattering.** The concept of students *mattering* first began with Rosenberg and McCullough's (1981) research related to student mental health and community formation. Nancy Schlossberg (1989) furthered the *mattering* concept with her theory of college students' mattering to others. According to Schlossberg, mattering is the experience of others depending on us, being interested in us, and being concerned with our fate. Schlossberg studied 533 first-year undergraduate students and their influences on each other. In the initial study, female students reported higher levels of family support, mattering to friends, mattering to their college, and academic stress. Males and females found that college friend social support was the most powerful predictor of mattering. The results that Schlossberg found established a well-cited theory that applies to how
students interact with other students. Schlossberg’s theory has been well-cited, but little research has been conducted to further the mattering concept.

Dissertation level work was completed by Marshall (1998) and researched the concept *Mattering Attitude*. Mattering attitude is associated with the motivation to belong. According to Marshall, "a mattering attitude offers individuals cognitive and affective information about the degree to which they believe they are significant or important to specific people" (p. 10). Individuals seek a sense of acceptance by others, which contributes to their sense of being a part of the social environment found on college campuses.

Dixon Rayle (2005) created the Interpersonal and General Mattering Assessment (IGMA), which is an instrument that measures the perceptions of students as they relate to mattering. A study using this instrument was conducted in 2007 (Dixon, Rayle & Chung). At a large four-year university, 533 first year students’ perceptions of mattering were related to a range of variables. Some of the variables included “academic success, social support of family and friends, and mattering to college friends and the college” (p. 26). The data supported that there was a level of mattering for students who felt supported by friends and family. Furthermore, the results indicated those students who had lower levels of academic stress indicated higher levels of support from friends and family. One last interesting finding in this study is that females reported higher perceptions of mattering than males did. Females indicated more support from family and friends. This may prove to be very important to my proposed study of connections reported by White college men.
Interactions Among Students and Staff

As previously stated, a student’s connection to the institution is fundamental in predicting and gauging a student’s success. Pascarella et al. (2004) found that students have two separate experiences when reflecting on their day-to-day events within the university. These experiences include the academic and non-academic. Connecting students to an institution in the non-academic sense can and should happen. Students can interact with the staff of the university through campus employment, programs, services, advising, activities, and events (Pascarella, 2004). Because of the wide range of differing roles and functions staff can have within higher education, little research exists that analyzes the entirety of student interactions with university staff. The existing literature on interactions between students and staff focuses on specific interactions, such as students with academic advisors or campus job supervisors, and how student affairs as a profession affects students. Because there is not one model for staffing and departmental structure across higher education, some institutions place academic advising under student affairs, but for this review the two are separated as is the case at most colleges or universities.

Interactions of students and academic advisors. Charlie Nutt, the Executive Director of the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) has stated, “this supportive relationship between advisor and student, although contrived and frequently assigned to the student as a requirement of ongoing enrollment, is a vital component for the student making her/his way toward educational goal attainment” (2003).

The advisor-student relationship can be one of the strongest connections between the academic goals a student seeks and a representative of the institution (Tinto, 1987).
Advising efforts have been linked to student success since the late 1970s. The research of Beal and Noel (1980) found advising to be one of three major areas positively affecting student satisfaction. Campuses across the nation are split in their advising methods; instructors can do some of the advising, or full-time academic advisors can meet with students for course assistance. The focus of this literature review section will be on the full-time academic advisors’ interactions with students.

Rendon (1995) studied community college retention and success of students who hoped to transfer to four-year institutions, in which two key aspects affecting successful transition into college were discovered. Rendon found advisors who work with students on course selection and establish productive relationships with students to be crucial in students’ motivation toward course work and degree attainment.

Other research on interactions between advisors and students has found that the varying styles of advisors and how students seek to be treated by advisors can vary. Students typically range from wanting detailed information and the ability to make their own choices to wanting an advisor to prescribe what courses should be taken. Andrews (1987) found that emotionally expressive students want information from advisors and then they will seek to make their own course choices. This was in contrast to prescriptive approaches of advising. A study by Alexitch (1997) found that the developmental approach to advising is preferred by students. Developmental advising encourages students to make choices for themselves, developing autonomy and purpose in their course and degree selection. Crockett and Crawford (1989) found that not all students desire a developmental approach in advising. Their research found that of those students assessed through the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, sensing and thinking students prefer a
more prescriptive approach. However, in a recent study cited by NACADA, the research to date shows that students desire advisors who are warm and supportive, which lends to a more developmental approach (Mottarella et al., 2004).

**Interactions of students and campus supervisors.** The opportunities available and numbers of students holding jobs while enrolled in college have been consistently high for many years. In 1987, the Higher Education Research Institute (Astin, Sax, Kom, & Mahoney, 1998) found that 74.4% of entering freshmen felt they were somewhat or very likely to get a job to help pay college expenses, and in 1998 that percentage held consistent to 76.7%. In the 1999-2000 academic year, King (2003) reported that 80% of college students were working. Students choose to have jobs to gain work experience, out of necessity to pay their bills, for basic spending money, or a variety of other reasons. Kuh (1995), in his work on outside class experiences, found that part-time on-campus employment provides experiences beyond the classroom that shape a student’s academic, cognitive, and social skills. With tuition constantly rising, the number of students needing to work looks to always be increasing. Many studies have been conducted looking at how students’ academic efforts are impacted by holding a job. However, little research has looked at how the interaction between students and campus supervisors affects the students. The research that has been published follows.

In a study by Furr and Elling (2000), first-generation students who worked on campus had less difficulty interacting with instructors and being involved in extracurricular activities than those first-generation students who did not have campus employment. The students in the study still had to learn about balancing academics, job, and outside activities. However, Furr and Elling found that the campus-employed
students felt a sense of belonging to the institution more than students who had no job or worked off-campus, and the positive interactions with staff or instructors as a result of their job streamed into the classroom.

Work by Broadbridge (2005) looked at the employment relationship from a psychological and transactional approach. Focus groups were held with undergraduate students to explore the positive and negative results of campus employment. Students viewed the relationship formed between students and their supervisors as positive. Students felt a connection with the university through their position and supervisor. The study gave suggestions as to how institutions can maximize the effects of campus employment for students. Whereas the nature and effects of supervisors and student staff has seen little research, the interactions between students and student affairs staff has been well-documented.

**Student Affairs Impact on Students**

As stated in *New Directions for Student Services*, “Although student affairs professionals are not faculty, they still conduct important educational, developmental, administrative, service-related tasks, without which the institution could not function, and certainly the influence on the effectiveness of the student experiences would be felt” (Woodard, Jr. et al., 2000, p. 19). Since the early days of colleges and universities in America, students have been needing help from non-academic staff. Student affairs is a profession grounded in educating students outside of the classroom. Thus, the opportunities are plentiful, and interactions with students are desired by student affairs staff. With its long history and impactful function, the student affairs staff and their
interactions with students are vital to student success. Student affairs professionals can interact with students in such diverse settings.

**Summary – Role of Instructors, Peers, and Staff in College Student Experiences**

The data on which group effects the success of students the most is conflicting. Research has focused and found that instructors can influence students’ levels of socialization, intellectual growth, retention, and leadership skills. However, it is well-documented that instructors can be pulled away from students toward other priorities such as university-mandated research. Students attest the people they talk to the most are their peers. Whether students are in their first two years or nearing graduation, their peers can help them feel a part of the community, impact their retention, and make them feel as if they matter to someone. Staff members argue that when students need something outside of the classroom, staff members are the only people on campus trained to help them. Little research exists on how staff members work with students, presumably because many variations of staff exist. The literature that does exist divides staff into academic advisors, campus supervisors, and student affairs staff. Which group on campus affects students most will rightfully continue to be debated.

This research did not seek to answer which on-campus group affects White male students the most. The research seeks to add to the literature, filling a potential gap in research of connections influencing and being influenced by White identity development. None of the research on how certain groups connect with students addresses that the connection may lead to a furthering of a student’s development in other areas. Examining groups and how those groups may affect a student’s identity development has never been done before. The question of whether and how students’ identity development could be
impacted by connecting with members of the campus community has not been answered. However, before examining the information gaps in research on college student connections and identity development, the background research on White identity development must be explained.

**White Identity Development Models**

The concept of White identity development has been widely researched in disciplines including counseling, counseling psychology, and college student development (Helms, 1984). However, models of White identity development were not examined before the 1980s, largely because before the 1960s higher education researchers believed that studying any other race than White was not worth the effort. The 1960s civil rights movements furthered the awareness of those in underrepresented populations and sparked White individuals to look at themselves and other racial groups. For individuals to develop healthy perceptions of themselves and towards others of all races, that person must develop a nonracist identity and view no race as superior to another (Helms, 1984). A person with a healthy White Identity views all races as equal, but acknowledges the differences amongst varying races. Out of the civil rights movement, researchers began to examine and question how different races viewed each other. And these races especially questioned how the perceived dominant race, White, viewed other races. From these questions and examinations of racial interactions, they proposed and tested theories of identity and its development. Three widely-accepted theories of White identity development were formulated and exist today. Hardiman (1982), Helms (1984) and Scott and Robinson (2001) developed models that explore the formation of White racial identity. All theories are based on general theories to provide
frameworks for understanding the life experiences of White individuals (Hardiman, 1992; Helms, 1984; Scott & Robinson, 1992). Helms’s (1984) model has been subject to empirical investigation and thus is the most widely used and accepted model amongst researchers within higher education (Helms, 1999; Harkley, McLellan, & Randall, 2002; Miville et al., 2000; Sandhu, 1999). In 1995, Helms revised her model and published her data and changes in the *Handbook of Multicultural Counseling*.

In 1982, Hardiman published her White Racial Identity Development Model (WRID). Her model was formed from work with White antiracism activists. Her work with these individuals, who attained a high level of racial consciousness, led her to identify five stages of White development: naivety, acceptance, resistance, redefinition, and internalization. To date no further empirical research has been conducted based on this model.

In 2001, Scott and Robinson published their work on the Key Model. The Key Model is a White male identity model that addresses the combination of race and gender attitudes that White men exhibit as a result of societal influences. The authors acknowledge much of their work was influenced by Helms (1990), and the phases are not linear. The five types identified in Scott and Robinson’s model are as follows:

- **Noncontact Type.** Individuals deny racism and seek power and privilege. There is limited awareness of how women and people of color handle discrimination (Scott & Robinson, 2001).
- **Claustrophobic Type.** Individuals blame women and people of color for taking away advantage at the expense of White males (Scott & Robinson, 2001).
Conscious Identity Type. Characterized by a dissonance between a person’s existing belief system and real life experiences (Scott & Robinson, 2001).

Empirical Type. A male in this phase recognizes that racism and sexism exists in society, yet the sexism and racism is earned through no effort of one’s self (Scott & Robinson, 2001).

Optimal Type. This stage is characterized by those who view all individuals equally in their common struggle to survive.

Helms’s White Identity

Due to its wide acceptance by researchers and its ability to designate stages of individual development, Helms & Carter’s (1990) WRIAS will be used in this study. However, some limitations of Helms & Carter’s WRIAS must be acknowledged.

Helms & Carter’s work (1990) is outlined in their model titled the White Racial Identity Attitude Scale (WRIAS). The original WRIAS was developed from work by Helms & Carter in 1990 and revised in 1995. This scale was not created for researchers to diagnose individuals, but rather to assess development of racial identity at each stage of development. Helms’s scale has two phases of White racial identity development and six stages within those phases. In Helms’s book (1984), she explains each stage with reference to White and Black individuals. For the purposes of explaining each stage I will remain consistent with Helms’s reference of Black and White, but with knowledge that Black as a group could reference any underrepresented group.

Phase I: Abandonment of racist identity. Contact. Individuals lack any awareness of cultural and institutional racism and of their own racism. Racism may be displayed by someone in the Contact stage, but at a basic unaware level. Contact
individuals have not thought about or acknowledged moral dilemmas associated with having racist thoughts or being White (Helms, 1984). A typical statement for a Contact individual could be “I see and treat everyone the same, I don’t see differences.” During this stage, individuals have met persons of color and don’t acknowledge the initial relationships (Helms, 1984). White individuals in the Contact stage will interact with other races at a high level if these interactions are done through the work place or some forced interaction. When these interactions become frequent enough for the White person to become aware of differences then White individuals can begin to enter Disintegration.

**Disintegration.** Questions about ways in which White individuals are socialized, and feelings of guilt and shame regarding discrepancies between realities and perceptions are displayed in this stage (Helms, 1984). To deal with these discrepancies White individuals in Disintegration feel pressure to display two personalities. Depending on the present circle, individuals act White or Black. However, this attempt at cross-racial interaction is often not accepted by Black or White individuals (Helms, 1984). Not being accepted by one’s own group or any other group causes pressure and the eventual retreat to acting White. However, the notion of not being accepted by other races invokes negative feelings and the idea of Black inferiority to White individuals is born.

**Reintegration.** This group accepts their own racism. Fear and blame may be directed at a person of color due to one’s own discomfort (Helms, 1984). Discussions of race occur with likeminded same-race peers. Displays of violence or exclusion to protect White privilege may occur (Helms, 1984). This stage is easy to remain in if the individual does not act on their beliefs and is surrounded by others in the same stage.
Phase II: Establishment of nonracist identity. *Pseudo-independent.* Typically this stage begins with an event that promotes an awareness that a person’s Whiteness should be looked at differently. At this stage a person feels a new level of intellect regarding race and becomes interested in similarities and differences (Helms, 1984). A pseudo-independent person will look to other races for answers to solving the perceived disparities. If a person displays this behavior in obvious ways Black people will be suspicious and White individuals will wonder what the person is doing. If a pseudo-independent person sees the reward in becoming an educated White person and acknowledges their own race but does not feel tied to racism then the next stage will begin to form (Helms & Carter, 1990). In addition when a White individual can look back on and accept his or her history then the final stage of Autonomy can be approached.

*Autonomy.* When this stage is entered, individuals no longer look at race, and instead appreciate others and accept them as individuals (Helms, 1984). A positive definition of being White is internalized. An autonomous person is interested in learning about other cultures. Individuals in this stage seek an awareness of other forms of oppression and learn how these other oppressions connect to racism (Helms, 1984). However, Helms (1984) points out that just because someone reaches Autonomy, he or she is not perfect with respect to personality. If an Autonomy-stage person had a short temper at Contact, then he or she can still be short tempered. Yet, the short temper will not be fueled by racial views.
WRIAS Reliability and College Population Normative Data

To contextualize the data that will be provided from Helms's WRIAS, it is important to discuss the WRIAS reliability results and the scale results when tested among college students. The psychometric data collected by Tokar and Swanson (1991) found that each reliability measure in the WRIAS ranged from .61 to .84. In a study by Mercer and Cunningham (2003), 430 students with an average age of 19.2 completed the WRIAS. The researchers sought reliability analysis and whether varying dimensions of White identity could be measured. Reliability scales were factored for each of the 50 questions and grouped into four dimensions. The four dimensions and their reported reliability scales were White superiority ($x = .87$), perceived racial comfort ($x = .81$), interest in racial diversity ($x = .75$), and racial dissonance ($x = .63$) (2003).

The authors discuss that the four dimensions are split between positive and negative White Identity associations. In addition, the reliability numbers are strong and affirm that the WRIAS should be used to measure White racial identity development. However, the authors discuss that "White racial identity needs to be conceptualized and studied developmentally....within a phenomenological variant" (2003, p. 227). As will be discussed in detail of the next chapter, a conceptual phenomenological approach is consistent with my proposed study.

Limitations of Helms's White Identity Development

As previously noted, the WRIAS was published in 1990 and updated in 1995. Helms and other researchers have noted limitations to her work. The construct of her model has some contradictions and the measurement scale has proven challenging to test.
Helms’s research indicates that an individual’s identity development occurs in a linear sequence and is represented by one dominant stage (Helms, 1984, 1990, 1995). In addition, when individuals are evaluated, the highest stage scored should be used because the stages were designed to be one-dimensional (Helms, 1984, 1989, 1995, 1997, 1999). However, as Helms (1995) described, in the right contexts, individuals may revert back to previous stages. Helms has also suggested (1990, 1995), that individuals may identify simultaneously with multiple stages. Other researchers have affirmed Helms’s notion of individuals exhibiting multiple stages (Parham, 1989; Richardson & Helms, 1994; Thompson & Carter, 1997).

These descriptions contradict each other and make testing difficult. If an individual can revert back to previous stages, then the concept of linear development is questionable. In addition, if an individual can identify with multiple stages then it cannot be claimed that identity development is represented by the highest scoring stage. These inconsistencies have led to variations in scoring across studies (Neville & Lilly, 2000; Silvestri & Richardson, 2001; Vinson & Neimeyer, 2000).

In addition to some contradictions, Helms’s model holds some principles that are not testable. One proposition that cannot be tested is that when moving through the stages, earlier stages still have some effect on the individual. How much of a residual effect varies and is not measurable (Rowe, Behrens, & Leach, 1995). Another untestable principle is a person’s racial reaction as determined by the exhibited stage. The exhibited stage is determined by the behavior most often shown. However, behavior may be situation-specific. Individuals may form their belief system under one stage but when navigating society another stage may be more useful.
The contradictions in Helms’s writing make it difficult to compare data to previous research. This proposed study will not be a comparison of previous White identity stage achievement. The WRIAS stage achieved will be used as a lens to understand student institutional connections and further the benefits of using identity development information.

Benefits and Implications of Identity Models

Because projections that White Americans will account for just over 50% of the American population by 2050, conducting research through the lenses of White identity development is vital (Mercer & Cunningham, 2003). Understanding the benefits and implications of identity research gives us the purpose to continue seeking answers about race. The benefits of having and using racial identity models exist for all groups in society. One benefit of identity development is that it allows individuals to view themselves positively within a particular race (Pack-Brown, 1999).

Another benefit of identity development models is that they allow individuals who struggle with the convergence of their race, ethnicity, and gender the notion that this is a legitimate struggle, offering methods to help manage these issues (Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 2000). In addition, identity models help in understanding how people can move from relatively low levels of racial understanding to a greater knowledge of self and others. Further understanding of one’s identity moves discussions of privilege and oppression toward knowledge and awareness of oneself and others as racial beings (Helms, 1984). Recent research on White college students is showing knowledge and awareness of identity-related issues is increasing. In their qualitative study, Reason,
Millar, and Scales (2005) discuss White students working against their racial privileges to promote racial justice and equality.

Robinson and Howard-Hamilton (2000) focused their research on counselors who work with clients struggling with their convergence of race, ethnicity, and gender. They found that integrating racial identity development into the discussion made race become one component of a person’s psychosocial identity that may intersect with other identities such as sex, ability, and religion. This convergence is similar to the study I propose. I will look at the way male college students’ prior interactions with instructors, peers, and staff have influenced their White identity development.

**Summary—White Identity Development Models**

The frameworks of White identity have been well-researched and documented within higher education and society. Hardiman (1982), Helms (1984), and Scott & Robinson (2001) authored the most widely-used models that explore the formation of White racial identity. Each of these theories describes stages individuals progress through as they gain knowledge and experience with regard to their own White identity. Helms’s theory, which has been updated and is the most cited and used model, has documented limitations. Helms acknowledges that individuals can display more than one stage at a time or revert back to earlier stages in particular situations. Reverting back or displaying multiple stages in Helms’s model makes it difficult to for researchers to compare data from prior studies.

The limitations of Helms’s model will not hinder this research proposal because it has never been conducted before. The only research gap is that Helms’s model has never been synthesized with student-university connections. A limitation will be the reliability
of repeating this study and acquiring the same results with respect to the students’ levels within Helms’s WRIAS.

**Gaps in the Research**

A great amount of information is known about students attending college. Foundational work on college students by Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, 2005) paints the picture of this complex population. However, not until the 1960s were college students viewed beyond the White male population, and seen as needing anything outside of lecture information. The opening doors of higher education to all sectors of society called for many new services, staff, and data-driven information. Concepts such as male masculinity and identity development were not developed with the sole intention of being applied within higher education, but became important to answering questions about why some groups are more academically successful than others.


The increased diversity in higher education eventually instilled the notion that students of all backgrounds could learn from each other. Peer groups did not have to be of the same race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, etc. Similar notions of diversity also took hold with staff and instructors of students. Higher education research has found that students who connect with some entity within the institution have a greater chance of
success (Tinto, 1987, 1993). Students who connect with peers, instructors, or staff show evidence of increased leadership, intellectual growth, marketable job skills, and perceived value of the education they are receiving.

Unfortunately, because the study of higher education and its diverse students is relatively young, the silos of information that exist have rarely been merged. Much is known about White identity development, masculinity, and student connections with peers, staff, and instructors. But, as the research questions posed ask, and the phenomenological nature of this study aided in answering, how do the past connections between WCM and peers, instructors, or staff influence the WCM’s identity development?

This study will add to the research addressing how higher education can serve and prepare WCM for their futures. Students who connect with peers, instructors, or staff show evidence of increased leadership, intellectual growth, marketable job skills, and perceived value of the education they are receiving. Students who have developed a furthered White identity have stable mental health, recognize and abandon racism, and are comfortable in multicultural settings. However, how did the connections between the participants and peers, instructors, or staff influence their White identity development?
CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter describes the methods used to answer the following research question, thus adding to the body of higher education research: do the concepts of connections that WCM form within the university influence their White identity development? I used a qualitative phenomenological approach in this study. According to Hatch, “phenomenological researchers seek to reveal the essence of human experience” (2002, p. 30). This chapter discusses the study’s design, introduces the research site, explains recruitment and sampling strategies, presents a participant overview, details the steps to ensure trustworthiness, and identifies data collection and analysis methods.

Research Questions

How do past connections White college men have with peers, instructors, or staff influence their achievement of Helms’s stage 2 of White identity development?

1. How do White college men who have achieved stage 2 of Helms’s (1984) White identity describe their process of making connections with peers, instructors, or staff within the university?

2. How do White college men who have achieved stage 2 of Helms’s (1984) White identity make meaning of experiences connecting with peers, instructors, or staff within the university?
3. How do the masculine tendencies of White college men who have achieved stage 2 of Helms’s White identity influence their connections with peers, instructors, or staff?


**Role of the Researcher**

I established rapport with the participants and relied on my background in student development, knowledge of the medium size public university located in the Mid Western United States, my experience as a former college student, and my identity as a White male to promote open discussions. My professional experiences have honed my skills in discussing both casual and sensitive matters with college students. However, to ensure my results were as credible as possible, I maintained my neutrality and awareness of any predispositions I had. According to Locke, Spiroduso, and Silverman (2000), efforts must be taken to hear what is being said and not what is hoped to be said.

One method to become aware of any predispositions is for researchers to participate in *epoche* (Creswell, 2003). *Epoche* means to refrain or abstain from judgment. Creswell (2003) describes that, when a researcher goes through *epoche* he or she identifies biases, viewpoints, and assumptions that may affect the research. This description is done through the researcher sharing his or her own experiences as they pertain to the proposed study.

**My Epoche/Experiences**

Neither of my parents attended college and so I assumed their knowledge of college navigation was low. Prior to and during my attendance in college, I did not ask
my parents about college related issues- I sought their advice about life-related matters. When I had college-related needs I went to my peers, staff I knew, or instructors, depending on who I thought had the knowledge I needed.

Growing up as a White male, I was never made aware of my societal privilege, how masculine I was, or what White identity development was. My father raised me within a lower middle class military family; we did not discuss privilege and I do not remember instances of obvious privilege. I do remember having several Black friends and not always being included in discussions because I was White. Thinking back, not being included did not bother me or hurt friendships. Growing up within a military environment the people I was often around were very masculine and the schools I attended were diverse. While living within the residence halls and taking on leadership positions while in college, I was exposed to students different than myself. Graduate school first exposed me to what it means to be masculine, White identity development, and White privilege theories. During my readings of White privilege and White identity development, I was able to look at my own development. I now know what White privilege is, what it means, how it affects others, and what I can do to reduce its effects.

From as early as I can remember, I enjoyed talking to strangers and people from all walks of life. During high school I wanted to know about my teachers beyond the classroom. I quickly learned that these relationships are enjoyable and could be advantageous to me. While in college I sought out my instructors during office hours, became involved in student organizations which strengthened my ties to university staff, and attended parties and any social gathering I could. Thinking back, I did not prefer peers, staff, or instructors over another group. Nor do I remember instances when my
connections may have affected my identity development, but it may have occurred. My profession has taught me the benefits of seeking connections with peers, staff, and instructors, but not all students seek these relationships. Early in my career, I realized that not all students want connections with others within the university. When conducting interviews for this study, I cannot assume that all college students seek connections with peers, instructors, or staff within the university. My temptation as a student affairs practitioner to encourage the students to seek more connections must remain in check.

To diminish the potential for my bias or experiences to taint the results, the instrumentation of the study was set to allow for open discussion, but minimize outside influences. In addition, I kept a reflexive journal that described a peer review check of my work and documented my decision making.

**Research Design**

**Sampling**

I utilized qualitative procedures to understand the experiences of participants. Thus, sampling procedures were used that gained “information rich” cases to study (Merriam, 2002). I used criterion-based purposeful sampling in selecting participants to explain their interactions with instructors, peers, and staff. I chose students who are at least junior status because that increased the likelihood they have reached Pseudo Independent (Helms, 1984) within the WRIAS and have made some connections with peers, instructors, and staff on campus (i.e., purposeful rich sampling). Because of my position as an administrator at the university site where the study was conducted, I excluded all students with whom I have had prior interactions. The following figure allows for a visual depiction of the research process.
Recruit junior or senior standing White males

Present in randomly selected classes

Students contact me via email

Respond to student e-mails and explain further research details

If No:
Send e-mail thanking for participating; will not be asked to further participate.

If Yes:
Meet with students, sign HSIRB forms, answer questions, complete WRIAS, and compensate students

Send e-mail asking for two additional meetings that will include being interviewed by me

Those who agree I will meet with and discuss connections to staff, instructors, peers, identity development, and masculinity

I will write their stories as part of the phenomenological process. Pseudonyms will be used for all names

A request will be sent to each participant for a last meeting

If participants agree to meet I will deliver their stories to them to give preview time

During meeting I will review the story asking questions for accuracy and clarity. All follow-up questions will be asked. Students will be compensated and thanked for participation

Stories will be written and included in chapter IV

Analyze stories for themes, patterns, and exceptions in chapter V

Target:
Numbers: 18 – 22 White males
Dates: May-June 2011

Target:
Numbers: 6 – 8 White males
Dates: May-June 2011

Figure 2. Overall study diagram.
Research Site

I chose the site of this study to be a medium size, Midwestern, public university located in Michigan. According to this university’s Fact Book (Dwan, 2008), it enrolled 24,818 students in 2008, of which 81% were undergraduate students. Of those students, 96% were from Michigan (Dwan, 2008). The faculty to student ratio is 1:19. Students at this university are 89% White, 7% Black, 3% Hispanic, 2% Asian and Pacific Islander, and less than 1% American Indian. The gender make-up is 49% male and 51% female (Dwan). The first to second year persistence rate for full time students is 75.1% (Comprehensive Report). In 2008 this university employed over 1,800 staff and approximately 859 professors (Dwan, 2008). This university is considered a regional institution in that a majority of its students come from Michigan and its neighboring states of Indiana or Illinois. The university’s regional pull makes for a student body comprised of men and women who primarily come from local or rural communities. However, the university is considered a research institution with seven different colleges and 239 degree programs, lending to the diverse interests of its students (Dwan).

I chose this university as my research site for one key reason. In addition to being a doctoral student, I am a staff member, which allows me greater access to those I am choosing to study. My contacts within the university increased my ability to navigate the university and seek students willing to participate in this study. All efforts were taken to decrease the sense of a backyard study and interactions with those who come into contact with me regularly due to my position at the university. The detail of these measures taken will be explained in the authenticity and validity section.
Participants

My sample consisted of 22 participants for the initial phase of completing the WRIAS. From the 22 participants, 19 scored at the stage 2 pseudo-independent level, and eight agreed to meet with me for a second and third session that included interviews. The eight chosen for interviews achieved Pseudo Independent status on the WRIAS, which is described as having an intellectual acceptance and curiosity about other races (Helms, 1984). The reason I chose this level to be reached for the interview participants is that, according to Helms (1984), at Phase II and beyond, individuals look to others for answers about racial disparities. White individuals see a value in talking with others of all backgrounds about race, and as previously mentioned, this level may factor into whether a WCM connects with others within the university. This can be a valuable piece in understanding connections between White males and others within the university.

Excluded participants. The inclusionary criterion for participants is they are White males of at least junior standing within the site university. My decision to exclude females and men of color from this study was made for several reasons. Including women and minority men would have made this study much larger than time and resources allowed. Also, I chose to exclude women and minority men because by focusing on White males, the potential for racial or gendered power disconnects was avoided. The White males were open and seemingly comfortable talking with me. I believe my self identification as a White male in comparison if I were talking with females and other minority members, the reactions may have been different. Researchers who acquire trust and rapport with participants will likely have more information shared with them than if the rapport or trust was not present (Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004).
Recruitment

I identified participants from those who volunteered to participate. The steps in recruiting participants included: contacting instructors who taught classes that are heavily populated by junior and senior level students, gaining permission from the instructors and presenting to their class about my study, handing out introductory flyers (Appendix C) to the interested White males with instructions for them to contact me via e-mail, and set meeting times for those who agreed to meet with me. The flyer (Appendix C) and introductory letter (Appendix D) gave a brief description of the project and explained the criteria for those who will be accepted to participate; explained the potential time commitments and the incentive to participate ($20.00 Meijer gift card for phase 1 and $30.00 Meijer gift card for phase 2); and who to contact if interested in participating. For those who responded to the initial flyer, a personal e-mail (Appendix E) was sent that gave more detail about the project. This e-mail gave an overview of the topics we discussed, reiterated the time commitment and confidentiality protection, and requested contact information. The return rate of willing participants was high and so a second round of class presentations was not needed.

Phenomenological Research

Phenomenological research seeks to, “describe how one orients to lived experience…reveal the essence of human experience (Hatch, 2002, p. 30). In comparison to other forms of qualitative inquiry, phenomenological research seeks to look beyond conscious answers given by participants and learn about the roots of human experiences. Phenomenological researchers typically use interviews or extended conversations and rely on listening, observing, and forming a bond with the participants (Rudestam, 2001).
During the interviews, themes became apparent, but I resisted the temptation to interpret or construct meanings before the proper time (i.e., the analysis phase). This is consistent with inductive and deductive analysis, which will be explained in later sections, which seeks quality information and looks for patterns from the specific to the general during the analysis phase.

Researchers describe differing trends in phenomenological research, one example being heuristic research (Moustakas, 1994). Heuristic methods are consistent with the research I conducted in this study. Moustakas (1994) describes this process beginning with a question or problem that has social significance and is meaningful to the researcher. Information is acquired through participant stories, self descriptions, and is subject to researcher interpretations. The researcher is the co-creator of the narrative.

This study fit well with phenomenological methods and especially with heuristic research traditions. I sought to understand how the experiences that WCM had while connecting with others within the university affected their White identities. I did not expect the participants to be conscious of the effects of the connections they have made while attending the university chosen for this study nor their level of White identity. I interviewed each participant and connected with them, resisting inductive analysis until the appropriate time. The heuristic traditions fit well with this project considering that this study had a set of research questions and a problem, both which are meaningful to me. My methods included interviewing the participants seeking their descriptions and stories. After each interview I wrote a narrative for the participants to review. This was done to ensure accuracy of the stories and lend to deeper information.
Data Collection

Interviews were the primary source of data collection for this qualitative phenomenological study. A secondary source of information was the WRIAS (Helms & Carter, 1990). The WRIAS has been discussed in previous sections and its administering details will be discussed in the next section. All participants volunteered their time and only scheduled interview times that were convenient for them. The interviews took place in one of the university library’s private meeting rooms. These locations ensured a neutral environment, privacy, and less outside noise for recording. All interviews were digitally recorded and I took thorough notes. Each interview was conducted by me.

Instrumentation

The design of the study is dominant-less dominant (Creswell, 1994). Dominant-less dominant is a design “where the researcher conducts a study within a single dominant paradigm, with one small component drawn from an alternate paradigm (Creswell, 1994, p. 146).” The dominant design in this study was qualitative in the form of interviews. The less-dominant portion of this study was quantitative in nature. Participants were asked to complete the White Racial Identity Aptitude Scale (WRIAS) (Helms & Carter, 1990) see Appendix F. The WRIAS (Appendix F) is a 50 item attitudinal statement measure that participants answer based on a Likert scale with 1 meaning strongly disagree and 5 meaning strongly agree. Scores were calculated by adding the answers of each item that correspond with the 5 stages. The stage that received the highest score by the participant indicated the level of White identity each WCM had achieved.
After the WRIAS was completed, the 19 that had achieved at least the Pseudo Independent Phase II within the WRIAS were asked to be interviewed. More than eight of the original 19 achieved Phase II and so I randomly selected eight for the next interview. Those who were not selected were sent an e-mail thanking them for their participation and expressing that they were no longer needed for the study (Appendix G). The first interview was transcribed and written as the participant’s story. Each participant reviewed his story before the next interview. Participants read their stories and verified the accuracy of the stories; this gave me the opportunity to ask clarifying questions.

The interviews were conducted no more than 22 days apart for each participant. Keeping within 22 days hopefully increased the likelihood the participants’ continued desire to work with me, remembering what was discussed, and kept the stories fresh in my mind. Interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed with exact wording. All WRIAS results, digital recordings, and transcriptions were kept in a locked file cabinet in my office on campus.

**Interview Protocol**

To understand how WCM construct meaning through their White identity development, masculine tendencies, and connections with others within the chosen site, I conducted minimally-structured in-depth phenomenological interviews. The minimal questioning structure was in place due to the wide range of topics that were covered and the risk that pre-written questions would limit my ability to adapt topics to each unique personality. However, to ensure that each topic was covered I created an interview outline (Appendix A). The purpose of the phenomenological interviews is “to describe the meaning of a concept or phenomenon that several individuals share” (Marshall &
Rossman, p. 112). Creswell, (2003) explains that if a researcher seeks to study individuals, a phenomenological strategy of inquiry is appropriate. The minimally structured in-depth phenomenological interviews allowed the participants to reconstruct their experiences (Seidman, 1991). During each interview I asked for stories about participants’ experiences involving White identity or connections with peers, staff, or instructors.

In addition, each of the participants was asked a series of questions related to their masculinity in order to ensure that the influence of the men’s masculinity is taken into consideration. The masculinity questions were based on the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ; Spence & Helmreich, 1978). The PAQ, although dated, considers overall masculinity and breaks it down into constructs of displaying feelings, awareness of self, self confidence, and social habits. This information was sought to shed light on how masculine the participants are, and how differing levels of masculinity may influence students’ ability to connect with peers, instructors, and staff.

The interviews were one to two hours in length, digitally recorded, and transcribed using the interview protocol included in Appendix # A. Participants were asked to share stories that represent examples of their identity development.

Survey Instrument

As previously stated, to further the data gained from interviews and determine who should be interviewed, I asked each participant to complete the Helms & Carter’s (1990) White Racial Identity Attitude Scale. The WRIAS was developed from earlier work done by Helms in 1984, created in 1990 with Carter’s assistance. The scale was developed to assess the attitudes associated with the original stages of White racial
identity development; Attitudes about relationships between different identities characterize the five stages (Helms & Carter, 1990).

In 1994 Helms made several revisions to the scale which most significantly included changing the stages to statuses. This shifted the theory and scale from a stage model to a process model of racial identity development. The statuses begin with attitudes that are least sensitive to race and progress to statuses that are most conscious of race and racism (Helms, 1984 & 1995). The WRIAS contains 50 attitudinal statements that are answered using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). The statements were broken into five subsets and each contained 10 questions. Scores were tallied using the point values for each subset, and the sum of each subscale is divided by 10 to give a metric scale. The higher the score on the subscale, the more descriptive the subscale is to the participant, and associated with the status in that model. The scores were analyzed using all five of the participants’ sub scale scores. Helms’s (1984 & 1995) theory holds that individuals who score higher on the WRIAS have a deeper understanding of racial identity development. The data collected through this survey was quantitative and served as the less-dominant portion of the results.

To accurately convey the quality of the research gained, I acquired data through the WRIAS instrument, and participant interviews. These items were analyzed for common themes that address White racial identity development, participant connections with others on campus, and elements that foster identity formation. Using multiple items of analysis including the lived experiences of the participants, revealing quotes that were shared, and the WRIAS scores data triangulation was used for theme identification (Fontana & Frey, 1994; Janesick, 1994-from Hornack diss).
Consideration of Human Subjects

I did everything possible to protect the human subjects’ identities and information. Participants were initially exposed to the project via volunteer solicitation within a class. Those who showed interest received e-mails detailing the project. Those who agreed to meet with me and participate were asked to sign consent forms for our interviews and the WRIAS. Participants were compensated after they completed the WRIAS and paid again when the interviews were completed. I ensured that the consent forms were clear to the participants by asking if all the information in the form was understood. After the consent form was signed each participant received a copy of the agreement. Participants were told they could end their participation in the study at any time. All data was coded and participant true names were substituted with pseudonyms.

Data Analysis

The qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed in different ways. The quantitative data from the WRIAS (Helms & Carter, 1990) was tabulated to determine those selected for the in-person interviews. The information gained from the WRIAS was not considered an essential data piece when considering WCM identity development and campus connections. The WRIAS results were used to choose those who have achieved an identity level that allowed them to connect with others without racially-based hesitations.

Phenomenological data collection served as the primary source of information. As previously stated, the qualitative phenomenological interviews sought to learn about the experiences of the participants. The interviews produced massive amounts of information, all of which was transcribed. To gain a sense of the whole, all the
transcriptions were read prior to any information breakdown. Reducing the information into codes and domains was crucial to identifying common meanings and patterns (Creswell, 2007). Domains were essential to my inductive analysis and used versus categories because domains allow for broad relationships, whereas categories are more limiting (Hatch, 2002). The domains coincided with the research questions. Domains 1-4 represented each question: (1) describe their process of making connections; (2) make meaning of experiences connecting; (3) masculine tendencies influence; and (4) which connections helped achieve stage 2. The coding allowed me to analyze and triangulate information about people, places, or events in particular settings and generate a small number of themes or categories (Creswell, 2003). The coding sheet can be found in Appendix B.

During the coding of interview transcriptions and summarization of the participant stories, I used inductive and deductive analysis. Inductive analysis is a search for patterns that begins with specifics and moves to generalizations (Hatch, 2002). The inductive process included establishing domains, coding the domains, rereading the data to identify examples that support or counter the domains, looking for themes across domains, identifying the connecting themes, and selecting interview excerpts that supported the identified themes and research questions.

Deductive analysis uses information that is learned and allows researchers to form hypotheses from information collected or by a better means to acquire information from future participants. In this research study, a hypothesis was not formed, but because of the desire to understand meaning, deductive analysis was used to acquire quality information. Deductive analysis is used in qualitative research, although rarely (Hatch,
Qualitative research that uses deductive analysis does so by constant comparative method of what is being heard (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). The process of deductive analysis such as Hatch (2004) describes was valuable to this study in that I was able to take information learned from one interview and use it in my development of precise questioning for other participants.

Because I used a phenomenological approach and sought the lived experience, the participants made statements that required my continued analysis. Often, one comment by a participant opened an entire line of new information that deductive analysis allowed me to bring to the surface. This method also furthered the choice to use minimal questioning structures. The shared experiences surfaced at different points within the interviews for each participant and I did not want any predetermined questioning structure or analysis to hinder this process.

**Data Trustworthiness and Authenticity**

**Trustworthiness**

Although this study took several steps to ensure information validity, efforts were also taken to ensure trustworthiness and authenticity of the data. Varying measures can be used to establish trustworthiness and authenticity for the researcher, participants, or readers (Creswell, 2003). Trustworthiness and authenticity are established by giving evidence to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Erlandson, 1993). I conducted a pilot study, used an audit trail, referential adequacy materials, peer debriefing, member checking, a reflexive journal, and thick descriptions to ensure trustworthiness and authenticity.
In March of 2011 I practiced my data collection approach with two White male participants who were compensated. None of the data collected during the practice sessions was used in this study. Each student completed the WRIAS and was interviewed twice as was described in the research methods section. All protocols of communication, compensation, transcription, privacy, pseudonyms, and a written story for review were followed. This pilot study was vital to the study and allowed me to accomplish several needs of the study. It gave me real-time experience of students completing the WRIAS, the quality of questions related to the set themes, reflect on my own qualitative interview skills, and the students’ willingness and ability to divulge the information I was seeking.

Creating an audit trail entailed collecting all written or electronic materials or communication that were created through the research process. The audit increases dependability and confirmability by allowing an auditor to see the processes, steps, messages, and details of the research in writing (Erlandson, 1993). My audit trail included communications between me and the participants, instrumentation completion of the WRIAS by the participants, transcriptions of the interviews, stories written from the interviews, and my own reflexive journal.

Referential adequacy includes materials that provide context into research and is used to support data analysis, interpretations, or audits (Erlandson, 1993). I used referential adequacy by the means of digitally recording each interview. The interviews were transcribed word for word, but the recordings served as evidence to any emotions that were expressed. Those emotions shed light on the interview comments made beyond the words transcribed. “Referential adequacy materials help provide a slice of life that may be invaluable to the researcher in understanding the context” (Erlandson, p. 139).
I also used a method called peer debriefing to add to the trustworthiness and authenticity of this study. Peer debriefing can take the shape of the researcher thinking aloud, venting, bouncing ideas off someone, and reviewing written pieces with a trusted other (Creswell, 1993). My peer was a colleague who is familiar with the university chosen for this study, has read my proposal, is not on my dissertation committee (Erlandson, 1993), and is familiar with this type of research. The debriefing for this study was conducted by my peer reading the transcriptions and summary stories. Our discussions centered on the stories I wrote about each participant, the transcriptions, and my thinking aloud about the entire data collection process. I found the debriefing very helpful to keep my thoughts organized and most of all to hear how someone who is not engrossed in the project views what I worked on.

The next method required me to keep a reflexive journal. A reflexive journal is similar to a diary about the researcher’s decisions, schedule, logistics, and insights (Erlandson, 1993). I add journal entries sometimes on a daily or at least weekly basis no matter the level of research progress.

The last method I used to ensure trustworthiness and authenticity was to take thick and rich descriptive notes before, during, and after each interview. Thick descriptions force researchers to pay attention to contexts and specifically stop, look, listen, smell, and feel the surroundings (Erlandson, 1993). All interviews took place in a private conference room in the library. The times of day and outside influences upon the students (such as our meeting being near lunch time or after the participant had just left class) varied but did not seem to affect our interviews.
By completing and paying special attention to the previously described six techniques, I feel that trustworthiness is well established for this project. Independent researchers, by reviewing all of my materials, could repeat this study with great detail.

**Chapter Summary**

This study focused on the experiences that eight White college men had with instructors, staff, and peers, and how their White identity development was impacted by their past. The information acquired could be very useful when searching for methods to serve this at-risk group who are entering an ever increasing multicultural society. All participants were chosen on a volunteer basis and were made aware of the study’s purposes prior to the interviews. Before interviews began I reflected upon and acknowledged my *epoche*, (i.e., background similarities to those being researched), and took every precaution to not have my own experiences affect the outcomes. The primary method of data collection was phenomenological interviews that totaled 16 interviews and 22 hours of interview time. During the interview process I used deductive analysis to identify and increase the quality of information collected. After all the interviews were transcribed they were coded within three different domains. I used inductive data analysis methods to construct meaning of the information and ensure trustworthiness.
CHAPTER IV

PARTICIPANT STORIES

This chapter features the stories of the eight men who completed the WRIAS and participated in two interviews. The purpose of telling the stories in this chapter is to represent the men and have their voices be heard. As described in the methods section, each story was written after completion of the first interview, shown to the participant prior to the second interview for verification, and updated with relevant information that was revealed during the second interview. These stories represent a summary of participants’ basic demographic information and descriptions of their views on peers, staff, instructors, their masculine tendencies, and issues connected to race through their own experiences.

The participants who completed the study were eight males who identified as White. Each participant had obtained at least junior status during the spring and summer, 2011 terms, when the research was conducted. The group was varied in terms of major, family background, hometown size, siblings, and future career plans.

The following are the individual stories of each participant. The students names’ were replaced by pseudonyms of my choosing.

Individual Stories

Andy

Andy was born and raised in small rural town in the lower peninsula of Michigan. He is a middle child and was raised primarily by his father. Andy is a White male and his
heritage is German; he is also fluent in speaking German. He is proud of his German heritage when he described his family background; “my last name is hardcore German, both my parents’ sides are from Berlin, and it feels good to know where I come from.” Andy has a strong understanding of his identity and reflects on his past. Some of the statements Andy made to represent his past and identity included the following:

I have been rewarded in life to have friends. Earlier in life I had mentors and lots of anger issues and I was mimicking things from my home life. For me to feel okay emotionally and physically with others is important for me. I have been seeing counselors since I was in the third grade.

Andy has primarily two groups of friends in the area; one of which is made of people who have migrated from the small rural town in Southwest Michigan and who he has known for many years. The other group he had gotten to know from his film major: “Film group is avid film nerds who love movies and directors and analyze a movie with me.”

The film studies group can number as many as 30, but there are about 10 that he sees on a somewhat regular basis. Being with the group from his home town is good for Andy because they are people he has known most of his life, and he has a bond with them. Because he knows this group very well, Andy has no hesitation showing his feelings and is very confident when around them. Andy described this bond:

My town was harsh and lots of drugs and gang affiliation. I am glad I got out when I did. And the ones who ended here we have this thing where we all know we came from the same place and made it out. We have known each other since kindergarten and so nothing to worry about.
They all come from the same “medium class” but are an ethnically diverse group. Andy likes this school and especially “the ranking in broadcast, it has some big city and public broadcasting gets high marks which could help my future.”

Another group on campus that Andy spoke of is staff within the university. Andy has not really met a lot of staff or spent much time with any staff members outside of a job he held. Andy worked in the computer help desk area and got to know one of his supervisors beyond just a “Hi” level. This particular staff person “worked Sundays and would talk with us.” Andy liked this guy, “we had some similarities and he made it lively.” Yet the connection never really went beyond a good working relationship.

In terms of working with instructors, Andy has connected with a few in his area of study. In particular, he was drawn to one professor who exposed him to some great things about film from an African cultural perspective. Andy described that instructor as such: “I wanted to work with him because he is from Africa and done some low budget films about where he is from. He struck me as a great mentor and had such a different upbringing. We all loved him.”

Another professor, with whom Andy has taken classes and will do some independent study, is female and “opens up about her experiences to help him.” He recognizes she wants to teach students and help them prepare for a film career. One unique thing that Andy did that she liked was when “I turned in this assignment that had to do with originality and you can see I have unique hair, so I put some of my hair on the paper. She saw this and smirked.” Andy felt this instructor reach out to him and so he was comfortable reciprocating the connection.
Andy has knowledge of issues related to racial diversity. He was first exposed to a diverse environment in his hometown when lots of diverse families moved to the area. When I was in first grade we had one Black student in our class and towards middle school we had lots more Mexican Americans around. My best friend in middle school was a Black female and we still talk today. When he graduated, his class was fairly diverse with “over 30 Black kids in the class.” Through his upbringing around diverse groups, history with counseling, and appreciation for film, Andy enjoys differences in people and likes to learn about them.

This enjoyment Andy has of being around new people was also evident in our interactions. Andy contacted me quickly after I presented to his class and seemed very eager to participate. He was on time for all our meetings, flexible when scheduling, and seemed to enjoy the process. Each of our interviews were well over an hour due to Andy’s lengthy answers and willingness to divulge details about himself. Andy’s body language and overall demeanor was always pleasant even when talking about his sometimes troubled past. He seemed to enjoy talking about his present habits and views; when we were completely done Andy said to me, “this was fun, glad I did it.”

Ben

Ben is from a small rural town in West Michigan and “grew up on a dairy farm and has always worked to help the family.” He has an older brother and sister. He likes to “play sports, hang out with his friends, watch sports, and talk with new people.” His major is engineering, which he enjoys, but wishes the area he takes most of his classes had “more life and things going on, plus people who were not always in a book.” He is close to graduation and has enjoyed his time at the university. Ben is proud he is a good
student and is about to graduate. He has liked his time at the university and met many people over the years.

The people with whom Ben has spent more of his time compared to other groups at the university are his friends. This friend group is made up of “guys I met while living in the dorms.” When this group gets together they “watch sports, have a few beers, and the conversation is pretty light, we don’t really get into politics. We talk about different things every time—I don’t know. They know me better than anyone else here.” Ben’s description of what he and his friends do when together and talk about indicates a fairly high masculinity level. The group is made up of all White guys. “There are lots of other groups at engineering we just have not made friends with them.”

Ben has been at the university for long enough to have had a fair amount of contact with staff within the university. He has worked in several offices while in school and has gotten to know multiple staff members. Getting to know these staff members has happened through “work conversations, casual talk, and I did some good work.” Ben specifically remembers getting to know the secretary in the engineering office: “I go into her office area often and talk with her. She lets me get coffee and keep my lunch in the fridge. She was just nice and we would talk a lot. Sometimes make fun of the professors.”

Other staff he has known have been through chance interactions. Ben even had a longer than average conversation with the president of the university once: “I was walking on campus once and he was next to me. He asked how my classes were going and how I liked the school. I brought up football. It was good.”

Overall, the staff members Ben has worked with have interacted with him with regard to work, his classes, or surface-level discussions. Ben has not become particularly
close to any staff at the university. This type of interaction is consistent with experiences I had with Ben and my impressions of his masculine tendencies. When we met to complete the WRIAS and during each subsequent meeting he was cordial, but showed little excitement to be participating in this research. Our conversations were productive, but Ben did not offer detailed answers. His voice is low key and offers little fluctuation. His body language during the interviews was neutral with little movement giving off positive or negative vibes. On more than one occasion I was looking for stories from him to add examples to the answers he was providing and he struggled to do this.

Ben has some definite opinions about some of the faculty at the university. Overall he feels that “respect is a big thing, if we show it then they should show the same.” Ben has had faculty who have “treated him very well and some who have not.” Those he worked well with seemed to enjoy students “were humble to learn from students and not be assholes.” Yet, Ben did not seek them outside of class because there was “no need to.” On the flip side, Ben did attend the office hours of one particular instructor whose class Ben struggled with, but they did not form a connection.

Ben has some knowledge of issues related to diversity. His hometown was very “farm living and White with very few Black students in his high school.” Yet Ben keeps an open mind and sees lots of differences on campus. Ben describes the lessons his parents taught: “I was raised that all are the same. Race does not matter it is actions that define the person. My parents taught me that, even though our school was almost all White.” Looking back on where he was raised, Ben feels “comfortable around other cultures,” but recognizes that he was simply not exposed to other races and cultures.
Cory

Cory is a senior who has had a few different majors before deciding on medical administration as his future career path. He is from a large city on the East side of Michigan, has one sister, and was raised by his father, a situation he describes as a “dysfunctional family.” Yet this dysfunctional upbringing has not hindered him in being successful in college, making friends, or being in relationships. Cory likes to play soccer, has a calm demeanor, and recognizes his past experiences have impacted him especially when it comes to being around people different than him. He enjoys making new friends and getting to know instructors and staff within the university. Cory’s desire to meet new people within the university sheds some light on his masculine tendencies by the fact that he seeks new connections.

Cory spends most of his time either at work, focusing on his classes, or “hanging” with his small group of friends. His friend group is made up of people he has met at school and known for a few years. The two guys he primarily hangs out with, one his roommate and the other a mutual friend, are Black men. Cory has a “unique connection with one of my friends, we talk about race sometimes serious or sometimes joking, but it’s open.” The conversations have educated Cory on multiple levels.

He is a very educated man and knows I might ask something or if I say something out of place it is not intentional and he educates me. He won’t be stung by it and so I feel comfortable about it. Most of the time we can make jokes about things or he says to me “be easy with that.” I understand that others might not take what I say as a joke.
The rest of his friend group consists of women, who are mutual friends of everyone and are all White. Cory sees his roommates daily and the other members of the group when they can get together to watch sports, play sports, or grill outside.

Cory appreciates and likes the University. He has held a couple of jobs on campus and gotten to know some staff fairly well. One of his positions was working at a reception desk in one of the residence halls and he worked some late nights. His supervisor spent time with him and “when you spend that much time together getting to know each other well just happens.” In addition, Cory’s personality is extroverted, but he prides himself on doing a good job and learning from other people. Cory has also gotten to know other staff at the university outside of the jobs he has held.

I attribute Cory’s extroversion and desire to learn from other people to his responses to me and his level of participation in this study. His e-mail agreeing to participate in this study was sent less than an hour after my presentation to his class. Cory was always quick to schedule with me and always on time. He is not an overly animated or excited man, but enjoys talking and giving detailed answers. He had a strong sense of pride when describing his hometown, his friends, interests, and especially what he has accomplished. The stories and examples he told had just the right balance of detail and insight. Cory’s detailed stories and answers allowed me to ask questions about his background and beliefs I was not able to do with some of the other participants and he never seemed uncomfortable or negative toward me.

Having been at the University this long, Cory has had his fair share of instructor interactions and is open to sharing some of his experiences with instructors. Having switched majors a few times, he has been in a wide variety of classes. The instructors that
Cory had connected with “have an open class and promote us to have discussions…don’t take things too serious, but I only see them in class.” Cory feels the instructors that act as “the Wizard of Oz and just talk at the group without any two way talking is not good.” Cory has had classes with both types of instructors. The type of instructor that is open in the classroom makes Cory feel comfortable talking with them outside of class, but he does not do this often. The instructors whose office hours Cory visited taught the classes he needed help with.

Cory talks about his past experiences with people from other cultures and his views of culture very comfortably. He recognizes that two of his friends are Black and he is White and what that can mean to other people. His “natural curiosity” comes from his upbringing with his father and being around many groups growing up.

It [his knowledge of race] has definitely raised my pride level and like I said earlier I am kinda our family historian and I see that we are very Irish. So that has been something I learned from this school and my friends is that I have a culture of my own and I want to know about it.

Cory’s pride in being Irish and knowledge of being White helps him prepare for his future. Cory recognizes that White stereotypes exist just as they do for all groups and he appreciates learning about all groups.

David

David was born in a large city in the North Western United States, but raised in a large city in Florida. He has an older brother and sister. He has friends who are still in his hometown that he keeps in contact with long distance.
David does not have a large friend group in this area. “Most of my friends are back in (large town in the Northwest U.S.) and so around here I just hang out with a few people and my fiancé.” He spends most of his time with his brother, a few guys, and his fiancé. When they are together they play video games, watch movies, enjoy some light drinks, and “experience the town.” David’s small friend group is consistent with his introverted personality, masculine tendencies, and “self described intellectual personality.”

Although David described himself as introverted, his interactions with me were highly collaborative. David’s eagerness to participate was evident through his e-mails and our discussions. He seemed to enjoy being asked about his past and especially his views on various topics. The vocabulary he used and his future plans showed his intellectual personality well. His body language and facial expressions were always inviting and gave off the impression that he enjoyed being interviewed. When the interviews were done he asked several questions about this project and researching students.

David has been at this university for long enough to have had a fair contact with staff within the university. He currently works on campus and has lots of contact with random staff and instructors. The staff members he spoke about are “my bosses in the computer lab” and one from the international student services office. All of the staff to David are “nice, but I don’t talk with them more than just work.”

With respect to instructors, David is around many of them through his job and the many classes he has taken. He has connected with one particular instructor from his major, but no one else. David said of his instructors that he “like[s] lots of them and
see[s] as more than feeding information, but feeling connected to, no.” Yet David does attend office hours when he needs help.

David has a strong knowledge of and interest in issues related to diversity, which also ties to his self confidence level. His is comfortable with who he is and identifies as, which allows him a sense of ease when around those who are different than himself. He has a personal and academic interest in Japan, including its people and culture. Some of this may have begun when David’s dad “would do business with an Asian man and I was always fascinated by him.” Overall, David viewed people “for what is in their heart,” rather than their culture or color. David remembers examples of when he was growing up and he feels “that throughout my life I was taught about other people and the area I grew up in promoted treat others as you want to be treated.”

**Eric**

Eric has been at the university for nearly three years, is majoring in English, and hopes to teach at the secondary level after graduation. He is from a small town in western Michigan and has multiple siblings. Eric likes to lift weights and hang out with his friends, which is natural for him having an extroverted personality. Eric describes himself as “easy-to-please type of guy” who goes with the flow often and has a strong sense of “doing the right thing” which he attributes to his parents. Eric’s masculine tendencies were very open in that he has a strong presence of self confidence, is aware of himself, and wants to learn about all people.

Eric balances his time between his girlfriend, multiple jobs, and classes. His friends are made of up two groups: one from his home town and one at the university. The group from the university are people he has met on the job or in classes, and his
friends from home are a small group of guys he grew up with. Eric’s friend group from home is very close to him, although they “do not see each other much these days.” He has known this group since a very young age and can remember learning about other cultures through them.

My one friend who is Latino came from a family of nine and his parents were hardly ever there. And so his brothers would run the house. Everyone in his family would work and give money towards the house payment. We just saw different things.

Eric appreciates and likes the University. Since coming to the university he has held one job, but that job has allowed him to meet lots of students and several staff. The staff he has gotten to know for the most part has been because of his personality; Eric feels that he is an “engaging” person. He sees the staff he has gotten to know as good people and hopefully people who “can teach me something. Makes me attracted to them and curious how they got to where they are now.”

Having been at the University this long, Eric has had many faculty experiences. Being an English major and physical education minor, he has taken a wide variety of classes with varying instructors. The faculty that Eric is drawn to have “high energy” and he looks for ways to connect with the instructors he likes. Eric is not the type to visit office hours often, even with instructors he admires, but he will talk with them after class. Because Eric is a “go-with-the-flow” kind of guy he has had “very few poor experiences with instructors,” but the ones he has had there is a commonality to them. Eric is turned off by instructors who “get a doctorate and run into this realm of believe what I say is always right.” One in particular that rubbed Eric the wrong way was a new professor who
seemed to need to “prove himself.” Although Eric has gotten to know several of his instructors he “talk(s) with them only in and around class time.” Eric connects with instructors differently than he does with peers or staff.

Eric understands diversity and recognizes he is a White male and that privileges exist with being White. Yet, Eric has a keen understanding of his own identity and other races. Coming from his hometown, which was “very White,” he has since been exposed to diversity while at this university. It was his “upbringing that made me want to meet lots of people and just learn about them.” Eric’s curiosity impacts him today when being around people at the university: “So one day I just talked to him and found out he has great history with the Marines and this school.”

Eric’s curiosity and extroverted personality was obvious from the beginning of our interactions. He was the only student who approached me after my presentation and wanted to take the WRIAS (Helms & Carter, 1990) right then. His discussions involving staff, peers, and instructors revealed his high respect for anyone within the university. Our time together had plenty of laughing and smiles because Eric was comfortable telling stories and showing his positive outlook. His, “nothing is too serious” attitude was evident throughout. On more than one occasion he stated, “dig deep . . . this is good and I am learning about myself.”

**Frank**

Frank has been at the university for over four years and is majoring in Criminal Justice. He is looking into working for the DNR, as a state trooper, or joining the Marines after graduation. He is from a small town in the central part of Michigan and has multiple
siblings. Frank likes to grill, drink alcohol, and hang out with his friends. He is “somewhat introverted.”

Frank’s participation in this study and interactions with me were useful, but he did not show the overall desire to be a part of the research that some of the others. Frank treated me well and was always polite, but his lack of desire to be a part of the study was fairly obvious. His answers were typically a few words and it tested my ability to ask open ended questions and requests for examples. He was never rude or negative toward me or the questions I asked, but also never showed excitement toward being interviewed. The first interview was just under an hour and the second was 35 minutes, much shorter than the other second interviews. Frank showed high self confidence and little awareness of his feelings or the feelings of others.

Although Frank calls himself introverted, he says “friends are the most to me.” His friends are made up of three groups, which include “some people from home who are still living there, some people from home who attend this school, and some people he has people I met since being at this university.”

Frank considers all his friends to be “real cool.” His closest group consists of six or seven guys from back home. Yet, all his friends here are similar to him in that they hang out, enjoy college life, and are not too serious. When any of his friends are together, the conversation and fun is light, they do not do things to get in serious trouble, and conversation is not very heavy with controversial topics. Frank likes it that way and is “OK with the group” he has now. Frank likes the university. Since coming to the university he has not worked in this area, but works with his dad when he goes home.
Frank knows very few staff at the University. He has met several times with his academic advisor, who helps him with classes, but the conversation does not go beyond classes.

Frank has had lots of exposure to faculty, but minimal connections with them. He can think of a few he has “kinda connected with.” One particular instructor was a young female for a sociology class. She was easy to approach, kept her office hours, and did not seem mean. Another instructor made Frank feel comfortable because they both like South Park and this particular instructor spoke about it during class. He was just social and even invited “the class to have a drink if ever in Grand Rapids.” Frank did not explain what makes an instructor connect with him.

Frank has only had one instructor he did mention feeling negative towards. This particular stats instructor “was hard and she made it a hard way of teaching.” Frank did go to her office for help and only talked about stats, but was happy when the class was over. Frank remembers that many of his professors ranged in age and gender, but he has had only one Black instructor in all his years here.

When Frank spoke about staff at the university he only mentioned one that he has spent any time with. His academic advisor he sees once a “semester or so for class stuff.” Frank explained that when he talks with her, there is “nothing else I need from her.” When talking about staff and instructors, Frank thinks not knowing many of them beyond the classroom, “is not a big deal, I don’t need them.”

Frank understands diversity and recognizes he is a White male and that privileges exist with being White. He sees that White individuals at times “get better jobs, are treated better, and are not first thought of as negative.” He thinks back to growing up and the people that were around him is where he was exposed to other races and cultures. His
friends “would hang out with anyone.” One particular guy in their friend group growing up “was a jokester about being Black and would say things about scaring people or being a Black man.” Although Frank is aware of the privileges he does not talk about race issues with his friends because he feels that his friends are his outlet for good times and relaxation.

**Greg**

Greg has been at the university for three years and is majoring in biochemistry with a minor in a foreign language. He is planning to study abroad in Japan in the near future. After graduation he hopes to get into veterinary medicine. He is from a small town in west Michigan, has multiple siblings, and his parents are divorced. Greg has a small group of friends who he likes to be social with. Greg is a pretty “easy going guy” who some describe as “introverted” and others think he is extroverted.

Greg balances his time between his friends, working off campus at a vet clinic, and his studies. His friends are a small group; when they get together they usually play golf, some poker, watch sports, and have some drinks. Greg is not a “heavy drinker and also does not prefer the party scene. The people that Greg considers friends are his roommates who he met through his brother, one person from home, and another woman from class.

Greg appreciates and likes the university. Since coming to the university he has held one job as a class tutor, but most of his work has been off campus. Yet, with his positive personality and academic accomplishments, Greg has gotten to know several staff at the University. When he lived on campus he knew a “few of the cafeteria workers, (his) old hall director, some of the staff in the biology department, and (his)
academic advisor.” Greg likes meeting new people and feels it is part of the college experience.

I believe Greg thought participating in this research was part of his university experience. He is an extremely positive person to be around who truly soaks up the learning environment. Greg’s e-mails showed that he wanted to participate, but nothing overly excited or anxious. Yet, when we met he seemed to enjoy being asked about his past and especially his views on various topics. He seemed to thrive on the attention and that he had things to say. In addition, Greg asked more questions of me and the study than all the other participants combined. He took a keen interest in the structure of the study. His body language and reactions to my questions were always open and inviting.

Having been at the University since 2008 he has had many instructor experiences. In preparation for studying in Japan he has spent time with the chair of the Japanese department. Their conversations mostly involve what his travel will be like and “the country.” His other faculty interactions that were of high quality involved a professor with whom he liked being in class who he sought out for lab experience. He rarely seeks instructor help with classes because he does well and “understands the material.” Instructors who make their “class fun and interactive” make Greg more inclined to seek them out for outside interactions. Greg does not look to instructors “for advice outside of academic things or help I need.” And, Greg cannot think of any instructors who he felt he had a poor experience with.

Greg talks about his past experiences with other cultures and his views of culture very naturally. He comes from a town with a high percentage of White residents, and so his exposure to other races while growing up was minimal. Yet, his parents never
“avoided a topic,” which included race and how to treat people different than himself. “It [viewing other races] started with my parents and everyone is equal and to not care about other sorts of differences.”

In addition, from an early age Greg had a fascination with Japanese culture “when I visited the country in eight grade.” His interest in Japanese culture carries over today when Greg “spends time with Japanese foreign exchange students on campus” and is planning to travel to Japan in the near future.

Henry

Henry has been at the University for nearly three years and is majoring in criminal justice. He is originally from an affluent suburb of a major city in Michigan, which is a “fairly prosperous town and has a pretty diverse population.” Henry hopes to be accepted into the police academy within the next several months, which would also help in completing his credits toward graduation. Henry considers himself an extroverted person who likes to be social with lots of friends. He does not need to work while at school because he is able to “save enough money during summer jobs.”

Henry balances his time between his studies and friends at the University. Henry is proud and it adds to his self-confidence that he has a large group of friends (30 to 40) that he hangs out with on a weekly basis. However, out of those 40 friends, he has seven or eight who he considers close friends. Henry’s close friends are people he sees daily and can talk to if he had problems. Of his group of friends, some are from his hometown, the group is a mix of men and women, and they all have similar interests of being good people who “like to party.” The group is predominantly White. When I asked Henry who
were the most important group to him at the university he replied, “definitely my friends.”

During his time in school he does not recall spending much time with staff of the university. When asked about the staff he could only think of one, his current criminal justice academic advisor, who he knows “somewhat.” Over the years he has met with her many times, but all conversations have been focused on “his program, class stuff, and possible future with the academy.” Henry calls himself social, but he says he does not typically reach out to staff or faculty in their office environments.

During our interviews I felt this same sense from Henry of not reaching out to others. He feels aware of himself and does not consider connecting with others within the university something he needs. Henry participated with me and answered my questions, but did not extend himself. He never showed any level of excitement or displeasure and his temperament was even during the whole process. The questions I asked were answered, but I would often have to ask him to elaborate or give a story to support. He never asked any questions about the study or what would happen next. Our interactions were never tense or he was never rude, but neither was he overly willing to help or elaborate.

Other than staff, Henry has had many experiences with instructors. For the most part he has been happy with his instructors and looks for them to “be there and present the material plus be fair to us.” He mostly looks for “classes to be fun.” The instructors that have stuck positively toward Henry on a positive were fun and outgoing. The few who Henry speaks negatively about were regimented in their class structure or were completely out of touch with the material.
Coming from his home town, and since his high school was “more diverse than the University,” Henry is comfortable around diverse groups. When growing up his parents talked about race, and “if I said something racist then I would have been told about it. I was taught to treat everyone the same and give all a chance.”

Within his group of friends he mentioned one friend who is Black and considers him a good friend, but not a person he has had conversations about race with. Henry is aware of race and privilege and what it can mean for people. Some of his classes helped him “realize that lots of Black come from low socioeconomic background and can’t afford legal representation and come from an environment that is not best.”

Henry has not seen examples of privilege on campus and has seen very few instances of racism. If he had to Henry would stand up for “friends who were being talked about or treated unfairly” for whatever reason including their differences. In general, when it comes to other people Henry considers himself trusting of others “until given a reason not to.

**Summary of Participants**

The eight men who participated in this study had striking similarities and differences. Seven of the men were from Michigan and one was from Illinois, lending to the point that the university the participants attend is a true regional serving institution. Each participant had achieved at least a junior standing at the university. The age range of the men was from twenty two to twenty four. They all elected to participate in this study, showing a willingness to be interviewed. Their personalities varied, yet had similarities including enjoying time with friends, consuming alcohol, and having romantic
relationships with women. They all fell into uniform masculine tendencies with respect to connecting with others, which included spending time with peers, instructors, or staff.

Just as much as the participants were the same they had differences. Their majors included engineering, criminal justice, film production, communications, physical education, and biomedical sciences. They came from a variety of rural and urban hometowns. As described in the stories, they displayed varying degrees of extroverted and introverted personalities. Even though they all agreed to be interviewed by me, some were more forthcoming with information than others. Some seemed to take an interest in the research process and asked questions about the study while others asked nothing. And, they all had varying levels of outside-of-classroom participation such as university clubs, sports teams, or jobs.

In addition to their personalities, university affiliations, and backgrounds, the similarities and differences of the participants also brought light to the emerging themes and possible answers to the research questions of this study. Included in the participants’ similarities was how important to them it was to connect with peers, and who influenced the participants the most in achieving stage 2 of the WRIAS (Helms & Carter, 1990). Another theme that started to emerge was the homogeneous nature of their masculine tendencies and its seemingly slight impact on the connections they discussed. The themes and research questions addressed by the differences within the participants included whether they connected with staff or instructors, experiences with race, including the use of humor around issues of race, and how some of their precollege experiences impact their views of race while in college. Overall, the eight participants held enough similarities and differences to offer a study rich with information.
CHAPTER V

RESULTS

This chapter details the information that emerged from the data analysis of the eight White men who participated in this study. The purpose of this chapter is to represent the emerging themes I found and respond to the proposed research questions. I have selected quotations to illustrate the themes that emerged relative to the research questions. It should be noted that during the interviews the research questions were not asked as they are written in this study; rather, questions and scenarios were posed to allow for answers from the varying view points of the participants. The proposed research questions included the following:

1. How do White college men who have achieved Stage 2 of Helms’s (1984) White identity describe their process of making connections with peers, instructors, or staff within the university?

2. How do they make meaning of experiences connecting with peers, instructors, or staff within the university?

3. How do the masculine tendencies of White college men who have achieved Stage 2 of Helms’s White identity influence their connections with peers, instructors, or staff?

I found multiple themes that emerged from the answers given during the interviews, allowing for me to answer the research questions and provide a lens into the lived experiences of the participants. Although it was not feasible for me to include the entire interview transcriptions, themes were only identified and included when noted by multiple respondents. After careful analysis six themes emerged from the data. The themes I identified include (1) the definition of connection varied, (2) participants were comfortable having no connections with instructors or staff, (3) the connections that the participants spoke of included staff and instructors, but peer-to-peer connection was most important, (4) participants believe their initial learning about race came from when they were young and not the university connections, (5) having connections gave meaning for the participants to be comfortable with learning about race, and (6) participants used humor to talk about race.

The themes connect with all four research questions and represent the participants’ lived experiences. Overall, the purpose of this study was to add to the existing knowledge pertaining to what types of connections WCM make, how their masculinity levels influence connection choices, and how the nature of those connections influence their White identity development. I believe the following themes and findings derived from the research questions will add to the existing knowledge on this topic.

**Emergent Themes**

I spent a total of 27 hours with the eight participants, including on average two and a half hours with each participant for our private interviews. I completed all the interview transcriptions, coding, and multiple methods to maintain authenticity and trustworthiness. I feel very confident in my knowledge of the participants, the
information that was shared, and my recognition of the identified themes. The interviews were guided by an outline, but remained minimally structured, allowing for a casual atmosphere and for the participants’ responses to reveal a wide range of information. I found myself resisting the use of inductive analysis during the interviews, but using inductive processes including searching for domains and patterns to find connected themes.

Hatch (2002) describes inductive analysis as beginning with particular pieces of information then bringing them together in a meaningful whole. In the case of the interviews the participants told me pieces of their lives or views and I put those pieces together in the form of deeper questions. I also formed the emerging themes by an inductive process including reading and rereading the transcriptions to identify consistencies and pieces of information to put together.

I did not change the research questions during any of the participants’ interviews. I collected information that was directed at particular research questions and other unforeseen information was also acquired. Some of the information shared tied to research discussed in the literature review, but in some cases unexpected information was revealed requiring additional published research to be cited.

The eight participants were all WCM with at least junior standing. As prescribed in the methodology, all of the participants volunteered to participate and spent time with me on four different occasions. Each of the participants had unique perspectives and varied pasts that have impacted his identity development. Much of what was shared was done in the form of stories or examples from their pasts. The themes I found after reading and coding the transcriptions are presented below.
The Level of Connection Differed By Group

When I asked, all of the participants could give examples and talked about being close to staff, instructors, or peers at some level. Some of the participants had positive examples of interactions with staff, peers, or instructors. However, my interpretation of the level of connection and how the participants defined connecting with instructors, peers, or staff varied by group. The literature is exhaustive and culminated in Pascarella and Terenzini’s *How College Affects Students* (2005), which summarizes that connecting with someone while in college increases a student’s likelihood of graduating. The connections between the participants’ peers and staff were consistent and spoke of close relations, somewhat intimate knowledge of each other, and a desire to be around each other. However, the connections between participants and instructors comprised of surface level information and almost no desire to be around each other outside of classroom learning.

Ben is a prime example I found of a student who has done well at the university and has connected with multiple groups, but to varying degrees. Ben has peers at the university he has known since his first year and they do many things together. His description to me of what his peer group does include the following: “We have some serious conversations and know each others’ views, but mostly hang out.” Ben spoke of two staff he knew, one of which was a secretary from his major department office. They talked about his class projects, some of the faculty, or their daily lives. I perceived that Ben felt good about talking with her and he chose to go into her office area for conversations. Ben shared with me great examples of instructors he connected with, but with one slight difference: “Basically it is about the respect thing. It should be the same
way of what we show. As long as we are not being jerks to them then they should do what they can to help us be successful.” Ben’s idea of connection with instructors was limited to whether he saw them as respecting him and helping him with class material.

David is another example I saw of a student who has had plenty of opportunities to connect with the various groups at the university. He is an intellectual personality who enjoys literature and government discussions, and has a small friend group. When his friends are together they talk about their future careers, sports, and some go to David for advice. The friends that David spoke of are from his hometown and came to the same school he is at or are people he has known since his freshman year. David also spoke of a few staff he has spent a fair amount of time with while working on campus. His supervisors work well with him, ask him about his life outside of college, and he “gets them gifts at times and they like me.” David spoke of several instructors and most in a positive sense. However, his description of what he talked about with them and did was all class-based. When I asked him if he sees instructors as more than people giving him information, his response was very telling; “I have liked lots of them and see as more than feeding me information, but feeling connected to, no.”

Greg also spoke of instructors, staff, and his peers differently. Greg is an exceptional student who rarely visits instructors’ office hours, and when I asked him why he does not go to office hours he replied, “I don’t need any help.” When I asked him if he could talk about any instructors he has not cared for, he led me to believe with answers such as “I have had lectures I did not like, but not a bad experience,” that connecting with instructors was not a priority for him. Yet Greg spoke about his small group of friends and the guys he lives with. They like to play cards, talk about their futures, relationship
issues, and watch movies. Greg has also made one particularly strong connection to an academic advisor to the level that he house sits for her and they speak often.

Eric exemplified for me having university-wide connections but having a different view of his connections with instructors. When I asked him about how he has connected with various staff he replied, “he has helped me form opinions of other students and we just talk. Yeah I know one lady in the dining halls and one of the maintenance workers.” Eric thinks of himself as an extrovert and that shows in his description of campus friends and those from his home town. He has made many friends on campus through various jobs and classes; he also keeps in contact with several people from his home town. Eric enjoys being around his friends to socialize or be serious when anyone needs help. Eric also described his unique approach to instructors: “Sometimes I would find out what they are interested in by Googling them and then bring articles or things to them about what they are researching.” It is clear that Eric, even being a very social person, had interactions with instructors that were based strictly in academics.

A large difference in all the descriptions of the peers and staff compared to the instructors was what participants felt a connection was. I heard them discuss that connecting with peers or staff included talking about problems, successes, interests, and doing things in their free time. The participants’ views of connections with instructors were dominated by the material covered in class or whether they found the instructor entertaining while teaching. The participants connected with peers and staff by spending time with them of their choosing. The few participants who went to instructor office hours sought class help; it was never to just chat or seek help with a non-class item. The interviews never evolved to this topic, but my feeling about why students connect with
instructors differently is in part because instructors hold the authority of students’ grades, which can force a different social dynamic.

**Participants Were Comfortable Having no Connection to Instructors or Staff**

All of the participants could speak in detail, and seemed to enjoy talking, about their peers. However, within the participant group some spoke about having no connections with instructors or staff within the university. This lack of connection between the participants and staff or instructors was noteworthy to me because the participants were content with this missing piece of university life. Several of the WCM discussed having completed many classes, having been at the University for at least three years, and having been in contact with many staff, but described having little connection with any of them, even to the level of forgetting most of their names. This theme does not connect with any specific piece of research in the literature review, but could affirm the conflicting research that each group claims to be the most impactful on students’ lives.

When I asked Henry about staff within the university our conversation was indicative of how he viewed staff; it was eye opening to me that he did not care to connect with university staff:

Randy: Can you speak about any staff you know here?
Henry: Not really, just my major advisor.
Randy: OK, how do you know her and can you describe her?
Henry: We meet for my class stuff and she is nice.
Randy: Ever talk with her about anything but classes?
Henry: No, I guess I don’t see why I would.
Randy: Do you like talking with her?
Henry: Indifferent.
And, when I asked Henry about his instructors he commented liking some of his Spanish instructors because they were “fun and outgoing.” During the second interview Henry and I were able to delve deeper into his thoughts on instructors and staff within the University and why he views them the way he does. Henry commented, “I think I treat it (getting a degree) like a business and who I need things from is where I go and people here, I just don’t seem to need things from.” Henry showed me in his language that getting a degree to him was like a transactional process and connecting with staff or instructors was not a necessary part of the transaction. His puzzled look and short answers to my questions about connecting led me to believe that he could not understand why I would ask about this because he had never even considered connections important.

Similar to Henry, Frank described to me almost no meaningful interactions with staff at the University. Furthermore, his demeanor indicated that this void of staff connections was acceptable. When I asked about staff, Frank talked about meeting with his academic advisor, but only for class needs. His responses about staff could be summarized with his one statement, “I did not want to waste my time...no need for another person.”

Frank’s responses to my questions about instructors were slightly different than his responses about staff; he gave a few examples of some that he “liked.” However, as presented in the previous theme, a connection with instructors was limited to “he had good stories and would make us laugh.” When I asked probing questions about why he had not spent more time or talked with instructors beyond class material discussions, Frank responded, “no, and I just would not do that.”
Henry and Frank are two examples of the participants who seemed surprised when I asked detailed or repeated questions about connecting with staff or instructors. Connecting with anyone on campus besides peers was foreign to them.

**Peer Connections Were Most Important**

The two previous themes discussed that some participants viewed connecting with instructors differently than with peers or staff, and that not connecting with staff or instructors was acceptable. This theme found that although a connection between the participants and staff or instructors was meaningful for some, the connection between the participants and peers was most important. As detailed in the literature review, extensive research has been conducted to tie a student’s success with the influences from his or her peer group. Having a strong peer group can help a student feel a sense of community, (Chen, 2004; Maslow, 1970), aid in retaining students (Bean, 1980; Tinto, 1975, 1993), and help students feel as if they matter to others (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981; Schlossberg, 1989). The participants in this study had peer groups numbering from one to three, and made up of sizes between three and forty. During each interview I began with asking about peers because, as expected, this group was easy for the participants to talk about. The unknown was how the participants’ peers compared to other connections and how they described their peers.

Andy exemplified a powerful connection between himself and his peers when I asked him to describe his friends.

I tend to hang with people I meet in my classes or a lot of my high school friends who moved here. I come from a harsh town with lots of drugs and gang affiliation. I am glad I got out and those who also got out, we have a common bond.
The two groups he associates with have conversations varying between their majors, interests, and happenings from their home town. When Andy talked about the people he still communicates with from his home town, he had a sense of calm and even commented, “when you have known someone since kindergarten, it is chill and you don’t have to worry.” Not worrying and always gravitating to this group exemplifies that his peers are most important to him.

In terms of self-knowledge and background, Henry is the opposite of Andy. Henry comes from an affluent community and a stable home. Yet, similar to Andy, Henry’s peers dominate his time. When I asked Henry to generalize how his friends impact him, his response was, “my hobbies, which is a high significant [sic] part of my day and what I spend time on.” Henry described his friends as good people, some drink often, and when they are together, they just hang out. The group he spends time with knows about each others’ lives, but they do not give advice or go to each other for help.

Frank is another student who I found to highly value his friend group, but is different than Andy or Henry. Frank has a strong friend group from his hometown and a group from campus. Each group is made up of six or seven people, but he is “much closer to the group from home.” When I asked him questions about why the home group is closer, he responded: “My home group is people I have known almost all my life. Some of us went to Catholic school together. We used to smoke together and now we just have some drinks and hang out.”

When I asked Frank about comparing the instructors, staff, and peers, he emphatically said his peers were most important to him. Yet, when I asked direct and
related questions to learn why he chose his peers, Frank did not go beyond “I have known them longer.”

My views of Ben are that he also places great importance on his peers, yet he has done little reflection as to what they mean to him. Ben has two friend groups; one being his roommates and the other guys from his major. Both groups are made entirely of men and when they are together typical activities include, “watch[ing] sports and drink[ing].” The groups have similar opinions, according to Ben, “but we don’t get into politics and I don’t like to talk about that stuff. When I asked Ben about the importance of the peers, instructors, and staff, his response was, “I see my friends the most and I guess they mean the most to me. The other people at the university teach me and talk to me, but my friends keep things fun and let me be me.”

**Learning About Race Started Before Entering the University**

In Beverly Tatum’s (1989) seminal book, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria*, she notes that children as young as three see physical differences such as skin color, hair texture, and facial features. Research conducted in a day care setting by Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) concluded that children from three to five years of age held views of racial dynamics. However, just because children can learn about race at a young age does not mean that people within the university could not teach students about race. The literature leads one to believe that the university would present strong teachable moments for all the participants to learn about their identity development and knowledge of race. My interviews revealed some contradictions to this expectation of teachable moments within the university. Consistently, the participants reported that knowledge of their own race, knowledge of other races, and for some their
curiosity to learn about other races, came before entering the university. This is not to
discount the impact of the university setting, as will be discussed in the next section,
because for some having connections gave the participants the comfort level needed to
further their learning.

The levels of insight about race and specifically how, when, and where the
participants learned what they know varied. Some of the WCM could recall specific
incidents, some spoke generally about who or what shaped their race education, and
others had not done much reflection on their past. Yet, every response touched on
beginning to learn about their identity and other races before coming to college. What
follows are examples from Andy, Frank, Cory, and Eric I found to be representative of
these men learning about race before entering the university.

Andy reported learning about race at a young age and had some unique
experiences to reference. After asking Andy about the various groups within the
university and race from many different angles I asked how he thinks he got to where he
is now with respect to viewing others different than himself. He commented,

There have been lots of people throughout my life. So with that, being
around diverse people it got my feet wet and so when I was counseled and
even my family it (race) was open. It did not matter when, but if race came
up my dad would talk with me and encourage me not to be racist and if
you believe in God, not to be racist. I have done lots of self reflection and
living in Florida helped me see lots of different people. Oh and we had
Black history month in school.
Andy has done a fair amount of traveling and I found him to be reflective on what those travels have taught him. His reflective personality allowed me to ask deeper questions about how and where he learned the views he carries now. After we talked about his knowledge of race and learning before entering college, I asked if anything at this school has shaped him. Andy’s response was, “Well, not really. The real world even as a child was a better education.” One of the notable things about Andy is he recognizes his past and what he has overcome, and uses that to work with others and put his knowledge into his future career.

Frank was raised in a small town that was predominantly White, but his high school was large and diverse due to outlying communities. Growing up, Frank did not travel often with his family, but during his early years he was “friends with a guy from the Middle East” and most of the guys he played soccer with were Latino. His high school also had a number of Black students. I asked him how all those groups did when around each other. Frank explained that while the school was more diverse, he knew mostly “good people and so we all learned that we could be friends.” Frank could not remember having specific conversations about race with his parents or friends, which is consistent with his personality. When I asked him whether he has learned more within the context of being a White male from interacting with people of other races, he responded, “I would not say I have learned more. I have seen more different people. I have some Black friends, but race is never brought up.”

Cory also learned about race as a child and exemplified for me the impact of his family experiences at a young age. Cory remembers statements made by his grandparents such as, “that Black man was really nice.” To Cory, who described himself as a curious
person, he wanted to know why his grandparents made a statement like that. As he grew
into his teen years, Cory learned that his grandparents did not view individuals of other
races negatively, they just had not been exposed to other races. This made Cory curious
and he wanted to learn about other races. In addition, ever since Cory was a baby, his
family was close friends with a Black woman whom he eventually called his aunt. When
thinking about his childhood, speaking with his aunt was just natural and “asking
questions about race did not happen because discussions just came up naturally.” Cory’s
natural curiosity and experiences with race growing up have benefitted him greatly and
make his experiences prime examples for later themes involving WCM who do further
learn about race in college and how jokes are used in discussions involving race.

Eric’s description of his experiences involving race prompted me to interpret his
education about race before entering the university. Eric, as previously described, comes
from a small town, enjoys lots of friends, and has a keen understanding of his past. Eric,
without a doubt, was shaped at an early age to have knowledge of his identity and about
other races. Unlike the rest of this study’s participants, he remembers a specific incident
that still resonates with him:

When I was seven or so I was at a gas station in a nearby town with my
dad and we were reading Huckleberry Finn for school. This was the old
version of Huck Finn that used the word nigger. My dad was outside
pumping gas and I shouted, “Dad, what is a nigger?” He jumped up and
said, “Don’t say that right now.” But then we talked about it later. The
way I said it helped me see this was the wrong place to say something like
that.
This story still stays with Eric as a lesson learned. In addition, Eric remembers his mom say things to help him learn and his dad sometimes corrected his grandfather, who made racist comments from his generational perspective and who Eric called “an old school race man.”

The experiences Eric and Cory shared with me involving learning from their families about race at a young age are consistent with research conducted by Feagin (2000). In his book *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities and Future Reparations*, he contends that learning about race for Whites and Blacks can come in the form of “informal lessons…as children at home and school and as adults socializing with relatives or friends (p. 130-131).

Another point of early education Eric shared came in the form of his friends. He was part of a fairly tight group of guys who did lots of things together and one of the guys was from Mexico and came from a family of nine children. When Eric was growing up he was at his friend’s house often and he described the differences in the home of the family from Mexico:

His parents were hardly ever there and so his brothers would run the house. Everyone in his family would work and give money toward the house payment. His brothers were nice and always were working on motorcycles. I was the only one speaking English so that felt different.

It is no surprise that Eric looks back on his upbringing and credits much of his social nature and comfort with all people to his friends and family. He believes that his time in college has exposed him to more people and his upbringing prepared him to learn more about other people.
Ben, in his self reflection and answers to me, described learning about race in different ways than some of the other participants. He could not remember specific instances when he learned lessons, nor does he remember ways his home life taught him about his identity or other cultures. When I asked him in various ways if he has learned about other cultures or races since being in college, his summary response was “not really.” When I pressed him that his knowledge had to come from somewhere he responded, “I don’t really know, maybe that is how it always has been.” From our discussion, I don’t believe Ben has learned about his identity and race while in college. He may have gained his awareness at a young age or was giving me the politically correct answers and when pressed as to how he learned about other races did not want to reveal the truth. This will be discussed in greater detail in chapter VI.

**Setting Up to Learn About Race in College**

The previous theme detailed the participants’ experiences learning about race at a young age. A related theme that I found through the transcript analysis emerged when four of the participants described how their exposure and education about race at a young age has impacted their desire and abilities to learn about race while in college. Within the lived experiences of the participants, they exemplified concrete examples that involved race and occurred during college, but were rooted from a young age.

All participants in this study have achieved (Helms and Carter, 1990) Pseudo-Independent stage within the White Racial Identity Aptitude Scale. A characteristic of pseudo-independence is becoming interested in similarities and differences amongst all races. Greg, Andy, Eric, Cory, and David all described to me ways in which they were interested in the similarities and differences of other people while in college.
Greg grew up in a small town that was predominantly White and he kept the same small group of friends during his early years. His family was traditional, but “traveled often and made sure he was exposed to other cultures.” In addition to being exposed to other cultures, Greg shared that his brother is visually impaired and he discussed watching and learning from his brother from a young age. Greg remembers how other people treated him and his own lessons of “looking past physical differences of all people.” One specific interest that Greg found at an early age and still has is the Japanese culture. Greg is planning a trip to Japan in the future. His interest in the Japanese culture has prompted him to spend time with Japanese foreign exchange students on campus and with instructors within the Japanese department. When I asked Greg where this fascination came from he responded, “I went to Japan in the eight grade and had a really great time. Ever since I have wanted to learn more about the culture and go back to visit.”

By Greg sharing his exposure to someone close to him with a disability while he was young, he represents how his early experiences shaped his college years. It is no surprise that Greg wants to spend time with Japanese students. His present acceptance of others and desire to learn about those different than himself came from his early experiences. When I asked Greg if his experiences traveling and his family impact him today he explained, “Yes my parents, and what I saw growing up set the foundation. Coming here was about building the house. I had the base but not the experiences as an adult.”

Cory also explained to me his experiences involving race that were educational for him at a young age and how they have impacted him while in college. As described in the previous theme, while growing up Cory participated on athletic teams that were
diverse, his family was very close to a Black woman, and watching his father speak to his grandfather about race increased Cory’s curiosity to “learn why this was.” I believe Cory entered college with, “a comfort with positive stereotypes about other races.” Putting Cory’s comfort about other races and his curiosity together allowed him to have and describe for me some very powerful college experiences.

Cory, consistent with his introverted personality, has a small group of friends. His primary group is made up of two White females and two Black males. One of the guys in the group and Cory have developed a particularly close friendship and connection that is open to talk about race. When I asked Cory if he ever talks with his friends about race he replied,

Yeah, I talk with the one pretty often and more than the others because he is a very educated man. He knows that I might say something of if I say something out of place it is not intentional and he educates me. He won’t be stung by it and so I feel comfortable talking to him.

When I asked for some examples or what is a typical conversation Cory elaborated:

The other day I asked my friend about a Black man’s hair and how fast it grows. Then he told me some good stories to help me understand. And once I asked him why he dates White women we had a great conversation from that.

Cory’s descriptions and stories made it obvious to me that he is comfortable talking with his roommate about differences between races. I wanted to learn how this comfort developed from Cory’s perspective. Cory explained, “My friend is from Flint and not the
best area. So in the beginning he would just talk, his life would come out naturally. So I just started asking questions and he answered them.”

Another connection Cory made, that to me seemed important to increasing his interest in learning about race, was his prior experience with a university staff member. Cory worked on campus at one of the residence hall reception desks. The supervisor of the desk was a Black male and by the nature of the job led some of desk staff training and the two of them spent many hours working together. I asked Cory if they ever talked about race since they spent so many hours together. He replied, “Not really. But we would talk about our pasts and he is from Detroit and so things would come up. We talked about our families and that taught me things about him.”

Cory also explained to me a particularly powerful lesson he learned from that same staff member. His story came in response to my question about whether his view on race has changed while at this university.

When I went through this training I remember my old boss taught a small class for us about race. I realized I wanted to be racially sensitive, but I was not. I always looked at myself that I don’t see color and I was helped to realize that not seeing color is absurd. That is the first thing you see and you may not judge them on the color, but that is what you see first. Then you talk with that person, but you can’t not see it. I see differences and let’s celebrate those differences.

Not viewing everyone the same and recognizing differences is a characteristic of autonomy which is Helms’s (1984) last level of racial identity. I believe Cory’s
experiences before college watching his father, his friends, and the Black woman he called his aunt brought him to his curiosity and comfort in learning about other races.

Andy also had experiences while he was young that have impacted his time in college. He explained those experiences to me by describing one particular instructor he had and his approach to his film studies major. Yet, Andy’s experiences from a young age were very different than Cory’s or Greg’s:

I think because my family was dysfunctional a lot of my cultural and moral mannerisms were guided through counselors. I had counselors every year since the third grade. I was always talking with counselors and case workers. I was able to understand in terms of relationships and it led to into how I felt about various diversities and races.

Although Andy’s experiences were very different than Cory’s or Greg’s, these differences further solidify the theme I found to link their experiences from youth and the impact on their openness to diverse races and other differences. Andy shared his connection that developed with one of his instructors who is from Africa. This instructor has done lots of work in film development and especially low budget films about African culture. Andy described why he wanted to work with this instructor:

He talked a lot about the pieces for movies and passion. I wanted to take him for this class because of his personal experiences and he struck me as a great mentor. He has had such a different upbringing and experiences, I was drawn to him.

Andy helped me understand that during his teen and preteen years counselors worked with him often and helped him make sense of his world. For Andy to be drawn to
an instructor who has also had a non-traditional upbringing seems sensible and second
nature for Andy. In addition to the non-traditional instructor draw is Andy’s draw to a
particular type of film making. I asked broad questions about the current film project he
is working on and he described it this way:

We have been casting and speaking with people of various races and
sexual orientations. We had one guy who was very flamboyantly gay and
an open discussion about this would be perceived. We talked about it to
see if anyone had an issue. In the end we chose someone for the best part
and not whether they were gay even though that is what the part called for.

Andy talked with me about learning to be happy with himself and self reflecting
while young. Watching him and talking with him, I could tell he has a sense of
confidence and pride in being unique. Listening to him, I was able to understand where
that uniqueness was rooted with regard to his academic program.

The last participant who discussed with me learning about race at a young age and
how it furthered his experiences in college was Eric. Eric did not have the unique
experiences that Andy had or diverse adults around him like Cory, but he described for
me a strong family environment that embraced differences, and he maintained a strong
bond with a diverse friend group. Eric’s early years impacted him in college because Eric
connects with many different groups within the university. His connections include
people of many races, but Eric seems to have a curiosity about all people. Eric is an
example of a student who makes connections with lots of peers, multiple instructors, and
various staff from all walks of campus. He acknowledges being an extroverted person,
but for Eric it seems to go beyond extroversion; Eric showed a true desire to learn about
all people. Below is an example Eric shared with me about his interactions with instructors:

He remembered my name and after I talked with him it was good. I have worked with another instructor who is goofy and looks like a big dork, but that is great about him. Others I would Google what their research was about and talk with them about it.

When talking about staff, Eric explained to me that he desires to learn from people with “authority” how they got where they did. This is consistent with Eric’s draw to his former supervisors from campus jobs and his home town. Yet, Eric was also drawn to talk with members of the maintenance staff and dining staff on campus. I asked him for an explanation on his connection with the maintenance man:

I would see this man and you could tell he has been here for a long time and I always had these ideas of who he was and why he is here. So one day I just talked to him and found out he has great history with the Marines and this school.

I saw in Eric’s descriptions that he subconsciously uses what he learned growing up today while navigating the college experience.

**Humor Made it Okay to Talk About Race**

True to phenomenological research, I sought to capture the lived experiences of the participants. While hearing about the experiences unexpected answers, ideas, and themes emerged. One theme that emerged to me, which is not directly related to any of the research questions but is worth discussing, involves race and humor. Three of the participants shared stories with me involving race where humor was ingrained in the
These stories allowed me to discover an emergent theme and share the stories I felt represented humor that made it okay to talk about race. They all felt that the joking atmosphere made it easier to talk about race, or that they learned something from the humorous exchange. According to Lynch (2002), “All humor is a communicative activity” (p. 423). Lynch described that humor can be used when things are found to be irrational, illogical, incoherent, or inappropriate and some use humor as a way to persuade. The stories shared with me by David, Frank, and Cory are prime examples of how humor was used with mixed intentions having positive results.

David shared with me memories of race tied with humor coming from his time in high school. The high school David went to had very few students of color. David played football in high school and had a small group of friends. One of David’s friends was the only Black student in his school. David’s friend’s parents were an interracial couple and that is where the root of the jokes came from. David described the jokes; he said, “our small group of friends would tease him that he was only half a brother.” David explained that in his school, there were no other Black students for us to see how our friend should carry himself. Correct or not, David described that he and his friends used “media or TV comparisons” when looking at his Black friend. They would tease him about not being Black and say things like, “You are not Black and you have no street in you.” I asked David how in looking back on this, he views this experience. He explained that he still has contact with his friend and he does not say the jokes anymore. I asked David if he learned anything from this and his response was, “Not really, well that we were different and it was okay to see those differences even as a joke.”
Another memory that David described to me involving humor and race was during his senior year of high school football. David remembered a guy on his football team that had an Asian heritage, but was “very vocal about hating Black people.” David described to me some of the things his teammate said and he views them now.

David: At first we laughed at him and what he said, but then he never stopped and it got worse. Eventually we said this not funny and made him stop.

Randy: Was that the end of it.

David: He never did it anymore.

Randy: Why do you think it was funny at the time?

David: Because we were guys in high school.

Randy: Would that be funny to you now?

David: Oh no.

Randy: Looking back do you take anything away from that?

David: It was funny at first, but then it went too far. I think he thought he was being funny. I am glad it did not become a problem on our team. When I think about it the coaches should have done something.

David’s example fit within the theme of humor to me and also helped me see his level of maturity and how he views people different than him. According to Lynch (2002), “humor can be an act of disguised aggression” (p. 428). David’s teammate may have been making racist remarks because of some underlying aggression. David thought it was funny in the beginning, but was able to recognize when it needed to stop. Listening and reading the transcript of this exchange I see this was a lesson learned for David involving race and confronting the behavior of others at a young age.
The next participant who talked with me about experiences involving race and humor was Cory. Cory’s experiences with race and humor were different than David’s on many levels and occurred while in college. As previously discussed, Cory has a small group of friends, one of whom is Black, and Cory feels comfortable asking questions related to Black culture or just talking freely around him. I asked Cory to explain. He said, “We poke fun at each other and sometimes it is about our habits or races. It is all in fun. Family Guy is a great parallel for us and it works.”

One statement that Cory’s friend used to help Cory realize possible tensions and when others could take offense is “be easy with that.” I wondered what that meant and Cory explained, it is said in a “joking manner so there is no tension,” but it helps get the point across to Cory. According to Smith and Powell (1988), humor helps ease tensions and allows people to relax. Even when Cory says something possibly offensive, his friend deescalates the situation with a quick repetition of that statement (i.e., be easy with that).

Another more concrete example of using humor and race I heard involved Cory and this same friend. Cory once said something in front of his friend who knew Cory meant no offense but, others could take offense to it. Cory explained the situation:

One time I said a more racial joke involving fried chicken. My friend said be easy with that and then took it even further. He said you need to realize you could say nigger, but some might take offense to it. And right then the X-man cartoon was on and he said look that character’s voice is Magneto. Magneto is an evil character and not good so he is a nigger. So when you want to say someone is a nigger call him magneto. It was kinda funny. He even told his family about it and they thought it was cool. I could use the
term and others would not take offense to it because only we knew what I was talking about.

Cory explained to me how the two of them created a humorous joke that only they were privileged to. According to Lynch (2002) humor that “excludes individuals or groups who do not have the knowledge of the in-group’s reference” is called in-group bias or differentiation humor. Also, this type of humor can express boundaries in groups to the level of gender, nationality, race, religion, or occupational position. I believe that Cory and his friend in effect created a boundary for the two of them.

As I was interviewing Frank and talking about where he grew up and his friends, he shared with me memories of race and humor also came out. Frank was raised in a small town, but went to a large diverse high school. He was a social student, making many friends and playing sports. Franks described the diversity and people in his school this way: “The different groups were just part of it. No conflicts, just good people to grow up with and we learned we could all get along.”

When I heard Frank remembering his high school days this way I wanted to know if he remembers the group ever talking about race:

Randy: Do you ever remember talking with any of the group about race or differences?

Frank: Yeah my one friend, he was kinda a jokester about being Black. He would, one time he said things about scaring people and being a Black man.

Randy: Was it funny?

Frank: Ohhh yeah we all laughed and kept the joke up for weeks.

Randy: Would you say you all learned things through jokes?
Frank: That was definitely us. There was never any racial tensions. We were all just in our home town.

I probed Frank to see if he could connect how he presently views other cultures and races to his high schools days with little success. As discussed in previous sections, Frank appeared less reflective, in looking back on situations and learning from them, than was Cory. However, I believe Cory’s friends and their use of humor and race taught him a level of comfort with those different than himself.

**Research Question Findings**

The findings I associated with each topic and line of questions is presented separately in this section. This is done to keep within the context of each research question and preserve separations between peers, staff, and instructors. During the interviews it was typical for each topic to be addressed by itself. However during the second interview when appropriate, I posed broad questions and sought information across topic areas.

**Peer Connections**

Research questions one and two posed specific questions about the participants’ peers. I gathered information to learn how the participants described the process of making connections with peers, and how they made meaning of their experiences with peers. For all of the participants, talking about their peers seemed to come naturally. I think this was in part because each of the participants was able to list off multiple current friends and to describe their friends in high school. Having high school friends led me to believe that each had past positive experiences with making friends. As was represented in the literature review, peers, or friends as they were called in the interviews, were very
influential on the participants. During the interviews I asked questions to clarify differences between how the participants described the process of making connections and what meanings those connections represented.

**Process of connecting with peers.** Cory related to me how he met his current friends and his process of connecting with peers: “I met them from working on campus. He worked near me and we just hit it off then started hanging out and I met most of the girls I know from living on campus and doing things together.” Differences were evident among the participants in how many friends they described having and how many friend groups they had. Two of the WCM talked about having 30 to 40 friends who they saw on a weekly basis. All but two of the WCM had multiple friend groups ranging from people they have met in classes or during their first year in the residence halls to friends from their hometowns. The WCM who had multiple friend groups revealed interesting information about the different meanings each friend group represented to them.

**Meaning of connections with peers.** It was evident to me from each interview that peers were very important to the participants in this study. However, they struggled with what meaning their peers held for them. Asking about commonalities, what they do when together and basic descriptions of their friend groups, seemed difficult for them to answer. One insightful comment about his peers came from Andy when he said

I like my film group because we have love for something in common and this is an awesome bond. It is the same principle for those who made it out of our home town alive because we don’t steal or do drugs and we are trying to make better of ourselves. So my hometown group is we have this bond beyond words. We get each other.
Andy hinted at a theme that emerged and will be discussed later involving the participants’ comfort levels, connections with peers, and discussing race.

**Instructor connections.** In addition to information on peers, I also posed research questions one and two to learn about the connections the participants had with instructors. I asked various questions to learn how the participants thought about their interactions with instructors. The unique aspect of considering the instructor interactions is that all the participants were at least juniors, so they have had many experiences to choose from. As Ben said, “Wow I have had so many [instructors].” Yet, the process of connecting and the meanings of those connections were different and less substantive than the peer connections.

**Process of connecting with instructors.** The participants described connections with instructors, yet their experiences were on much more of a surface level when compared to the peer connections. I interpreted a connection in the mind of the participants to one of their instructors was nothing more than something positive that was done during class. As Frank said, “He would make South Park references and he would make us laugh. He had good stories about his life, so I liked him.” Several of the participants talked about liking most of their instructors, but never indicated anything at the level of a connection. When I asked him if he had ever talked with his instructors about non-class related topics, David revealed, “No. I mean, I like lots of them and I see them more than feeding me something, but beyond being with them outside of the class or feeling connected to them, no.”

In addition, when I asked the participants to name instructors with whom they would feel comfortable having a casual conversation today, most could only give one or
two examples. Conversely, all of the participants spoke of things past instructors have
done to turn students away from wanting to connect with them. The one common
negative thread for students was, as Ben stated, “He had no respect for us as students.”
With a surface-level perception of what connecting with an instructor means as well as
some negative experiences, it is no surprise that meaningful connections between the
participants and instructors were few.

Meaning of connections with instructors. Insight that the participants shared
indicated little depth in the meaning of interactions they have with instructors. I asked
multiple questions related to instructor interactions: Did they seek out instructors outside
of class? Do instructors influence them in ways not connected to the course material? Did
they have instructors who presented more than the course material? Have instructors done
things that distanced themselves from students? The telling information related to
meaningful instructor connections lay in what the participants did not say. As stated in
the previous section, all participants “liked” instructors, but the connections did not
extend to a deeper level. Frank gave an insightful response as to why meaningful
instructor connections did not exist when I asked about talking with his instructors
outside of class: “No I don’t go to see them. I do well in the classes and don’t see a
need.”

Staff Connections

The last area about which I sought information through research questions one
and two was the connections the participants had with staff within the university. I
explained to all the participants that a staff person is someone who works for the
university who is not primarily an instructor or a student. I helped them understand by
giving the example, “It could be anyone from the custodians, maintenance, advisors, supervisors, or just anyone who works here.” I asked questions surrounding how the participants knew the staff person, for how long, typical conversations, whether they learned from that person, and if they saw that person now would they have a conversation. My questions were similar to those I used when asking about peers and instructors. The participant responses were mixed, with some having multiple connections and meaningful experiences with staff and some having almost no staff interactions.

**Process of connecting with staff.** For the participants in this study I perceived that the process of connecting with staff was different than the process used for connecting with peers and instructors. Peers connected by the process of desiring friendship, instructor connections occurred because of classroom coexistence, and a connection between staff and the participants seemed to happen for multiple reasons. The circumstances around the connections between the participants and staff varied, and included casual interactions, student worker-supervisor relationships, or academic advisor-advisee relationships.

Ben exemplified forming a connection with staff in his description of his interactions with one of the secretaries on campus: “I go into the area where the Engineering office is and just talk with her. She lets me get coffee and keep my lunch in the fridge.” Andy described that his “boss would come in and work with us on Sundays sometimes and [we would] just talk.” Seven of the eight participants could speak of at least one staff person they have connected with, but the experience was different for each. Each of the participants could think of staff they interacted with, but most could not
remember that person’s name and described as Henry did, “we had nothing to talk about or need from them.”

**Meaning of connections with staff.** The connections between the participants and some staff members varied, but the meaning of some of the connections between participants and staff was significant. Eric described to me how he felt about his interaction with some of his past staff supervisors. “They have things to teach me and treat me well. They have authority and it makes me attracted to them to learn how they got there.” Not all the participants articulated to me being attracted to staff like Eric did, but there was an overwhelming sense that participants wanted meaningful connections with staff. Staff members that made connections were viewed as knowledgeable about the university and wanting to help students, while not having grading authority over the students.

**Masculine Influences**

Research question three was asked to gauge the masculine tendencies of the participants and whether their masculine tendencies impacted their abilities to connect with others within the university. As discussed in the literature review, the masculine tendencies of college men can influence their desire to be open with other men (Edwards, 2008; Harris & Edwards, 2006; Plummer, 2010). I asked the participants multiple open-ended questions based on the PAQ constructs of displaying feelings, awareness of self, self confidence, and social habits (Spence & Helmreich, 1978; Appendix H). Examples of the questions or topics I used to gauge the masculinity levels include the following:

- Would you consider yourself introverted or extroverted?
- Would you describe yourself as emotional and sensitive?
Do you ever cry at movies?
Are you a competitive person?
Do you drink alcohol and what is your drink of choice?

The answers differed with each participant, but as a whole the participant responses indicated similar levels of masculine tendencies. And, those levels did not indicate any influence on their connections with peers, staff, or instructors. The overall results of the study found vast differences in the connection between the participants and members of the university and with the tight range of masculine tendencies displayed the notion that masculinity might impact connections proved to be not supported in the results.

All the participants fell within a middle range of masculinity in their described habits, how they show feelings, and their levels of self confidence. The data tied to masculine tendencies also affirmed my definitions of masculinity through my interpretation of their feelings displayed, habits, and topics of discussion with others. Thus, research question three cannot be answered based on the data collected. None of the participants displayed consistent hyper-masculine characteristics such as excessive drinking, lack of emotion, or aggression (Edwards, 2008). In addition, none of the participants displayed strong behavior on the other end of the masculinity spectrum, which is characteristic of feminine behavior. They all fell into a uniform level of masculinity that did not appear to hinder or enhance connections.

Achieving Helms’s Stage Two

I posed research question four to find out which connections helped the participants achieve stage 2 within Helms’s (1984) identity development model. Stage 2
of Helms’s model is characterized by a person feeling a new level of intellect regarding race, becoming interested in similarities and differences, and acknowledging their own race without tying that to racism. The information I gathered pointed to how the participants’ connections have influenced them in achieving stage 2 of Helms’s model.

Reviewing the published literature on which group (peers, staff, or instructors) has more of an influence on students reveals conflicting messages. Research has been conducted on each group and their influence on students. Each group claims to be the most influential on students in college. This proved to be consistent with my findings of this study. The bulk of the interviews were spent on learning about the connections between the participants and the various groups within the university. The eight participants spoke of connecting and being influenced by peers, staff, and instructors. Some students solely connected with peers, others with peers and instructors or staff, and some connected with all three groups. I believe the participants’ connections with peers, staff, and instructors varied depending on the desire of the individuals and opportunity for those connections to happen.

What they learned in college. However, as detailed in the previous theme, *Learning About Race Started Before Entering the University*, the participants consistently felt curiosity about their own races and others, which started before college. And for some, their college experiences have deepened their knowledge of race and themselves, but I believe they already were at stage 2 (Helms, 1984). The following section shares what I found to be the lived experiences of the WCM who described how they were influenced in college.
Eric and I were talking about how college has impacted him positively. He explained, “Yes, I would say the female friends I have known have helped me see women better. Then I would say staff not really [impacted positively]. Professors I guess have helped me by being in conversations in class about diversity and able to see what others think.”

David explained to me a conflict he had in one of his classes and the conversation he had with his instructor after class: “I learned how to word my stuff better and not blow things out of proportion. I really learned to confront a mistake and keep going. The teacher helped me.”

Ben and I were talking about some of his past instructors and his friends who are not White, and about which relationships have affected him more in college. Ben explained:

I would say the instructors. It was more difficult with their ways and language. Some good and some bad. I learned from both. When I was forced to do things then something (learning) happened whether I wanted it to or not.

Cory answered my questions about his friends and what they have taught him since being in college:

Probably from my friends who are Black and they have told me things that I would guess will? never happen to me. There are things that are never going to happen to me and it has to them. I can’t think of specifics right now.
In summary, I interpret that some of the participants learned from individuals while at the university, but their learning was not directed at achieving stage 2 of Helms’s (1984) identity development model. Their learning while in college enhanced their stage 2 interests and the curiosity about themselves and others they already had.

Summary

The eight participants in this study provided rich information to me allowing for my analysis on multiple levels to seek out themes and answers to my research questions. Although many more participants could have been recruited and interviewed, I feel that the research questions were answered and that quality themes emerged.

The emergent themes I found included (1) the definition of connection varied, (2) participants were comfortable having no connections with instructors or staff, (3) the connections that the participants spoke of included staff and instructors, but with peers was most important, (4) participants believe their initial learning about race came from when they were young and not the university connections, (5) having connections gave meaning for the participants to be comfortable with learning about race, and (6) participants used humor to talk about race. Yet, when the unexpected themes were investigated through published research, the participant responses, such as learning about race before entering college and using humor when talking about race, made sense and fit with findings of other research (Smith & Powell 1988; Tatum, 1989).

A portion of the participants’ responses were quoted in this chapter to represent the findings. I chose quotes that supported and represented the information being sought. I chose some participants’ statements more frequently due to their ability to reflect, explain themselves and experiences as related to this research, which will be further
discussed in chapter six under limitations and conclusions and partly based on my speculative observations.
CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY, LIMITATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE, AND PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Summary of the Study

This study sought to understand what types of connections WCM make, how their masculinity tendencies influence connection choices, and how the nature of those connections influence their White identity development. Extensive research has addressed White identity development (Hardiman, 1982; Helms & Carter, 1990; Hornak, 2003; Scott & Robinson, 2001), masculinity (Spence & Helmreich, 1978), and the connections (Dungy, Rissmeyer, & Roberts, 2005; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004) students make while attending college as separate study areas. However, to this date very little research has been conducted that examines how White identity development is influenced by student connections. A positive White identity allows individuals to resist societal racism and abandon individual racism (Helms & Carter, 1990).

Put in a different context, a positive White identity typically brings about stable psychological health, a higher quality of life, comfort in multicultural environments, and less prejudice towards differing cultures (Ponterotto, Utsey, & Pederson, 2006). Thus, learning more about how WCM connect with others at the university has a number of benefits. Given insight into aiding this group because of their potential future, an increasingly diverse society, and needing help on-campus, more information was needed
to deeply and specifically understand how White identity develops for WCM. I believe within the context of the information gained from the eight participants, valuable knowledge has been gained that adds to the body knowledge of WCM identity development, masculinity, and ways of making connections within the university.

The research site was a medium size, Midwestern public university located in Kalamazoo, Michigan. According to this university’s Fact Book (Dwan, 2008), it enrolled 24,818 students in 2008, of which 81% were undergraduate students. Of those students, 96% were from Michigan (Dwan, 2008). The faculty to student ratio is 1:19. Students at this university are 89% White, 7% Black, 3% Hispanic, 2% Asian and Pacific Islander, and less than 1% American Indian. The gender make-up is 49% male and 51% female (Dwan). In 2008 this university employed over 1,800 staff and approximately 859 professors (Dwan, 2008).

I chose this university as my research site for one main reason. In addition to being a doctoral student I am a staff member, which allowed me more flexibility and easier access to those in the study. My contacts within the university increased my ability to navigate the university and find students willing to participate in the study.

This information was acquired by utilizing research methods developed and practiced by experts that were also determined to work best with the location of the study and chosen participants. I chose a phenomenological method of inquiry for several reasons. In comparison to other forms of qualitative inquiry, phenomenological research seeks to look beyond conscious answers given by participants at the roots of human experiences. Phenomenological research seeks to, “describe how one orients to lived experience...reveal the essence of human experience” (Hatch, 2002, p. 30). This type of
research typically utilizes interviews or extended conversations and relies on listening, observing, and forming a bond with the participants to learn what one is seeking (Rudestam, 2001). This decision proved to be invaluable in that it gave me extended time with the participants, allowing for topics to be discussed without prescribed interview questions, and having the opportunity to write down the participants’ stories.

The sample consisted of 22 participants for the initial phase of completing the WRIAS (Helms and Carter, 1990). I came into contact with the participants by presenting in three different classes during April and May of 2011. Of the 22 participants, 19 had achieved Pseudo Independent status on the WRIAS, and eight chose to meet with me for second and third sessions, which included interviews. Pseudo Independent is described as having an intellectual acceptance and curiosity about other races (Helms, 1984). The reason I required this level to be reached for the interview participants is that, according to Helms (1984), at Phase 2 and beyond, individuals are curious about race and look to others for answers about racial disparities.

After the men took the WRIAS, I contacted those who scored at the Pseudo Independent stage. I made arrangements with those who responded to meet in the campus library for interviews. All measures were taken to maintain the confidentiality of the participants. I tried and was able to have no more than 17 days pass between the participants’ first and last interviews. This kept the interview topics and our discussions fresh for me and the participants. I conducted 16 interviews and completed the transcriptions myself.

The transcriptions resulted in 204 pages of data and hundreds of quotations. Data analysis followed inductive methods including coding for each research question and a
further breakdown to three levels representing staff, peers, and instructors. In addition the analysis found consistencies that resulted in six emergent themes. The themes found were as follows: the definition of connection varied, participants were comfortable having no connections with instructors or staff, the connections that the participants spoke of included staff and instructors, but with peers was most important, participants believed their initial learning about race came from when they were young and not the university connections, having connections gave meaning for the participants to be comfortable with learning about race, and participants used humor to talk about race.

Research Questions

Question one. In addition to the emerging themes, the data gave insight to the research questions that were posed. Research question one asked how White college men who have achieved stage 2 of Helms’s (1984) White identity describe their process of making connections with peers, instructors, or staff within the university. The participants were not able to describe the process of connecting with peers because for them it was not a conscious process; making friends or connecting with peers happened naturally. Although some of the WCM spoke of having small friend groups, they all talked about their current and past friends, which evidenced their experiences connecting with peers. In their minds, peer connections are second nature and just seem to happen.

The process of connecting with instructors was not as natural for the participants. Some of the WCM could not speak about connecting with instructors because they chose not to. Those who did physically reach out to instructors kept their interactions with instructors near the classroom or office hours, and the interactions were limited to class-related discussions. Others saw themselves connecting with instructors through the basic
notion of feeling that their instructor was “entertaining, nice, or funny.” None of the participants discussed talking with instructors about personal issues, views, or things unrelated to class or their future careers. It was never outright discussed during the interviews, but I felt that some of the participants did not want to get personal with instructors because instructors have grading authority over them. And, others from the study I would surmise did not go beyond the classroom environment with instructors because they did not see any benefit to doing so.

The way that WCM connected with staff within the university was also different than how they connected with their peers or instructors. The connections with staff varied widely depending on the contexts of the participants’ and staff interactions. There was no common thread of description that the participants and staff connected under. Some of the WCM did not connect with staff, some did through a job held on campus, some did through frequent meetings, and others did via mutual interests. This variety in the types of connections between students and staff is consistent with the published literature on the topic. University staff can range from office secretaries to dining hall employees; it is reasonable to think that the variation in the types of connections between staff and students could be just as vast.

**Question two.** Research question two asked how WCM make meaning of experiences connecting with peers, instructors, or staff within the university. It was evident from each interview that peers were important to the participants. However, they struggled to articulate what meaning their peers held for them. The participants’ stories about what they do with their peers spoke to the fact that their peers provided a sense of comfort and belonging. A few of the participants talked about how it felt good to know
some of their peers since they were young kids. Some seemed to pride themselves on having either 30-40 friends or 3-5 friends, depending on their personalities. Having peers meant having a sense of belonging (Cheng, 2004) and mattering (Schlossberg, 1989) to the participants. The participants were not able to articulate these concepts, but their stories and answers to open ended questions indicated that their peers meant a great deal to them.

The meaning of the experiences with instructors as described by the participants was vastly different than those with their peers. Very little was discussed by the participants that pointed to them making meaning of their experiences with instructors. My speculation on why students did not see meaning in their connections with instructors is two-fold. First, these students have not graduated yet and are not yet able to look back on their college experiences with a reflective eye. It is hard for them to make meaning of connecting with instructors while still in the midst of instructors and the university environment. Research question one found that, for some of the participants, the process of connecting with instructors only happened when the participants found instructors “entertaining” or “nice” in class. If a connection on behalf of the participants was based on observations alone, then there would be nothing to indicate that those interactions were meaningful. Regardless of the reason, the participants were not able to make meaning of their connections with their instructors.

The meaning of the experiences between the participants and staff was more substantive than the connection with instructors, but not viewed as less important than the connection with peers. Some of the participants had no contact with staff outside of their academic advisors, and that time was spent completely on academic needs. For those who
had contact with staff, the meaning for them was rooted in wanting to learn and be social. Many of the participants were curious individuals, and when the opportunities arose to have interactions with staff, they chose to do so. My belief is it made them feel good to get to know someone at the university. Those who did not seek out staff connections may have not been as curious as the others or did not see connecting with staff as beneficial of their time.

**Question three.** Research question three asked how the masculine tendencies of WCM who have achieved level 2 of Helms’s White identity influenced their connections with peers, instructors, or staff. As described in the previous section, all of the participants displayed a narrow range of masculine tendencies such as consuming alcohol and having relationships with women, but none of the participants were overly masculine to the point of resisting connecting with peers, staff, or instructors. Yet the overall data and emerging themes did show differences in the connections between the participants and peers, staff, or instructors. They all had connections with peers and instructors, although defined in different ways, and most connected with staff at the university. Thus, the results of the interviews did not lend rich data to answer question three.

**Question four.** Research question four asked what connections helped WCM achieve stage 2 within Helms’s (1984) identity development model. After analyzing participants’ responses on what connections helped them achieve stage 2, I feel that none of the connections they had in college helped them achieve stage 2. Hearing about the participants’ upbringings, home lives, and educations before entering college, the participants achieved stage 2 before entering college. My assumption is several of them have been able to articulate their knowledge of race or their own identities before
entering college, but stage 2 had already been achieved. Their learning while in college enhanced the stage 2 interests and curiosities they already had about themselves and others.

Also relevant to question four and overall validity of this study is how the participants WRIAS (Helms & Carter, 1990) results compare to other studies involving college students completing the WRIAS. As previously stated, 19 of the 22 participants who completed the WRIAS scored at the stage 2 level. This is consistent with a study previously cited in the literature review completed by Mercer and Cunningham (2003).

Within their study 390 college students completed the WRIAS. Results concluded “participants expressed more agreement with attitudes of interest and comfort in racially diverse situations than with attitudes expressing racism or a desire to not associate with people of different races” (2003, p. 226). The study by Mercer and Cunningham did not give numbers of how many scored at each stage within the WRIAS resulting in no true comparison to this study. However, both show general consistencies that college students are more prone to be open to racial diversity and not have racist views. It should be noted that this study focused very little on the number of participants who achieved stage 2 of the WRIAS because the WRIAS was used in this study as a base line in learning the beliefs of the participants. As Helms (1984) and Mercer and Cunningham point to, White identity should analyzed as a concept within a phenomenological scope.

Limitations

This study had several limitations. I drafted multiple revisions in an effort to design a study that provided the highest quality of data. Yet even from the onset some limitations were known and uncontrollable.
Definition of Terms

The first limitation of the study is that several of the terms could have been interpreted in different ways. This was a phenomenological study and I sought the lived experiences of the participants, which meant I did not define terms for WCM I interviewed. Examples include the fact that I rarely used the word “connection,” but when I did it could have been interpreted many different ways. I used the word “peers” as a connecting group, but many of the participants used “friends.” By definition, peers and friends are two different things. I believe they were used interchangeably. The participants used terms such as “race,” “culture,” and phrases such as “those different than me” or “people like me,” and I believe I knew what they were referring to, but did not always ask for clarity.

WRIAS Limitations

The WRIAS (Helms & Carter, 1990) is considered one of the most widely used and cited White identity development models. It is cited and called to be used as a racial identity measure (Mercer & Cunningham, 2003). This study’s results were consistent with what Mercer and Cunningham found with regard to valid confirmation that students are more likely to have non-racist views. However, it has some published limitations, and I found some in this study. Helms acknowledged that when scoring the WRIAS a person is considered at the stage of the highest score achieved, but in the right context can revert back to previous stages. In addition, Helms acknowledged that individuals might exhibit behaviors of multiple stages.

In addition, a possible limitation was the participants answered the WRIAS questions as society expected them to, and not how they truly feel. I observed when
interviewing two of the men that some of their answers were rooted in what they have been told and not how they felt. Fundamental characteristics of stage 2 include being curious about other races, acknowledging their own race, and seeing differences. Although two of the participants were at the pseudo-independent stage they made brief statements like, “I treat everyone the same, I don’t see race, and I have some Black friends.” I asked a few probing questions, but did not further pursue the inconsistencies with some of their statements.

Another unexpected limitation found with the WRIAS dealt with the fact that the WRIAS refers to race only in the context of Black or White individuals. During early points in the first interview, several of the participants only used examples of race when it involved Black or White individuals. As the interviews progressed or during the second interview, their examples and stories were much more encompassing of all individuals. The WRIAS may have given them the impression that I only wanted to talk about Black or White individuals. I do not believe the results would have been any different if the WRIAS would have been written differently.

Participants

I feel confident that the participants were a representation of WCM from a medium size public university in southwest Michigan. These men varied in major, academic achievement, career plans, hometowns, and social habits. However, with only interviewing eight participants it is possible a different set of participants could bring about very different results. Eight different men could prove to be more or less connected with staff, instructors, or peers within the university. They could be more or less
masculine which could factor into their connections. A larger sample could provide stronger results. Although, I believe the results would be the same.

However, there are a few scenarios in which the results could be different. Had this study been conducted at a small private university, the results may have been different. At small private schools, students would typically have less peers to choose from, fewer instructors they are likely to have for multiple courses, and less staff employed compared to a medium size public university. Also, if this study were conducted in the southern United States views of race may be different than at a school in southwest Michigan.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

It is hard to look at this study and not see ways in which this research could be expanded or done in a different way. I feel that the results for this study are so rich with information it should be modified and redone to see what else can be learned. The different ways this research could be expanded are numerous. Increasing the participant group from eight to 20 could add various new elements. A participant group of 20 could add new themes, strengthen existing ones, or contradict ones from this study. This study could also be copied and conducted at different medium size public universities across the midwestern United States.

Another strong suggestion would be to conduct this study on other ethnic groups of college men. Analyze the connections between Black or Native American college men and the connections to the three groups from this study. A different literature review would need to be conducted to examine cultural norms of connecting. In addition, the racial makeup of the participants' universities or colleges would need to be carefully
considered. A different measure to learn the participants’ levels of identity development would also be needed. It would be fascinating to compare the results of this study to other groups of college men.

This study could also be altered and split into pieces for deeper analysis. A group of participants could be chosen and interviewed solely to learn about their connections with their peers. The whole study could focus on how the masculinity of WCM affects their connections to others within the university. Then, all of that data could be compiled and compared to the results in this study.

Another option for repeating this study could be administering the WRIAS (Helms & Carter, 1990) and interviewing all participants, not just those who score at the pseudo independent level. This would allow researchers to see if there are correlations between masculine tendencies and identity development. In addition, information would be revealed as to what type of connections participants would have at the varying levels of the WRIAS.

As discussed in the limitations section, this study could be repeated at a small private university or school in the southern United States. The methodology could be kept exact except for the site. Comparing the results and especially the answers of the participants would be very telling.

A last recommendation for further study would be to conduct this study with first-year students. The results might be questionable because first-year students have spent less time on campus, thus reducing the likelihood of their connecting with staff or instructors. New parameters for choosing first-year students could make it possible. In addition, data involving first-year WCM could support the findings in this study that
stage 2 (Helms, 1984) was achieved before the participants entered the university. This idea could be taken further and made into a longitudinal study interviewing the participants once per semester. Researchers could listen for changes in identity development, views of other races, and the lived experiences of the participants over multiple semesters.

**Recommendations for Practice**

When researchers are asked to explain why college women or students of color struggle with performance, persistence, and engagement, they cite research that has shown that the causes are rooted in sexism and racism (Capraro, 2004). However, when the same issues of performance, persistence, and engagement of college men are questioned, experts respond with no clear explanation (Capraro). I wish this study had produced a clear-cut answer to how to assist WCM. This study reaffirmed that WCM do connect with individuals while on campus and that is a positive sign. Instead of looking at these results as finding out which connections have the most impact this research can reaffirm that everyone within a university can impact WCM.

I do believe that whereas one group was not the most impactful, each group can take things from this research to tailor their approaches to WCM. Peers of WCM can be helped to understand that whether their friend group is three or 30, friends of WCM are very important. Even though WCM sometimes only want to talk about sports or literature, friendship is valuable. The participants did not directly speak about their peers impacting their desire to stay at the university or feel important, but there was a consistent tone of importance that peers were a factor to remaining at the university. Peers should not be afraid to talk about topics such as choices WCM make or views on
race from an educational stance. Peers asking each other about their experiences and opinions make them feel as if they can make a worthy contribution and have a mattering attitude (Marshall, 1998).

Instructors can take from this research that some WCM do not want to connect with them, but others do. Some who do want to connect are not sure how or what that connection should look like. It can be more than thinking an instructor is funny by what is said during a class lecture, but students need a little guidance on what their interactions can be. The results can be a student who has a positive interaction with one instructor will feel more confident to interact with other instructors and feel as if he matters. In addition, WCM are not always aware that spending time with instructors can be beneficial for them even when the discussion does not concern class material. Instructors should be open to ask students about their lives or interests. Students do not mind suggestions about peer groups and will take advice on who are the best people to be around when working toward graduation. Being rude to students during class will have a negative impact on a wide scale. Students want mutual respect and some look for instructors they can connect with based on the instructor’s attitude. Instructors do not have to be entertaining, although that is what students want. And, when instructors see a student who is looking to reach out or talk, they should respond and be inviting.

Staff members have a different task of connecting with students than do instructors because, with a few exceptions, students are not required to interact with staff. Yet, this study shows that when WCM do connect with staff it can be a deeper connection than a typical connection with an instructor because it is not related to a class. Not all WCM seek connections with staff, but for those that do the experience can be