No Longer the "Other": The Unique Experiences of Multiracial Students

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As universities address changes in student demographics, they also wrestle with issues of persistence. Understanding why students choose to leave college can be found in a better comprehension of multiracial university populations. The purpose of this study, accordingly, is to examine the relationship between the racial identities of multiracial students and persistence. As such, parental influence and experiences with racism were found to affect how students chose to racially identify, with university responses to diversity and issues of racism also impacting student decisions to remain at their respective institutions.

Keywords: multiracial, monoracial, student development, student engagement

Many colleges and universities rely on student demographic questionnaires to report campus population trends. One important use of this information is to provide administrators with insights into their ability to create equitable outcomes for traditionally marginalized populations. A limitation of these data, however, is that it is often collected using surveys that do not provide adequate space for multiracial students to distinguish themselves. For instance, many require students to select only one race, instructing them to select the option "other" if they cannot. Accordingly, Somers and Gibson (1994) argue that the labeling of traditionally marginalized groups as other reinforces an oppressive narrative, which stifles group engagement and feelings of belonging. Thus, considering multiracial students to be the other is symbolic of higher education's resistance to recognize and support minority groups. Providing a supportive and engaging environment for multiracial students, then, becomes increasingly important because the number of American citizens who identify as multiracial on the U.S. Census grew 32% between 2000 and 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Campus leaders must also consider the relationship between multiracial students' identity and the university environment. Scholars have suggested that racial identity is part of understanding oneself on campus and in society as a whole (Chickering &


Reiser, 1993; Helms, 1990; Renn, 2000; Stephan, 1992; Williams, 1992). Developing racial identity, then, is contingent on campus environment; general reception and opposition to different racial groups influences how multiracial students progress through the racial identity development process (Helms, 1990).

Although multiracial students can be incorporated into the category of nonwhite minority students, their models for identity development differ significantly from monoracial students insofar that they are not linear (Helms, 1990; Root, 1996). While Root (1996), Renn (2000), and Chaudhari and Pizzolato (2008) have theorized about the situational identity patterns of multiracial students, an in-depth analysis of the relationship between multiracial identity development and the racial state of campus climate has yet to be conducted. A better understanding of these interactions can assist administrators in supporting multiracial student success.

Thus, the purpose of this phenomenological case study is to examine the relationship between racial identity development and campus climate as experienced by multiracial students at a large, public university in the Midwest. In order to better understand how multiracial students experience racial identity development, the author asks these questions to guide the inquiry: How do multiracial college students describe their own identity development? How do they describe their reasons for staying in college?

Multiracial Student Racial Identity Development

The most cited models of Black and White monoracial identity development are linear processes that begin at a stage in which racial issues have not been confronted, only to be followed by certain race-oriented encounters that result in either resistance to or immersion in the select identity group (Cross Jr., 1971; Cross Jr., Parham, & Helms, 1991; Helms, 1990). As demonstrated in Figures 1 and 2, the racial identity development of multiracial college students is unique from other monoracial identity development processes because the former is fluid and cyclical, not linear (Root, 1996).

| Pre-encounter | Encounter | Immersion | Internalization | Commitment |
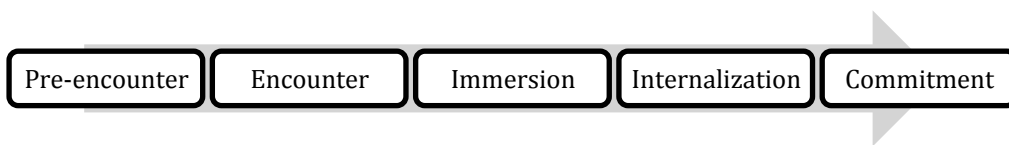
Figure 1. Black Identity Development Process. Stages originated from the work of Cross Jr. (1971, 1991).
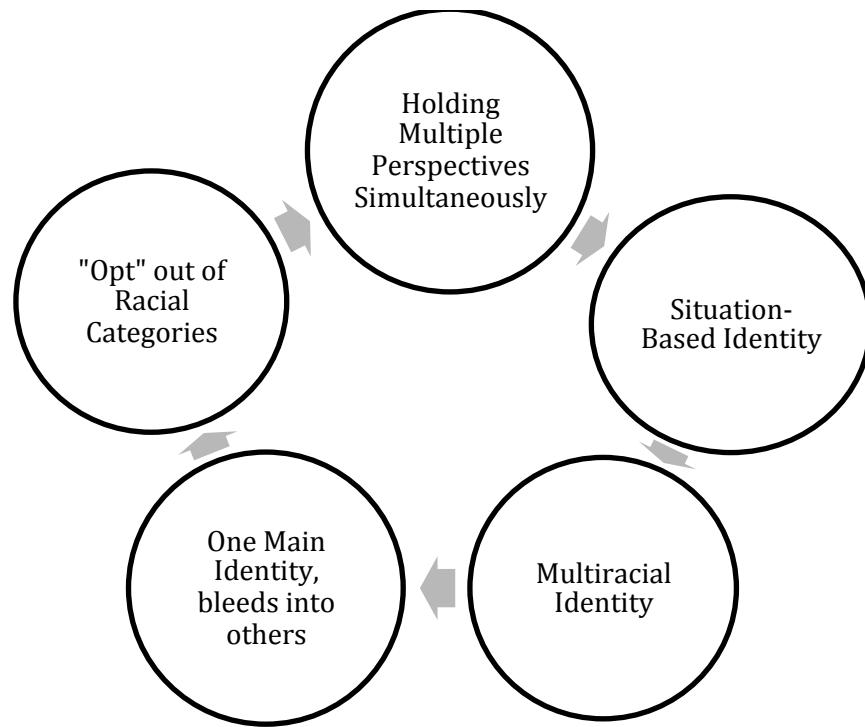
Figure 2. Multiracial Identity Development Process. Stages originated from the work of Root (1996) and Renn (2000).

Monoracial students undergo a stage of development in which they are immersed in their own culture, and thus, they are able to use that as an avenue to achieve and develop a sense of pride (Helms, 1990). Multiracial students, on the other hand, do not experience a singular immersion into a culture. Instead, they are more likely to experience racial identity as a social construct, having integrated the heritage of two or more different racial backgrounds. As such, multiracial students may reject parts of their identity through campus involvement, academic work, and personal identification (Renn, 2000). Root (1996) finds that multiracial identity formation consists of one of four "border crossings," identities that multiracial students fluidly adopt include: (a) holding multiple perspectives simultaneously, (b) switching racial or ethnic identity based on situation, (c) actively choosing multiracial as an identity, and (d) choosing one main racial identity and making inroads into others. According to Root, any of these four border crossings constitute healthy and productive means of resolving mixed-race identity (p. 385).

Building on Root's theory, Renn (2000) identifies a fifth border crossing pattern among multiracial college students—opting out of racial categories altogether by deconstructing them. At one university, Renn found that five out of eight participants chose to "opt out of race," whereas only three out of 16 participants chose this pattern at

the other two universities (p. 385). These findings imply that university environments play a role in multiracial students' identity formation processes. Furthermore, scholars have noted the importance of psychosocial factors—those factors related to the intersection of psychological development and social environment—in racial identity formation, thus supporting the idea that one's university environment might impact multiracial identity formation process (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Cross Jr., 1987, 1995; Helms, 1990, 1995; Root, 1996; Wallace, 2001).

Renn's (2003) study uses Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1993, as cited in Renn) Ecology Model to determine the roles of microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems in the campus environment and the racial identification process. Microsystems, daily, face-to-face interactions for example, influence students' senses of where they fit in and how easily they can move from one identity-based space to another. Mesosystems, on the other hand, impact the desirability of identifying with various racial groups within the campus environment. Exosystems, presented in the form of having to select one racial category on demographic forms, affects students' awareness of race. Finally, macrosystems influence students' ideas about race and culture, namely, who they are. Consequently, Renn finds that engaging in academic work about racial identity and co-curricular activities that supported these in-class opportunities proved helpful to students during processes of racial identification.

Minority Student Engagement

The multiracial students in this study are minorities insofar that they identify as nonwhite on a campus that is over 90% White. Thus, they face challenges similar to other nonwhite students. One challenge faced by nonwhite, racial, and ethnic minority students is that they complete college at lower rates than their White peer counterparts. For instance, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) reported that, in 2004, 57% of White students enrolled at four-year institutions graduated within six years versus only 37% of Black students. With these gaps in graduation rates reaching nearly 20% between Black and White students, minority student persistence becomes an important issue for colleges and universities. Scholars studying the causes of these racial gaps have identified limited academic and financial support (Gladieux & Swail, 1998; Nora, 1990) as well as the negative campus racial climate for students of color (Cabrera et al., 1999; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Nora, 1996; Rankin, 2005) as contributing factors to minority students' decisions to leave higher education before graduating.

Tinto's (1993) Theory of Student Departure can be used to explain links between factors like institutional support, campus racial climate, and student retention. According to the theory, four factors that influence persistence are as follows: (1) adjustment, (2) difficulty, (3) incongruence, and (4) isolation. Incongruence refers to the inability of the university to meet student needs, preferences, and interests, which results in feelings of not fitting in with the campus social and intellectual environments. Together, these four factors influence the experience of individuals and their choices to depart from their respective institutions. The more academically and socially involved individuals are, the more likely they are to persist (Tinto, 1998). Students find difficulty adjusting to college because of the differences between their previous environment and the current campus

environment. Thus, students struggle to fit into their new social and intellectual roles (Tinto, 1993). An outcome of this is none other than the fact that many students depart before the start of the second year (Tinto, 1998). Students who depart because of academic difficulties either leave early to avoid failure or are forced to leave by the university. Less than 15% of all university departures, however, are due to academic dismissal; rather they are results of social and intellectual student experiences (Tinto, 1993). Necessary university conditions for successful student retention include: (a) university commitment to address retention, (b) academic and social support, (c) involvement through academic and social integration, and (d) student learning that meets expected student standards. Additionally, retention rates are not equivalent to drop-out rates because the factors that explain why students depart are not the same as those that explain a university's inability to help them remain and graduate (Tinto, 1993). Thus, there are specific aspects of a university's environment that may be related to the development and decisions of multiracial students.

Method

Case study methods can provide "a reference to a complex narrative that takes the reader into the multiple dimensions of a problem or issue and displays it in all of its complexity" (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). Further, phenomenological data collection allows for the voices of participants to speak to salient issues of identity development with the goal that the "essence" of their experiences will be captured. Both case study and phenomenological research methods can be used together to examine individual phenomena within a particular system. Thus, these methods were used in conjunction to examine the complex dimensions of multiracial student identity development and persistence at Midwestern University (pseudonym).

Participant and Site Information

Data were collected from 16 multiracial college students at Midwestern University, a large, public, four-year, residential research university in a rural city in the Midwest region of the United States. At the time of the study, the site had an undergraduate enrollment of over 27,000 students, of which only 8% identified as nonwhite racial minorities. Additionally, at the time of data collection, the university did not provide a separate coding option for multiracial students. Thus, participants were identified using a snowball technique and consisted of volunteers who were recruited through cultural and scholarship programs, classroom announcements, e-mails, and personal recommendations. Class standing and intentions to return for the following semester of school varied among those individuals involved. Four participants were male, twelve participants were female, and the racial backgrounds of the students all varied.

Midwestern University gives students the option to identify their race/ethnicity using the following categories: Nonresident alien, Black non-Hispanic, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic, White non-Hispanic, and race/ethnicity unknown. When asked how they racially identified, participants provided

answers that many would consider to be ethnicities, like "Latina." In line with the phenomenological tradition, these ethnicities have been listed as races so that the true essence of how participants describe their racial identity is captured. Participants' racial demographics are listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Participant	Mother's race	Father's race	Gender	Year	Racial identity
001	Black/White	Black	Male	Sophomore	Black
002	Black/White	Black/White/Native	Female	Junior	Black
003	White	Black	Female	Senior	Biracial
004	White	Black	Female	Junior	Biracial
005	White	Mexican	Female	Senior	Mexican
006	Mexican	White	Female	Senior	Mexican
007	Black	White	Female	Junior	Biracial
008	White	Black	Male	Junior	Biracial
009	White	Mexican	Female	Grad Student	Chicana
010	Black/White/NA/Hispanic	Black	Female	Junior	Black
011	Greek-American	Egyptian/Cypriot	Female	Sophomore	Greek-American
012	Black	White	Male	Sophomore	Biracial
013	Mexican	White	Female	Sophomore	Latina (Mexican)
014	White	Chicano	Male	Senior	Chicano
015	Mexican/Native	Puerto Rican	Female	Junior	Biracial
016	White	Black	Female	Junior	Biracial

Data Collection

The design of this qualitative study revolved around semi-structured individual interviews and focus groups with the 16 participants. Participants were interviewed for two hours each, during which they filled out a demographic sheet providing general background information. Participants were then asked questions regarding their college experience, specifically those issues relevant to retention and identity as informed by the previously discussed literature. The first series of questions pertained specifically to participants' experiences with race and identity, also addressing intersections of campus engagement and racial identity. The second series of questions focused on participants' personal experiences with those retention-important factors identified by Tinto (1993) as well as students' intentions to return to school the following semester.

Following the individual interviews, focus groups were conducted with 13 of the 16 interview participants. The first focus group consisted of six participants and the second consisted of seven participants, each placed randomly based on their availability. Questions were generated based on responses to individual interviews. The main topics discussed included reasons for remaining at Midwestern University, campus engagement, the concept of race, racial identity, implications of racial identity in higher education, and the relationship between race identity and persistence.

Data Analysis

The project's lead researcher completed verbatim transcriptions of the interviews and focus group discussions. Consequently, the data were cross-referenced with the demographic sheet. As such, the findings were triangulated in order to draw conclusions about the relationships between the racial identities of multiracial students and persistence in higher education. Both Tinto's (1993) Retention Theory and the multiracial identity development patterns developed by Root (1996) and Renn (2000) were utilized to analyze the data. These frameworks provided the basis for the coding schema used during said analysis process. Patterns were then identified to categorize salient themes emerging from the data (Creswell, 1998).

Results

Multiracial Identity Development

One goal of this research was to expand the limited knowledge base about the experiences of multiracial students. Another goal was to understand the relationship between multiracial identity development and persistence in higher education. The research findings also offer insights into the roles of parents and racism in the development of racial identity. They also reveal the influence of university responses to race and racial climate on campus with regard to participants' academic engagement and persistence.

Personal identification. All four of Root's (1996) border crossing patterns were supported in the findings. Half of the participants expressed that they were able to hold multiple perspective simultaneously, with one participant stating, "Being biracial…you're a combination of things physically and mentally…. I don't think being biracial should be categorized as one [thing]" (005). Another participant shared that, "I identify myself as both, mixed like Black and White. I'm not more one than the other" (003). Many participants said that they switch their race identity based on circumstance. A prime example is exemplified in this response: "If I'm with one race in a predominately Black area…I know that I can change, and I do change" (007). Many students who switched their identities did so in order to avoid racial problems on campus. One participant said, "I look White, and I don't tell anybody. If I looked Mexican, [other students] are already going to bring on all those social stigmas" (006).

Over half of the participants chose multiracial as their identity. One student stated, "I identify myself as mixed" (008). Another participant who possessed a strong multiracial identity said, "I have a shirt that says 'I heart mixed people,' and I made another shirt that says 'Almost White,' and on the back it says 'Not Quite Black'" (003). All participants, however, maintain a central identity, one from which they occasionally

move into other racial categories, as in the case of one participant who stated, "I identify myself both White and African American, but socially, I'd say White" (007).

There were only a few examples of Renn's (2000) fifth racial identity pattern in this research, none of which typified strong examples of what he describes as a rejection of all racial categories. The closest example of this viewpoint can be found in this participant's comment: "White isn't really anything. White is a fake social construct. It's precisely the robbing of a community's way to express themselves in their indigenous way" (014).

Although there were no participants who opted out of racial identities altogether, some chose identities that were politically oriented, such as Chicana and Chicano. One student explained:

> Its neither Mexican nor 'United States-ean.' The word came about in the late 60s-early 70s as part of the greater civil rights movement. Youth who were children of farm workers and immigrants started exerting their selves culturally in that way. We are Chicanos, not Mexican. We can't honestly claim to be Mexican because we don't know really a lot about Mexico. (014)

While not emphasized in previous research, themes such as choosing politically oriented racial identities as well as the influences of parental relationships and racism on racial identity development both warrant further investigation.

Parental and family influences. Participants' relationships with their parents held a great deal of influence over how they chose to identify themselves. Half selected their racial identities based upon the relationship with the parent to whom they felt closest. One participant stated, "My mother is Mexican, and my father is White. My father was not a part of my life so I identify more with being Mexican" (013). Another participant said "I identify myself [as] Greek…. The reason [is because] I'm closer with my mom" (011). Two students shared that the reason they do not choose one racial identity over the other is because both parents are play central roles in their lives. One participant remarked, "I'm so involved with both sides of parents and everything socially and historically. I participate in activities on both [sides], so I wouldn't say that I relate more [with either side]" (007).

Over half of the participants chose to identify more with that race that holds racial minority status as a direct result of parental influence. For example, one student shared that although she was raised by her White mother, there was pressure from her White family members to identify as Black, stating, "My White family pressured me to say I'm Black. They personally identify me as being Black because obviously I'm blacker than they are" (003). Just as Root (1996) and Renn (2000) discuss, multiracial students are likely to select racial identities based on situation, which can include family situations as well as environmental racial climate.

Racism and changing identities. One issue not emphasized in earlier research is the role of racism in how participants navigate boundaries of racial identities, with over half claiming that they have changed racial identity as a result of racism. Some students reacted to racism by intentionally or non-intentionally "passing" as White or other races to avoid negative interactions. Here, passing is the act of going along with majority

identification (Wald, 2000). One example of passing can be found in this participant comment: "I look White, so I act like a White kid and nobody places these stereotypes on me. I don't talk the way that I would at home" (006), with an additional participant stating, "I'm Hispanic, but not very many other people know. So I don't see many racial barriers" (005).

Additionally, the experience of appearing racially ambiguous, in which others cannot identify one's race based solely on appearance, made participants more inclined to pass. One student commented, "I pass all the time. Having all White friends and not talking about race is passing, or just not being vocal about it. I think [it] is passing. So yeah, people see me and they think I'm White" (009). Further, the appearance of racial ambiguity meant that participants were more likely to overhear racially charged dialogue that might not be used in the presence of visible racial minorities, many other students operating off of the assumption that the participants were unequivocally White. One participant commented, "White people don't always realize right away, you know, unless I say something about me being mixed. So I hear so many things that anyone would consider to be, you know, racially insensitive on a regular basis" (008).

Not all participants reacted to racism by trying to pass for White or other races, however. In fact, three participants shared that, even if they could, they would not pass under any circumstances. One student noted, "People would tell me that I should just tell people that I'm White because of my skin color but I couldn't. That would be like denying my entire family" (008). Nevertheless, such a predominantly White college environment caused many of the participants to pass as White for the sake of avoiding racial obstacles.

Campus Racial Climate, Racial Identity, and Persistence

Many participants discussed how the campus's racial climate impacted their racial identity and decisions to persist at Midwestern University. Specifically, university initiatives, such as diversity scholarships and cultural programs designed to promote racial diversity, were mentioned by several students. Furthermore, campus racism— in the form of hate groups within the classroom and surrounding community—were common among participant responses to questions about their campus engagement and racial identity development.

University diversity scholarships. All respondents remained at Midwestern University after their first year. When asked why, half stated that scholarships were one of the top reasons that they decided to return, with more than half sharing that their scholarship had been awarded on the basis of their role in promoting diversity and multiculturalism. One participant stated, "The reason [for returning to school] was the scholarship that I have. I'm around other scholars, such as myself, that have the same drive toward enhancing their academic success and expanding their knowledge on diversity and promoting it through their everyday actions" (001). Moreover, several participants prioritized scholarships as their primary reasons for returning to Midwestern University after their first year of school, as in the case of one participant who responded, "If I would not have gotten as much money as I got to come here, I would not still be

here" (013). Hence, university efforts to promote diversity through the awarding of scholarships motivated multiracial students to persist beyond their first year.

Diversity programming. In addition to scholarships, Midwestern University promoted diversity and multiculturalism through campus programming with the aim of educating students about different racial and ethnic groups. It has been previously expressed that the experiences of multiracial students are different from those of monoracial students, the differences highlighted in terms of how diversity programming is viewed. Throughout the data collection process, however, many participants expressed feelings of not belonging to one particular minority group, often feeling uncomfortable when attending group-specific programs. One student stated, "I don't feel like the campus is trying to segregate people. But it just seems like that's always the case. Even with their programming and the speakers that they have here" (003). Conversely, some participants' positive experiences with campus diversity programming contributed to their decision to remain at Midwestern University. One participant stated, "They put on a lot of good programs. [They're] some of the main reasons I decided to come back and finish up" (008). Additionally, almost half of the participants stated that they liked the campus's culture, some students having become involved with diversity-promoting programs and organizations.

Despite these positive experiences with diversity initiatives, participants expressed dissatisfaction with how students of color were treated at specific programs. For example, one common theme was displeasure with campus police security measures at parties thrown by minority student groups at the university's Student Activities Facility (SAF). One student said: "I have never felt so violated when I go to a SAF party. I have to walk through metal detectors [and] get my purse looked through" (004). Another student stated that, "Anytime there's a Black party at the SAF, why are all the cops at that party and not [at] other events?" (007). Furthermore, participants claimed that perceptions of racism permeated beyond diversity programs into campus culture on the whole.

Campus racism. Tinto (1993) noted in his Theory of Student Departure that integration into institutional culture is key to student success. He does not, however, consider how successful students might respond when institutional culture is unsupportive of nonwhite students. For example, several participants were unhappy with the way Midwestern University responded to issues of race on campus. One participant captured the essence of this feeling when she said, "They're not doing anything to make you feel comfortable as a minority here. It's not gonna make you wanna stay in this establishment very long" (002). The campus newspaper was also cited as being a source of negativity with regard to racial issues, as one student expressed, "The college paper…there's nothing ever good about people of color…. It's either that they won some sport or they're beating somebody up" (003). Additionally, participants identified the presence of and university responses to hate groups, classroom racial experiences, and community responses to diversity as being significant to racial identity, institutional experiences, and persistence decisions.

Hate groups on campus. Halfway through data collection for this study, there was a hate group demonstration on campus just outside of the building where one participant interview was conducted. Students of color in attendance also claimed that

they were hit by paintball bullets during the demonstration and were asked to leave by campus police, while the hate group was permitted to remain. The hate group's presence was a persisting campus issue throughout the academic year, and as a result, the participant interviews and focus groups centered somewhat around the issue.

Several participants expressed that they felt unsafe as a result of the hate group presence. One participant said, "It scares me. Where I lived, it's illegal to wear a swastika…I spent like half my life surrounded by Nazis in Germany, and I left to come here and study, and now they're here" (011). The participant went on to share:

> I get really scared you know. I'm a young female, and I'm a person of color, you know. I don't go out at night. I don't say to myself, "I'm gonna take my bike and go to the store." I have to think about it and say, "what if, what if?" (011)

As such, many students were dissatisfied with the university's response to the hate group, for they wanted administrators to oppose the group more strongly. One student spoke to student disappointment with the university:

> With the hate group situation, our administration did not act. It is not even "take a stand against racism." It's "take a stand against violence." Take a stand against people being mistreated. I'm not asking you to be my friend—"who is White, who likes Black people." I'm not asking you to be my ally. I'm asking you to take a stand against something that hurts my feelings. (013)

It is important for institutions to carefully consider their responses to campus hate groups and student perceptions of said responses because they can impact student's sense of institutional belonging. For instance, one participant shared that "the whole hate group thing threw me through the loop, like I actually told my little brother not to come here." (004). Another participant said, "I did have a little, like, few minutes of fear. I was like 'Mom, they got Nazis up here, I'm thinking about transferring.' That's the only thing that happened up here that made me want to go back home" (012). This volunteering of this information, accordingly, demonstrates that the hate group's presence was a major concern.

Race and the classroom. Beyond dealing with race in the campus community, participants also discussed the role of race within the classroom, specifically with regard to isolation, the experience of taking racism-focused courses, and how faculty responses to racism impacted learning and engagement.

Many participants expressed that they were extremely bothered by their minority status in their classrooms. One participant said, "It was shocking because, sometimes, I was the darkest thing in my class, and I'm not that dark" (004). Another participant stated, "You go into any classroom on campus and there's a bunch of White people…so you sit in the back and you try to get some footing and stuff. I mean it's hard" (006). Consequently, many students agreed that they had to work harder in the classroom because they were minorities. One participant stated, "It is hard to always have to be the martyr. It is exhausting because, sometimes, I feel like maybe I just don't want to participate in discussion. It is like, if I don't say it, it just won't be said" (013). This sentiment was also shared by others who felt pressure to speak for their entire minority

group. One participant noted, "The teachers just stare at the minority students, [and] the rest of the students are going to stare, too. If you are always the only minority in all your classes, that could make someone so uncomfortable, you just want to leave" (016).

The experience of being the sole student of color in the classroom is only intensified in courses that focus on issues of racial diversity and racism. Several participants shared negative stories from these courses. One student said, "It has been difficult to be in Spanish classes with a bunch of White kids who are learning it because it's a pastime, or they're going into international business, and they can't wait to do business with the Mexicans, which means exploit them" (014). Despite such negative experiences, numerous participants shared that they were positively impacted by racism and diversity coursework. One student shared that "It has really helped me understand a lot about where my Black relatives have come from." (008). Other participants described that, as a consequence of racism and diversity courses, they were less afraid to talk about race. One student stated, "It's influenced me now to be more involved. Talking about it [is] okay, because before I didn't really want to hear anything" (015). Even faculty interactions can play a critical role in helping participants embrace positive outcomes as a result of these classes.

As leaders in the classroom, faculty can also play important roles in creating a classroom environment where multiracial students feel welcome. Only one participant, however, stated that a professor demonstrated supportive behavior toward students who had experienced classroom racism, making himself available as a confidential resource in the wake of heated class discussions concerning race. Conversely, other participants shared experiences in which professors were either the sources of racism or harmful to discussions. One example is described as follows:

> A professor wanted to do racial slurs in ads put on campus…a guerilla marketing technique. He was just reading [racial slurs] off, you know, pointing at people of color and asked them what they've been called…. I just got up and walked out…. When I was a kid I got called the 'N-word' and got the shit kicked out of me…. That was one thing that really bothered me, and that just happened last week. (003)

According to the classroom participants, dealing with classroom racism negatively affected their learning and levels of confidence. A few participants experienced significant grade drops as a result, with one student stating, "I went from like a 3.8 [GPA] to a 1.7. I'm just not interested. I'm not going to put time into an institution that I feel does not give a shit about me or my people" (014). Consequently, these reductions in grades and confidence exemplify how campus racial climate relates to academic achievement and persistence for multiracial students.

Racial climate in the surrounding community. Furthermore, participants described how their racial experiences in the Midwestern University community reinforced feelings of discomfort. One participant stated that, "Me and my brother would always talk about how bad [our hometown] was as far as rapid ignorance, but it's worse here, and that was something that surprised me" (008). Specifically, participants explained that they did not feel welcome or safe and experienced discrimination with local law enforcement. One participant shared that, "I can't even buy hair products in

town…. I just don't feel welcome as a person of color" (003). Another participant shared her experience of stigmatization at a local grocery store, stating, "All these people were just staring at us so hard and my boyfriend was like, 'It's because you look White…. They're thinking this White girl, or she's not fully Black, obviously is with this Black man'" (004). Another participant spoke to the city's social milieu on the whole, claiming "It wouldn't surprise me that [the hate group] chose Midwestern University just because [this city] and [its] people don't really accept diversity" (015).

Many of the participants agreed that local law enforcement officials practice racial discrimination. One participant shared, "A guy gave me racial crap… the cop comes up to ask what was going on and I said, 'This guy is giving me crap' [and] he went racial on me…. 'Well that's what you're gonna get in this town,' that's what the cop said. City police!" (003). Issues with law enforcement in the city extended to a popular local bar and their dress code that the participants argued targeted minorities. One participant shared:

> The whole dress code thing at the [local bar], it's been an issue with male friends, like hats, bandannas, and jerseys, and certain T-shirts, and everybody says, "Yup, they're targeting Black students because they're the ones wearing the jerseys and ball caps." (007)

The participants also shared that they felt unsafe in the community as a result of a perceived lack of support from law enforcement with regard to racial diversity. One participant shared that she was victim of harassment by an officer, stating, "He's like, 'You think you're hot, but you're nappy, you're Black.' The bouncers didn't do anything. I took my cup and chucked it at his head. That's when violence happens in this city, because nobody does anything" (003). While the university might not have jurisdiction over the community, participants' experiences are nevertheless relevant to their ability to feel welcome in their new environment, and ultimately, to continue at the institution.

Discussion

While this research supports the General Student Development Theory (Perry, 1970, 1981), that students undergo change while engaging in the university experience, this primary research adds a layer of complexity to Perry's theory. These findings support elements of Root (1996) and Renn's (2000) theories of multiracial identity development as well as Tinto's (1993) Theory of College Student Retention, revealing new issues overlooked in previous research. Students experienced all four of Root's border crossings, but multiracial students' decision to opt out of racial categories altogether—Renn's addition to Root's framework—was not expressed by the participants. New themes that emerged from the data include the importance of parental involvement in racial identity development, changes in racial identity based on experiences with racism, and intersectionality with multiracial identity development, campus racial climate, and persistence. More specifically, financial scholarships

significantly contributed to students' decisions to remain in school, an item not emphasized in Tinto's (1993) theory.

Additionally, the emergent themes have implications for university leaders as they consider strategies for addressing racism and promoting a thread of racial diversity that is inclusive of multiracial student needs. One primary consideration would be providing a space for multiracial students to identify themselves on demographic forms to demonstrate symbolically that they are of equal institutional importance as monoracial students. Secondly, the findings suggest that institutional leaders should pay particular attention to multiracial student experiences with racism in the classroom and campus community, for the frequency and magnitude of racial incidents yielded an increased desire to leave the institution as well as negative academic outcomes.

While universities provide events and programs for specific racial groups, the data reveal multiracial students often felt that such events and programs create a culture of difference rather than integration. Those that cater to one specific racial group can cause multiracial students to feel pressured to identify with only a part of their racial background. One suggestion for addressing this dilemma would be to create programming that caters to more than one racial group at once as a supplement to already existing programs, simply so the needs of the multiracial and monoracial students are both addressed. Lastly, institutions can implement initiatives that specifically target multiracial students, like the creation of multiracial student organizations, programming, and curricula, of which the sole purpose is to educate the campus community about multiracial student experiences.

Conclusion

A major limitation of the study is that the university does not include a multiracial category when documenting information about students, and as a result, the only way to identify participants was through personal recruitment. The recruitment process may have had a major impact on the results about the role of scholarships and involvement in cultural groups because so many of the participants were recruited at scholarship and cultural organization meetings. Another limitation was difference in gender representation; there were three times as many female participants compared to male participants. There may have been variation in the results if there was a more equal representation of both genders.

The data were collected at the end of a turbulent year for Midwestern University, particularly concerning racial tension. The heightened awareness of racial issues—as enabled by the hate group demonstration on campus—may have influenced the importance of institutional culture, making it appear much greater than it may have been during a less controversial period. As such, one benefit of the data collection during this time is that the results give universities insight into how students are affected by negative campus racial climate. Better understanding the student perspective on these issues of race can assist universities in creating more efficient strategies to address campus racism. Even with such limitations, the data have implications for university leaders, so long as they support multiracial students.

Even though some of the students in the study were able to pass and blend in with the dominant White culture, they felt many difficulties relative to the more-visible minority students. In many cases, the desire to pass as White and hide one's heritage was revealed as a tactic to avoid racial problems, not as a natural part of the student's racial identity development. The results of this study, then, give an overview of the experiences and perspectives of multiracial students. Many of this study's findings, though they raised more questions than they did answer them, will hopefully spark interest in further research of this unique group of students. The more that is known about the multiracial student perspective, the better-equipped universities will be to address their needs. More importantly, universities can contribute to the knowledge base about multiracial students by starting to recognize and track multiracial students on their campuses, not as others, but as visible and valuable groups in the campus community.

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