

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: I AM, BUT I DO NOT SEE: COLOR-BLIND RACIAL IDEOLOGY IN COLLEGE MILLENNIALS

Jonathan M. Cox, Doctor of Philosophy, 2017

Directed By: Professor Rashawn J. Ray,
Department of Sociology

Research suggests that in the midst of pervasive claims of a post-racial society, it is mostly whites who ascribe to color-blind ideology, while people of color still point to the significance of race. However, we know relatively little about the views of young adults, who have largely come of age during the time of the U.S.' first black-identifying president. Building upon research done by Bonilla-Silva (2003), and drawing upon from literature on racial ideology and racial identity, my research primarily addresses the following question: In what ways do the racial identities of Millennials impact their utilization or rejection of a color-blind racial ideology?

To answer my research question, I conducted a study involving 70 racially diverse college students from four schools in the Washington, D.C. area. Students kept weekly

journals about race in their lives for a period of time between 3-12 weeks (n = 65), and I interviewed about half individually following the journaling period (n = 35), with questions focusing on racial identity and racial attitudes.

My findings suggest that white college Millennials still utilize the frames and styles of color-blind racism in largely the same ways as the individuals in Bonilla-Silva's work. Millennials of color use color-blind racism, but typically in more nuanced and even contradictory ways. Millennials of color across all races use color-blindness at similar rates, although some differences emerged across ethnicity. Additional emergent themes include that whites often demonstrate a disconnect between their beliefs about living a diverse life and their actual lives, experience white guilt, and are impacted in complex ways by colorblindness. People of color live more diverse lives than their white peers, believe that race and discrimination are still significant factors in their lives, and may use colorblindness as a coping mechanism.

My research brings people of color into conversations about colorblindness in ways that have not been done before. Further, it has implications for understanding racial ideology within the emerging tri-racial system in the U.S., suggesting that the intersection of racial identity and racial ideology within this emerging system may be just as complex as identification itself in the system.

**I AM, BUT I DO NOT SEE: COLOR-BLIND RACIAL IDEOLOGY IN
COLLEGE MILLENNIALS**

by

Jonathan M. Cox

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Advisory Committee:

Professor Rashawn Ray, Co-chair
Professor Kris Marsh, Co-chair
Professor Dana Fisher
Professor Kimberly Griffin
Professor Shaun Harper
Professor Leslie Picca

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PREFACE

This research is the result of years of reflection on my work with college students. I have been involved in higher education since I finished my bachelor's degree, when I decided to pursue a master's in college student affairs. Through the years, I have attended or worked out several institutional types: a historically black school, two large state universities, and a small, private liberal arts college. As I got older, I began to notice a trend in the ways some students spoke about race in their lives: it seemed, at times, very different from the ways I understand race in my life. At first, I could not quite put my finger on what was happening. As I interacted more and more with students in different arenas, it finally occurred to me: when I was speaking with some students of color, if I were to close my eyes and imagine them as white, what they were saying would make perfect sense. But they were not white. And it really threw me off balance.

As I continued to experience this strange phenomenon, I knew that I would have to research it. I had been shopping around for years for a new research angle, something I was truly interested in that I could sink my teeth into. I knew race was at the center of my interests, but substantively I was everywhere and nowhere. After I had the realization that there was something happening with the ways in which these younger college students understood race that I could not easily comprehend, I decided to tackle it head on. I made a connection between color-blind racial ideology and the students with whom I was speaking: in a color-blind world, where race is not a significant factor, their expressions of race in their lives made more sense. Perhaps this was the ideological reality for these students. It made sense if I considered just how much post-racialism has been pushed for years—although I obviously did not buy into these ideological notions.

Once I made the connection to color-blind ideology, I realized exactly what was throwing me off about the conversations with certain students of color. It was not that they did not see race as a significant factor in their lives, at least not in the same ways my peers and I did. I had come across students of color in the past who were simply disconnected from their racial identities, and so I did not think twice about their claims that “race didn’t matter.” The reason some students threw me into a mental tailspin, the intellectual equivalent of the swirly Spongebob meme with the crab, was because they often appeared to be *very* connected to their racial identities, but would still express thoughts about race more consistent with the average white student (who studies show are very often disconnected from not only their race, but race in general). For me this simply did not make sense: how could you have a strong racial identity, yet seemingly believe that race was not an important factor in people’s lives? Thus, my new research focus was born.

I decided that one great way to uncover the connection between racial identity and racial ideology was to take a very simple approach: take some work that I really like and extend it to people of color. I thought Bonilla-Silva’s work from *Racism with Racists* was perfect; he had written mostly about whites, a little about blacks, but the intellectual world was wide open beyond that. I started putting together a research plan, and things took off from there.

Once my research project had more body and was becoming a living thing, I began to get worried. As a race scholar, I am always cognizant of the potential impact of any scholarship I produce. I may have intentions for one thing, but once it is out there in the world, anyone can interpret or use my work in whatever way they see fit. The main

theoretical question I sought to answer was in what ways do the racial identities of Millennials impact their usage or reject of color-blind racial ideology. My greatest fear was that I would uncover that Millennials of color were using colorblindness in the exact same ways as whites, and I could just see the headline some eager journalist would write: “New Study Finds That Racial Minorities Are Just As Racist As White People.” I felt a true moral dilemma: if I found that to be true, would I publish my work? Or would I use it to gain my doctorate, and let it disappear quietly into the background, while I pursued other research agendas? Obviously these concerns were greatly exaggerated in my psyche, but the underlying fear was real, and I think it is one that is shared by many scholars who study issues close to their hearts.

Thankfully for me, my fear was never confirmed. My findings overall did not support the notion that people of color were “just as racist” as whites. Instead, I found that race *does* still matter for the majority of people of color, and although young people may have had some different experiences that I had growing up, in general we share a common understanding of the significance and salience of race. There are, of course, many complexities that exist, many of which are tied in very interesting ways to racial identity. It is with great enthusiasm that I finally share the results of many months, years even, of cumulative work. In the proceeding chapters, I elucidate all of I have learned about racial identity, racial ideology, and college Millennials. Enjoy.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to three groups of people.

First, to my family. To my wife and partner, Charissa, thank you for being a beacon of support through the years, particularly during this last major push. Without your cheerleading in these closing months, I might have curled up in Apollo's crate and called it quits. I love you immensely, and hope that I can be such an immovable foundation for you in the years to come. To my father, the premier educational administrator, and my mother, the only other PhD in our family, thank you for not only believing in me and supporting me since birth, but providing such shining examples, and always pushing me to do post-graduate work even in my childhood. To my sister, I still think you are the smarter sibling; thank you for always encouraging me. To Hezekiah, thank you for being a source of joy for the last ten years. To all of the other family members who have seen me through all of these degrees, particularly those in the DMV area, thank you for always welcoming me with open arms, and cheering me on from the sidelines.

Second, to my friends. I have been blessed with some of the best friends in the world, people who share my passion for bettering the world around them. I cannot name everyone individually, or the list would be a chapter long, but thank you all for your support; no matter how small a role you may think you have played, it was indispensable to me. Thank you especially to my brothers in scholarship: Garry, Andrew, and Wilmon. I am completing the triple-play of our doctoral degrees—Wil, it is now on you to make it

a grand slam! Thank you all for getting me through this process, especially as a black man in academia.

Finally, to race scholars everywhere. The work we do is important, and we do it often not only without thanks, but in unwelcoming and psychologically crushing spaces. Thank you for providing me with a supportive space to do my work, as well as scholarly examples that I can follow. Continue to do race work, in all its unrecognized glory.

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This research would not be possible without the help and support of many people and entities. I will do my best to acknowledge as many of them as possible.

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Picca, it was such an honor to have you involved in this research, not only because I borrowed part of your methodology, but because I had heard about you for years from our mutual friend, my mother. It seems we were destined to meet (even though we have yet to do so in person!). And finally to Shaun Harper, thank you for your consistency as a friend and mentor for more than ten years. You altered my path that fateful day on Hampton's campus during my senior year, and I will never be able to repay what you have given me; my only hope is that I can someday pay it forward.

I would also like to thank all of the students who were involved in this research. I appreciate your willingness to open up to me, and to share your stories, which I hope I have done justice. It is for you that I began a career in higher education, so thank you for continuing to give me life and confirm that I am walking in my calling.

Many thanks are due also to my fellow graduate students, in particular my cohort. We started with many, and are ending with far fewer, but those of us who remained are all doing amazing work. Special thanks are due to the surviving members of the Brigade: Wendy, Jessica, and Joey, thank you all for your unfailing support through the years. The road has been long and the struggle real, but we're almost there! I am incredibly thankful for having shared this journey with you, and I am excited for the futures we are all forging. See you all at ASA in the coming years!

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Chapter 1: Introduction

INTRODUCTION

Many people purport that we now live in a post-racial society, where the significance of race has declined such that it is no longer a major issue, often pointing to other groups like social class as more consequential (e.g. Wilson 1978). Most work on race suggests that whites, members of the dominant racial group in the U.S., ascribe to this philosophy, while people of color largely still point to race as a major determining factor in life outcomes, particularly as it relates to discrimination (Quillian 2006; Schuman et al. 1997; Conley 1999; Feagin 2000; Holt 2000). However, we know relatively little about the views of young adults who have largely come of age during the time of the United States' first black-identifying president.

The backdrop for this continuing debate is riddled with contradictory images. The overall population of people of color in the U.S. is steadily increasing, particularly with regards to Latinxs¹ (Humes, Jones, and Ramirez 2011), often resulting in representational tokenism that belies the truth of racial disparities. At the same time, however, contemporary events highlight the fact that race is still a significant issue in the U.S. Representation in many social institutions—such as students in colleges and professional degree programs, or high-level positions in companies and the government—is still skewed heavily in favor of whites; educational outcomes show clear and persistent

¹ I use the form of “Latino” with an “x” instead of an “o” in an effort to be more gender inclusive, following recent trends in literature and social practices (see Manzó 2016 or Mendoza Aviña 2016 for examples). However, when speaking about specific individuals I refer to them using the traditional forms of gender assignment based on that individual’s gender identity (e.g. Latina or Latino).

inequalities between the achievements of whites and that of Latinxs and blacks (Massey et al. 2002; Roscigno 1998); housing segregation relegates blacks and Latinxs to poorer neighborhoods (Massey and Denton 1993; Emerson, Chai and Yancey 2001; Krysan and Bader 2007; Krysan et al 2009; Lewis, Emerson and Klineberg 2011; Logan 2011); and black and Latino males are much more likely to be targeted as suspects, incarcerated, and killed by police than whites (Western and Pettit 2005; Alexander 2012; Samuel, Spohn, and DeLone 2012).

Despite data and events pointing directly to race, many people, whites in particular, still assert that we are now in an era of colorblindness, or if we are not fully there yet, we should be (Feagin and Sikes 1994). Many whites say things like, “I do not see color,” or, “race doesn’t matter to me,” suggesting beyond this that race should not matter to anyone, that it is not really important—even going so far as to suggest that race is *only* important because people of color are not willing to let it go (Bonilla-Silva 2010; Bloch 2014). Whites’ attitudes about race are well known because they have been thoroughly studied over time (Roediger 1991; Taylor 1998; Schuman and Krysan 1999; Perry 2002; Lewis 2004; Hunt 2007). Seminal work in the area of whites’ modern colorblindness comes from Bonilla-Silva (2001; 2003; 2010; 2015). In a body of work spanning more than ten years, Bonilla-Silva finds that many whites ascribe to a color-blind ideology that absolves them of the label “racist,” but that effectually serves to perpetuate racial discrimination and racist systems (2010, 2013). Bonilla-Silva appropriately labels this neo-racist ideology as color-blind racism. His work, along with that of others, helps to establish well-known and much-investigated trends in white racial thought.

What is lesser known, however, is how racial minorities, particularly young adults, conceptualize race in the 21st century. Recent research on Millennials indicates that most Millennials see race as a significant factor in their lives (Apollon 2011), which is consistent with previous research on racial minorities (Feagin 1991; Cose 1993; Tuch and Martin 1997; Hughes and Thomas 1998; Darity, Hamilton, and Dietrich 2002; Hunt 2007). What this data does *not* address is whether or not racial and ethnic minorities subscribe to colorblindness in the same way as whites, or the ways in which racial identity specifically impacts racial ideology. Part of this gap highlights the historical focus on a black-white racial binary, as well as pervasive monolithic views of different races (e.g. treating all Asians as the same). Given recent research that does look at race and ethnicity more heterogeneously, allowing for differences within and between traditional racial categories, differences in the thoughts of individuals of different races might be expected. For instance, in many studies about race, Asians are considered ethnic minorities, yet fare as well (and sometimes better) than whites in many outcomes (Chen et al. 2006), suggesting ideological differences with other racial minorities. Further complicating this example, however, is the fact that Asians often have a difficult time being seen as anything other than “Asian,” or permanent foreigners incapable of full assimilation into American culture (Min and Kim 2010); this may lead to more similarities with other racial minorities. These and other studies point to the fact that, 1) racial and ethnic minorities likely have complex racial ideologies that differ from one another, and 2) the ways in which the racial identities of individuals impact their racial ideologies remain largely unclear.

Bonilla-Silva's work does little to address differences across and within multiple racial groups, which he willingly admits in his own writing (2010). Two issues impact the generalizability of his original work. First, his sample included only a very small percentage of non-white respondents, who were almost all excluded from the analysis. Second, all of his qualitative interviews of blacks were from only one city in the U.S. and did not include any non-African Americans. What resulted was a more comprehensive understanding of non-Hispanic whites' racial ideology, and a more narrow understanding of the racial ideology of African Americans, one that excluded any ethnic blacks (blacks who do not identify as African American, such as Caribbean and African blacks). Additionally, Bonilla-Silva's work does not address how the racial identities of individuals impact their racial ideology—although to be fair, he did not set out to do this.

I undertake an extension and update of Bonilla-Silva's classic work on colorblindness, specifically including an investigation of the racial identities of Latinxs, Asians, and ethnic blacks, in addition to whites and African Americans. I further the argument that not all racial and ethnic groups see or experience race in the same ways, and so our current understanding of color-blind racial ideology as it relates to whites and blacks is insufficient. I will focus on college educated Millennials, as they are the "future" of U.S. culture (Pew Research Center 2014), and have come of age in a time of racial realities much different from previous generations. My study will utilize two main investigative methods: a diary study, which will allow a glimpse into the private thoughts of participants (Picca and Feagin 2007) regarding their racial identities and racial ideology, and in-depth interviews following the original style of Bonilla-Silva. This research primarily addresses the following question: **In what ways do the racial**

identities of Millennials impact their utilization or rejection of a color-blind racial ideology?

COLOR-BLIND RACIAL IDEOLOGY

The nature of prejudice, discrimination, and racism has changed considerably in the U.S. after the Civil Rights era. Prior to the Civil Rights era, discrimination and prejudice were legal, and thus very overt; post-Civil Rights, they have become very covert and subtle, making them much harder to identify and measure (Quillian 2006). New prejudice (and new racism) formations assert that prejudice continues to be a major social force in the U.S., and it influences the thoughts and actions of whites (and non-whites). Generally, new prejudice and racism are seen to have taken different forms, but there are many different ideas about these new forms. Two approaches to understanding new forms of racism stand in opposition to one another. Ideological approaches focus on the prejudiced beliefs of individuals, typically viewing racism as “incorrect” or “irrational thinking,” leading to the labeling of racists as irrational and foolish; examples include symbolic racism (Kinder and Sears 1981) and laissez faire racism (Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith 1996). Structural approaches, on the other hand, emphasize rationality: racial systems were built using some rational elements to begin with, which leads to racially motivated behavior being seen as rational (Bonilla-Silva 1997).

Color-blind racial ideology (colorblindness, or color-blind racism) arises out of a structural formation of race and racism. Bonilla-Silva (2010) describes colorblindness as not being rooted merely in prejudicial beliefs and individual thoughts (although that is

certainly a component); rather, it is based in a "materialistic interpretation of racial matters" that corresponds with the "systemic location" of individuals and groups (p. 8), such that those at the bottom of the racial hierarchy tend to have different (and usually oppositional) views than those at the top, who support the racial status quo. In line with the structural view, in colorblindness, individuals are not needed to maintain a racist system. As a structural formation, colorblindness is based in the idea that race is no longer a significant factor in social life; in fact, race is removed as a meaningful identity almost altogether (Gallagher 2003). In this framework, people, in particular whites, claim that they "don't see race," and that racial discrimination no longer exists because national and local policies have outlawed it. As such, other factors become the drivers of social outcomes—social class, personal values and motivation, the economy, etc. Race is no longer on the table, except as a form of background cultural information, never to be used to assert group demands (Gallagher 2003). What colorblindness actually achieves is the maintenance of white privilege, via its negation of racial inequality and discrimination (Gallagher 2003). Because racial discrimination is illegal, race-based policies intended to overturn the effects of long-standing racial inequalities are deemed unnecessary, and beyond that, unfair. The American ideal of individualism thus becomes a mechanism for the perpetuation of racial privilege and now more subtle discrimination.

The Central Frames of Color-Blind Racism

The structure—or frames—of ideology are what give it shape and form. Within the dominant ideology of color-blind racism, these frames operate as the "intellectual road

map used by rules to navigate the always rocky road of domination and...derail the ruled from their track to freedom and inequality” (Bonilla-Silva 2010:26). In *Racism without Racists*, Bonilla-Silva identifies four central frames of color-blind racism, arguing that because of the flexibility of the frames, they are extremely durable. The frames make discrimination and racism much more subtle and gentle, in part because they do not rely on absolutes. This allows for prevailing sentiments like, “Not all blacks are lazy, but *most* are.” According to Bonilla-Silva, the four frames of color-blind racism are abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism.

Abstract Liberalism

Abstract liberalism constitutes the foundation of the new racial ideology. It involves the use of ideas associated with political and economic liberalism—things like equal opportunity (i.e. non-forced opportunity structures) and the “American” ideal of individualism—in abstract ways in order to explain racial phenomena. The use of this frame allows whites to oppose practical solutions to racial inequalities but write it off as moral or “reasonable” behavior; for example, opposing affirmative action by asserting it represents “preferential treatment” for racial minorities. Another example of the abstract liberalism frame is the idea of meritocracy—that people should be rewarded solely on the basis of merit, or how hard they work. The abstract nature of these arguments come into play when you examine the facts of racial inequalities. Affirmative action only represents preferential treatment for racial minorities if you ignore the fact that people of color are severely underrepresented in the upper echelon of social institutions (e.g. the best jobs and schools). When touting meritocracy, most whites ignore the fact that the majority of

people who are rewarded for their efforts are other white people. Thus, these are very abstract forms of the espoused liberal tenets.

Naturalization

Naturalization allows whites to explain away racial matters as “natural,” things that happen on their own. This perspective argues away race by asserting that preferences are a nonracial, and that “people of color do it too.” This often takes the form of statements like “that’s just the way it is” or “it just happens to be that way.” For instance, a white male who has only dated white women can say, “Yeah, everyone I’ve gone out with has been white, but that’s just because most of the people that lived around me were white. I didn’t do it on purpose, it just happened like that.” Another example is that a white person can justify their all white friend circle by saying, “People just feel more comfortable around other people like them. All the black people at my high school always sat together in the cafeteria, so that’s just human nature. We gravitate towards people like us.” Since “everybody” does these things, race is removed as a pivotal factor, thus perpetuating color blindness.

Cultural Racism

Cultural racism utilizes culturally based arguments to rationalize the social locations of people of color, and is essentially a form of “blaming the victim.” The frame asserts that the standing of people of color in society is their own fault: their lack of effort, inappropriate values or misplaced priorities, or loose family organization. This is a long-standing ideological framework, having morphed from formations of the “culture of poverty” wherein poverty status is passed from one generation to the next because the poor supposedly developed their own cultural adaptations that serve as barriers to exiting

poverty (Lewis 1975). In fact, this frame was used in a national forum recently by the Republican chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, Representative Jason Chaffetz. In reference to the fact that millions of Americans might lose the health coverage they have under the Republican replacement for President Obama's Affordable Care Act, Chaffetz said, "Americans have choices, and they've got to make a choice. So rather than getting that new iPhone that they just love and want to go spend hundreds of dollars on that, maybe they should invest in their own health care. They've got to make those decisions themselves" (Miller 2017). Inherent in Chaffetz's statement (which he almost immediately tried to walk back, because of swift backlash) is that people who cannot afford costly health insurance are to blame for their inability to afford it—they make the wrong choices. In the same way, cultural racism works to blame victims of racial inequality for their own social positions.

Minimization of Racism

The final frame, minimization of racism, downplays the significance of discrimination in the life chances of people of color. This frame allows whites to give lip service to racism and discrimination ("George Zimmerman definitely killed Trayvon Martin at least in part because he was black..."), but at the same time still accuse racial minorities of being too sensitive about race ("...but #AllLivesMatter."). This frame is also used to purport that while racism and discrimination do exist, it is not an adequate reason why people of color cannot compete; it is an excuse ("Look at Obama, he was black and became president!"). Minimization often takes the form of accusing racial minorities of "pulling the race card," making things about race unnecessarily. This frame also effectively disqualifies a majority of contemporary racism as racism at all—only old school, hard line racism

counts (e.g. calling a black person the N-word), but microaggressions (telling racist jokes, assuming a Latino man is the janitor) do not count.

The Style of Colorblindness

Additionally, Bonilla-Silva explicates the styling of color-blind racism, discussing how whites utilize specific linguistic maneuvers and rhetorical strategies, or “race talk,” when discussing issues of race, citing that “the language of color blindness is slippery, apparently contradictory, and often subtle” (2010:53). These styles are the result of the fundamental shift in the racial climate after the Civil Rights era, in which speaking about race, particularly in the openly negative ways of Jim Crow and prior periods, became almost an amoral act, at least in normative public discourse. As such, whites developed these various styles as ways to talk about race without talking about it. These styles include indirect, ambiguous, and often confusing answers to direct questions about race, the use of disclaimers, or even lacking coherence altogether when speaking about racial issues. Bonilla-Silva outlined five styles of color-blind racism, which I describe below.

First, whites often *avoid using direct racial language* when talking about their racial views. This means they typically do not use racial slurs openly, or may avoid mentioning race at all (“I don’t really go to that side of town, because I’m just not comfortable with certain types of people.”).

Second, whites engage in *semantic moves*, a method of concealing racist views by couching them in linguistic maneuvers that seemingly “offset” the racist content. This allows whites to safely state their views—and to save face in the event that what they said is perceived as racist. These semantic moves come in various forms: denials or

disclaimers (“I know it’s bad to think this, but…” or “I’m not a racist, but…”), claims of ignorance (“I don’t really know because I’m not a minority” or “I’ve never experienced that”), or self-support (“One of my best friends is black”). These “rhetorical shields” give whites the opportunity to retreat to the safety of the semantic move—“Well I told you I’m not a racist, so obviously I did not mean it that way.”

Third, whites utilize *projection* in order to put the burden of racism on minorities, in an effort to shift blame and escape responsibility—(“They are the racist ones, not me…” If I make you out to be the racist, or the person responsible for making a situation “racial,” then I am no longer in the hot seat. With this style, whites can say, “Those Hispanics segregate themselves, they only talk to each other,” or, “Black people are always calling each other the N-word and putting it in music, so it’s their fault that white people want to say it all the time.” Projection also does not always have to sound so nefarious—it often comes through when whites speak about their opposition to things like affirmative action (“If I was given a job only because of my race, I would feel terrible, like I didn’t earn it.”). However it is used, projection serves to shift the blame away from the user.

Fourth, whites use *diminutives*, attempting to “soften” the blows of their racist commentary. This is another consequence of the shift in rhetoric following the Civil Rights era. Whites typically do not speak in absolute terms, but instead cushion their speech so it comes off as more acceptable. Examples of diminutives would be saying, “I’m not quite sure I completely agree with affirmative action policies,” or, “That joke I told about the two black men and a Mexican is only just a little bit racist, but not all the

way.” As you can see, the speaker avoids a definitive, hardline stance (“Affirmative action is wrong.”), but still makes a very racialized statement.

Fifth, whites engage in *rhetorical incoherence*, where they become almost incomprehensible when talking about racial matters. Bonilla-Silva discusses how this is not technically a style of color-blind racism, but he includes it as part of the styling because so many people used it. Incoherence is something that comes with normal speech patterns, but it often increases dramatically when whites are speaking about the sensitive matter of race. This shows up with an increased amount of stuttering, long pauses, or I-don’t-knows, as well as people going off on irrelevant tangents.

The Limitations of “Racism Without Racists”

Bonilla-Silva’s work adds significantly to the understanding of neo-racism in contemporary society, particularly how racialized social systems produce racial hierarchies with clear social distinctions between races. In these systems, the race at the top of the hierarchy has the best position, and thus receives the greatest portion of reward and status (economically, politically, socially), and has the most power to draw social and physical (e.g. segregation) lines between itself and other races in the hierarchy. In the U.S., whites are clearly at the top of this hierarchy, with racial and ethnic minorities occupying lesser spaces.

While Bonilla-Silva’s work on color-blind racial ideology is seminal, there are some limitations. Again, I stress that Bonilla-Silva demonstrates a clear understanding of the limitations of his work, and he addresses them freely in his writing. I discuss these

limitations now not as a way of discrediting his conclusions, but more in an effort to clearly frame both the inspiration for my own research and the problem it seeks to explore.

To this end, Bonilla-Silva's original study utilized two social surveys and interviews from the late 1990s. The racial landscape of the U.S. has experienced significant changes in the two decades, not the least of which was the election of a black identifying president. In fact, to my point about Bonilla-Silva addressing his own limitations, he has released several new editions of his original book, in which he addresses the new, developing racial landscape in "Obamerica" (see 3rd and 4th editions, 2010 and 2013). However, although he discusses newer developments, his data do not change. The participants in Bonilla-Silva's study were also overwhelmingly white: over 70% of his survey respondents² and 85% of his interviewees were whites. Of the eighteen non-whites he interviewed, seventeen were black, and there are no data from other racial groups. As a result, Bonilla-Silva's findings really illustrate a more comprehensive understanding of the color-blind racial ideology of (non-Hispanic) whites. The analysis he offers on the color-blind racial ideology of blacks is limited because there is no discussion about differences that may occur within the black population. The black race includes individuals who *do not* identify as African American³, and as a result often understand race in ways that are different from African Americans (see Waters 1994, 1999; Rogers 2001; and Benson 2006). Bonilla-Silva concedes that this particular

² Bonilla-Silva utilized data from two surveys: the 1997 Survey of Social Attitudes of College Students (three different schools in three regions of the U.S.) and the 1998 Detroit Area Study.

³ While Bonilla-Silva never explicitly states that the participants in his study were African American (instead of ethnic black; see later section on black racial identities for more explanation), it can be safely assumed that they were American born blacks, based on their location (Detroit) and the fact that none of the respondents ever discusses race in terms of generational status or different ethnic identification, which literature suggests they would (see Waters 1999).

research lacks “data sets that include all racial groups, involve questions on interethnic matters, and include in-depth interviews with all the racial groups” (2010:266). My current study provides a much-needed update that *does* include these various components, based on new, contemporary data.

In addressing his own limitations, Bonilla-Silva does offer some consideration of how color-blind racism affects various racial minority groups, given America’s more complex multiracial reality. Again, however, this preliminary analysis does not arise from any new data; rather, he extrapolates based on consideration of other scholarship. First, he argues that the black-white racial binary in the U.S. is still the basis for most racial ideology, which legitimizes his findings by suggesting that most whites focus on blacks when asked about minorities broadly. I do not disagree, and instead use this as one of the motivations for my work. Second, the impacts of post-Civil Rights racism appear to vary for different minority groups based on their closeness to whites—phenotypically, culturally, ideologically, etc. He cites Latinxs’ experiences with housing discrimination (Latinxs who are perceived as white experience less discrimination than those who are perceived as black) and whites’ tendencies to intermarry more with Latinxs and Asians than with blacks. Finally, Bonilla-Silva discusses the implications of his idea of the “Latin Americanization” of race in the U.S.: that there is an ever-growing three-part racial hierarchy of white, honorary white, and collective black (Bonilla-Silva and Glover 2004). In this system, Asians typically have views more closely aligned with whites, blacks have views that are the furthest away from whites, and Latinxs are somewhere in the middle. Bonilla-Silva suggests that the degree of colorblindness among minorities is largely dependent on their position within this new racial hierarchy. I side with Bonilla-

Silva's final note: that more research needs to be done before any stronger conclusions can be made about the questions regarding color-blind racial ideology and various racial minorities. This research represents part of my contribution toward this end.

Moving Colorblind Racial Ideology Forward

As I mentioned in the previous paragraphs, Bonilla-Silva did discuss findings related to African American's use of color-blind ideology, and these findings are key to the work I now put forth. In essence, he found that African Americans are "slightly color blind" (2010). African Americans are significantly less likely to *directly* use frames of color-blind racism than whites, yet color-blind racism *indirectly* affects them, such that they may or may not develop an "all-out oppositional ideology to color-blind racism" (p153). Overall, African Americans often have complex (and sometimes contradictory) views on racial issues, acknowledging that discrimination has a significant impact on their life chances and that whites have a clearly advantageous position in the U.S. (an obvious contrast to the views of whites), but sometimes saying things like segregation is based on individual choice or natural process, or demonstrating a certain level of buying into dominant stereotypes about blacks. African Americans also generally do not engage in evasive "race talk" like whites, speaking more plainly and directly regarding race. In spite of limitations, these findings do provide a basic roadmap by which to assess the racial ideologies of other racial and ethnic minorities. This roadmap cannot be properly interpreted, however, without an understanding that racial and ethnic minorities see and experience race in a variety of ways.

In an effort to update Bonilla-Silva's work, I solicited participants from four different racial groups—(non-Hispanic) whites, blacks (including ethnic blacks), Latinxs, and Asians—from the Washington, DC metro area. I also extended Bonilla-Silva's work in several other meaningful ways: through a focus on Millennials, an intentional investigation of racial identity, and through a partial change in methodology. First, by focusing on Millennials I can capture the racial ideologies of the most diverse generation in U.S. history, those coming of age in a very different racial climate than their parents and grandparents (Pew Research Center 2014). Second, racial identities are highly complex, and, being based in things like generational status and acceptance of overarching racial systems, impact how people formulate their racial ideologies. Third, instead of utilizing a pre-constructed social survey, I paired in-depth interviews with diary writing. By analyzing journal entries of “everyday racism” (Picca and Feagin 2007) and other racial experiences, I am able to traverse into places I would otherwise be unable to go as a researcher—the private thoughts of individuals.

RACIAL AND ETHNIC IDENTITY IN THE U.S.

Race generally is a socially constructed concept hinging on the ancestral origin and physical attributes of an individual, chiefly skin color, while ethnicity refers to shared cultural attributes, such as language and food. The U.S. government now officially recognizes five racial groups—white, black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander)—with a sixth group labeled Some Other Race (U.S. Census Bureau 2013). Although the government

purports that their definition of race reflects “a social definition of race recognized in this country” (U.S. Census Bureau 2013), in reality there has been a long-standing social tradition of a racial binary in the U.S.—black and white. This black-white binary model of race in the U.S. has resulted, in part, in a dearth of research on the racial identities and racial realities of non-black (and non-white) groups (e.g. Latinxs and Asians). Although the U.S. government technically only measures ethnicity in terms of Hispanic origin, contemporary research and social convention generally recognizes ethnic groups as any subgroup of people who share common history and culture (Kiang, Witkow, and Champagne 2013; Howard 2000; Min and Kim 2010; Chen et al. 2006; McDermott and Samson 2005; Lopez and Espiritu 1990).

One of the aims of this study is to help fill the gap created by the historical focus on the black-white racial binary. In order to achieve this goal, this study focuses specifically on the racial groups of whites, blacks, Asians⁴, and Latinxs⁵. Even though “Latinx” is widely treated as an ethnic categorization, in practice Latinx identity is a much more complex interplay between race and ethnicity. Additionally, there is some support for “Latinx” to be considered as a racial category: for instance, in the last census over one-third of all Latinxs in the U.S. self-identified as Some Other Race (Other) (U.S.

⁴ For the purposes of this study, Asian race is collapsed to include Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, mainly because these categories were only recently separated in the 2000 Census. Additionally, social convention still has largely not caught up to this new categorization.

⁵ Many people will notice an obvious racial group that is missing: Native Americans and other indigenous groups. I made the conscious choice not to include this population in this research, although I certainly wanted to, and believe that is also a very important racial group that often gets erased from discussions. Based on where I conducted my research and the parameters of my sampling (see Chapter 2), getting a critical mass of indigenous people was nearly impossible. Future research, my own included, should intentionally include indigenous populations, as I think it will give more color, quite literally, to the findings and our understandings of race and identity in this country.

Census 2011). This suggests that many Latinxs believe current racial categories to be insufficient in describing their racial identities (Rodriguez 2000).

Despite a broad categorization of racial groups, this study allows for the recognition and exploration of different ethnic identities, as they relate to racial ideology. Racial identity is often a complex, non-zero sum interplay between race and ethnicity. At times, racial categorizations become more salient than ethnicity because racial identity is not only dependent on self-identification, but how one is perceived by others. For example, a Cambodian American may assert his distinctive ethnic identity, but others (particularly the dominant racial group in the U.S., whites) may look at him and only see an Asian male; therefore, his racial ideology and understanding may be impacted more by this association with the Asian race overall, rather than his distinctive ethnic identity. In other instances, there is evidence that ethnicity is believed to be more salient for groups, which is demonstrated by work on ethnic blacks who identify racially in the same way as African Americans, but see themselves as ethnically distinct with different cultural practices (Waters 1994). Looking at each racial and ethnic group in turn provides a preliminary background with which to understand how each might approach racial ideology similar to or differently from one another.

Whites

White racial identity has been well studied over the years (Helms 1990, 1995, and 2008; Hardiman 1994; McDermott and Samson 2005; Rowe and Atkinson 1995; Stoddart 2002). Some approaches focus on theoretical models of white racial identity

development, such as Helms' (1990; 1995; 2008) widely cited six-stage model of white racial identity, which moves from racial naiveté and racelessness to a more internalized racial identity in which whites embrace antiracism and social justice (see Rowe, Bennett, and Atkinson 1994 for a critique of Helms and a different model of white racial consciousness). Other approaches examine the experiences of whites and hegemonic whiteness, focusing on how whites view themselves as white, structural relationships to power and privilege, and various forms of whiteness (Ford 2012). Newer research on white racial identity highlights the dynamic nature of historic whiteness, noting that whiteness has changed and shifted throughout history, being constantly negotiated and renegotiated based on things like ethnicity, skin color, social class, geographical location, institutional context, and political affiliations (Twine and Gallagher 2008; Hartigan 1997, 2001; Perry 2001).

McDermott and Samson (2005) trace the history of white racial and ethnic identity, noting that many European immigrants who are now considered white originally faced challenges when trying to assimilate to the American racial system, but that over time, distinctive European ethnicities were subsumed into a broader European American identity such that white ethnic identity is very often now an option as opposed to a requirement, a privilege other racial and ethnic minorities often cannot access. Although this is true for most white ethnicities (e.g. Italian Americans, Irish Americans, Jewish Americans), some counterexamples can be found in relatively smaller, more isolated white ethnic communities, particularly Middle Eastern immigrants such as Arab and Lebanese Americans (McDermott and Samson 2005; Arjouch 2000). These groups are

often classified as white via the U.S. Census, yet maintain stronger connections to their countries of origin than to a white racial identity.

Blacks: African American Vs. Ethnic Black

Much of the work on black racial and ethnic identity is based on the work of Cross (1971), a five-stage continuum of identity development, moving from negative to positive self-identification, which was updated in subsequent years (Helms 1990; Cross and Vandiver 2001; see also DeCuir-Gunby 2009 for an overview of various models). Based on the assumption of black homogeneity in the U.S., most people lump all blacks together racially and ethnically in the same category—African American—assuming they experience and understand race in the same way. In reality, however, there are a multitude of studies that show that blacks have different racial ideologies and thoughts about race, based on things like contextually-specific demands (Sellers et al. 1998), social class (Demo and Hughes 1991; Smith and Moore 2000; Blau 2003; Lacy 2007; Hunt and Ray 2012), and different ethnic identities and immigration status (Waters 1990; Waters 1999).

Limited social definitions conflating *black* with *African American* ignore the ability of someone to identify as black yet *not* as African American. These individuals, or ethnic blacks, are often of West Indian and African decent, in particular recent immigrants and their children; within an American context, they identify as black, but often distinguish themselves from native-born African Americans. Black immigrants represent almost 9% of the nation's black population, with projections estimating that by

2060 almost 17% of blacks in the U.S. will be immigrants (Anderson 2015). Thus, ethnic blacks are a substantial population group.

Conceptions of race are very different in the U.S. than in other places. In the Caribbean, for instance, race is typically understood as a spectrum that spans between black and white, with a wide array of options between (Itsigsohn, Giorguli and Vazquez 2005; Newby and Dowling 2007). This provides a stark contrast to the strict black-white dichotomy of the U.S. (Denton and Massey 1989). As such, ethnic blacks understand their blackness in many different ways, based on the cultures of their native origins (Itsigsohn, Giorguli and Vazquez 2005; Newby and Dowling 2007; Rogers 2001). Black immigrants in particular must reconcile their identities with the very different racial systems in the U.S., and often feel pressure to assimilate to African-American culture because of their physical appearance (Waters 1999 and 1994; Rogers 2001; Newby and Dowling 2007). Black immigrants are usually very aware of the lower social positioning of African Americans in the U.S. because of systemic racism and pervasive negative stereotypes, and thus they actively attempt to distinguish themselves from black Americans in an effort to stave off downward social mobility (Waters 1999; Bailey 2001). Further, black ethnic identities are often multi-layered with regards to characteristics such as accents, as well as time spent in the U.S. Recent immigrants or individuals who spend significant time outside of the U.S. may have stronger connections to their ethnic identities, and tend to have distinctive accents that set them apart from native-born blacks. Those who have spent more time in the U.S. or were born here (e.g. children of immigrants) often lack any distinctive accent, and thus are more likely to be

perceived as African American (Waters 1994). For these individuals, the pressure to assimilate to black American culture is even greater.

Latinxs

Currently, Latinxs constitute the largest group of minorities in the U.S., and it is estimated that Latinxs will make up one fourth of the entire U.S. population by the year 2050 (Choi, Sakamoto, and Powers 2008). According to the U.S. government, the designation “Latinx”⁶ refers to ethnicity, and can apply to anyone of Spanish culture or origin (U.S. Census Bureau 2013). Based on this, Latinxs can identify as any race, however in 2010, 53% of all Latinxs self-identified as white, while 37% identified as Other (Humes, Jones, and Ramirez 2011). Because the U.S. attempts to treat race as distinct from ethnicity, Latinxs often struggle with self-identification based on existing racial boundaries (Stokes-Brown 2012). As such, Latinxs are, at least in part, reacting to these extant categories, either rejecting, challenging, or accepting them—by simply refusing to respond to race questions, selecting Other as a race, or picking a traditional racial category, respectively (Wimmer 2008; Stokes-Brown 2012). Research indicates that several, often intersecting factors impact Latinxs’ decisions about racial identification, including phenotype (i.e. lighter, more European features, or darker, more African features), country of origin, proximity to particular races (including settlement

⁶ According to the U.S. Census Bureau, “Latino” and “Hispanic” are interchangeable terms of ethnic identification (U.S. Census Bureau 2013). I utilize the term Latinx as a nod to trends in more recent literature and social norms.

locations), and generation in the U.S. (Kibria 2000; Rodriguez 2000; Vaquera and Kao 2006; Newby and Dowling 2007).

Even though the heterogeneity within Latinx cultures is well documented among social scientists and other scholars, (i.e. there are differences between Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Colombians, but also intragroup difference among Mexicans), overarching social perceptions often homogenize Latinxs. Generally speaking, race and ethnicity are defined according to the stereotypes of physical appearance of the dominant group, or non-Hispanic whites in the U.S. (Kibria 2000), and while some level of negotiation occurs during interaction, more latitude is given to those who more closely resemble whites (Choi, Sakamoto, and Powers 2008). As such, Latinxs may wish to assert a particular racial identity that may or may not be acknowledged by others, based on their phenotypic characteristics. Historically, white Latinxs like Cuban immigrants and their children have been able to assimilate as white, and as such their racial identities more typically align with non-Hispanic whites; other, more dark-skinned Latinxs, have not had that same ability.

Latinx immigrants' negotiation of identity is inherently tied to both their country of origin and their geographic location once arriving to the U.S. (Newby and Dowling 2007). Many Spanish-speaking Caribbeans face particular challenges when immigrating to the U.S. because racial categorization in the Caribbean is often influenced by myriad factors such as language, hair texture, skin color, and social class (Newby and Dowling 2007; Rodriguez 2000; de la Fuente 1998), which all vary greatly based on country of origin. The different racial demographics of where one immigrates to can also determine the racial groups with which immigrating Latinxs interact and become associated (Newby

and Dowling 2007). For example, if a group of Latinx immigrants looks white and resettles in a location with large numbers of white Americans, they are more likely to assimilate to (and be assumed to be members of) the white race.

Generation also impacts racial identity: immigrants and second-generation Latinx Americans are more likely to identify racially as Other, Asian, or no race, while third-generation Latinxs are more likely to choose black, white, or Native American (Vaquera and Kao 2006). This is consistent with other work on assimilation in the U.S. to dominant racial categories—after time, the pressure to assimilate becomes greater, causing greater likelihood to select from more normative racial identities.

Asians

Asian Americans as a racial group are made up of over 25 distinctive ethnic groups, including Japanese, Chinese, Koreans, Filipinos, and Indians, all of whose ethnic cultures differ extensively (Chen et al. 2006; Wei, Carrera, and Li 2013). Since racial identity is a socio-psychological construct that deals in part with the internal processes by which individuals experience their socio-racial categorization, the collective racialization of Asians can, at times, supersede their distinctive ethnic identities (Chen et al. 2006).

Despite Asian immigrants being subject to prejudice and stereotypes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the later success of many U.S.-born Chinese and Japanese Americans has helped to shift the perception of Asian Americans overall, gaining them the “model minority” label. In spite of this label, Asian Americans are still stereotyped in many negative ways, including as perpetual foreigners incapable of full

assimilation. Unlike white ethnics, who after several generations are accepted as full Americans and can therefore choose whether or not to access or identify with their ethnicity, Asian Americans are forced to accept their Asian racial identity, no matter how removed they are from foreign-born counterparts (Min and Kim 2010; Tuan 1999). Asian immigrant children often experience prejudice, discrimination, and harassment because of language barriers, but even U.S.-born Asians with English fluency often experience similar treatment because of their race (Min and Kim 2010). While Asian immigrants experience many disadvantages in the labor market, U.S.-born Asian Americans experience relative socioeconomic parity with whites, albeit they still experience the “glass ceiling” when attempting to gain entry into more prestigious positions. Because of their social class positioning, Asian Americans may be more likely to align ideologically with whites, however experiences with racial discrimination likely complicate racial ideology.

Generation is also important for Asian racial and ethnic identity. Min and Kim (2010) analyzed the personal narratives of second-generation Asian American young professionals, and found that in spite of parental pressure to learn ethnic culture, these individuals tended to reject their ethnic identities as children, preferring instead to identify as American in an effort to be seen as “normal” in a white society. Eventually, however, they grew to appreciate and embrace their ethnic heritage. Additionally, Min and Kim review other research on second-generation Asian Americans, noting that at present, second-generation immigrants may be more able to maintain a bicultural identity, rather than assimilate in the same ways as previous second-generation immigrants, due to technological advances that make it possible to more easily maintain

transnational networks with home countries, as well as institutional policy changes towards greater acceptance of cultural pluralism. This may be even more available for those with social class advantages: middle class and professionals have even more access to technological advances, and may engage in activities like sending children back to a home country on a regular basis for “ethnic education.” Second-generation Asian Americans typically prefer friendships with individuals of their same ethnicity, although they still maintain a high level of social interaction with whites, both as close friends and dating partners. Second-generation Asian Americans also tend not to live in ethnic enclaves, and also tend work in the wider American economy instead of in ethnic economies.

The Heterogeneity of Race and Ethnicity

More contemporary research speaks to how different racial and ethnic groups experience and understand their own race. Wu’s (2014) work on perceptions of police indicates that complex differences exist in the attitudes towards and perceptions of police both between whites and minorities as well as between different minority groups (e.g. blacks and Asians or Asians and Latinxs). In an article about the well-known phenomenon “shopping while black,” the coined-term for the negative experiences African Americans often encounter when in public marketplaces, Bennet, Hill, and Daddario (2015) argue that the better label is actually “shopping while nonwhite,” because all racial and ethnic minorities report the same treatment. Interestingly, however, the shared experience does not always result in shared beliefs regarding the existence of this discrimination: Latinxs

and Asians have similar perceptions as to the amount of discrimination against nonwhites in the marketplace, while only African Americans perceive a significantly higher frequency of consumer discrimination than whites. These articles both speak to the differences that exist across racial and ethnic minority groups, suggesting that not all races understand or experience race in the same ways. Although more contemporary research is investigating these differences, there are still many gaps in contemporary scholarship. Understanding how and why individuals identify racially and ethnically is paramount to understanding the ways in which they experience and conceptualize race. My research starts from the belief in the heterogeneity of race and ethnicity, using it as a supporting frame through which to explore how the racial and ethnic identities of Millennials impact their racial ideology, in order to help fill part of the existing gap in our knowledge.

CONCLUSION

In the following chapters, I present my research on the racial identities and racial ideologies of college Millennials. Using the work of Bonilla-Silva as a base, I further explore his ideas of color-blind racial ideology, discussing the ways in which college Millennials utilize and reject this framework.

In chapter two, I make the case for using current college students as an investigative group by discussing Millennials as a generation. I discuss my expectations going into this research, and give a detailed account of my methodology, which includes a thorough description of my sample. I walk readers through the two major parts of my

research, which are the participant journals and in-depth interviews, and conclude by explaining my analytic strategy.

In chapter three, I explore the racial and ethnic identification of college Millennials. I look at two main things in this regard. First, I discuss how Millennials are identifying racially and ethnically across racial groups. This includes a consideration of their generational status, the importance of parental influence, and connections between religion and race. Second, I explore Millennials' experiences with their racial and ethnic identities, by looking at issues with identity pressure and racial authenticity.

In chapter four, I map Bonilla-Silva's color-blind racial ideology onto college Millennials, looking first at white students. I discuss how Bonilla-Silva's frames of color-blind racism and its various stylizations were used by white Millennials in many of the same ways that he found in the late 1990s, which speaks to the strength of his findings. I also explore the effects of color-blind racism on white Millennials, looking at the differences in beliefs and realities for white students' "color-blind" lives, issues of white guilt, and the power of color-blind racism.

In chapter five, I turn to the role of color-blind racism in the ideology of Millennials of color, looking in turn at blacks, Asians, Latinxs, and multiracial students. I explore how Millennials of color are often "slightly color blind," to borrow from Bonilla-Silva, and use the various frames and styles of color-blind racism in more nuanced and often contradictory ways as compared to their white counterparts. I also look at the implications for being raced in a "race-less" time: first, describing how Millennials of color live much more diverse lives than their white peers; second, investigating the continuing significance of race in these Millennials' lives; third, exploring how some

Millennials of color use the frame of minimization as a potential psychological coping mechanism; and fourth, detailing how many Millennials of color experience “racial awakenings” that clue them into the realities of race.

In chapter six, I conclude by reviewing the themes I outlined in the previous chapters on Millennials and color-blind racism. I offer some final thoughts about how color-blindness impacts Millennials based on their racial identities, and why certain differences might exist. I also discuss the implications for my findings, their limitations, and directions for future research.

Chapter 2: Research Question and Methodology

INTRODUCTION

Understanding race in the 21st century is important, for multiple reasons. First, the landscape of the world is changing swiftly, largely due to growth in technological advances. These advances result in a “smaller” world, one in which people have access to information and people in a way never experienced before. An individual can maintain friendships, have acquaintances, or interact with strangers all the way on the other side of the globe at the click of a few buttons. Social media and worldwide news coverage also bring stories from around the world to consumers’ fingertips. But, the growth of these technological advances can also have deleterious effects, if the information is one-sided, narrowly focused, or outright false, such as with the case of ever-growing fake news (Rutenburg 2016; Leetaru 2016). Examples of false news further perpetuated by technological advances are the attacks on President Obama’s citizenship. Donald Trump in particular, the current U.S. president, has regularly used social media and more traditional media outlets to make continuous attacks on the citizenship of his predecessor. These false claims, which have been covered globally, speak directly to the contemporary significance of race: never in recorded history has a U.S. president been asked to release his birth certificate *until* it was a nonwhite person in office. Questions of legitimacy and authenticity as “American” for U.S. presidents only came into question for Obama, a

biracial, black identifying man. Understanding race in contemporary times is also important because race is a shifting target, and constant evaluation and reevaluation is necessary to understand the ways in which race continually morphs, in terms of categorization (e.g. how various racial groups are defined) and implications (e.g. how race as a construct impacts groups). Finally, we continue to see that race is a meaningful factor in people's lives. There are differential outcomes for various racial groups in terms of academic achievement (Shedd 2015; Lewis and Diamond 2015; Lareau 2003; Massey et al 2002; Goldsmith 2003; Roscigno 1998), neighborhood and school segregation (Massey and Denton 1993; Patillo-McCoy 1999; Charles 2003; Logan, Stults, and Farley 2004; Sampson and Sharkey 2008), access to health care and career opportunities (Fiscella et al 2002; Sternthal, Slopen, and Williams 2011; Tyson, Hargrove, and Griffith 2015; Gilbert et al 2016; Feagin and Sikes 1994; McCall 2001; Shapiro 2004), mortality rates (Hummer et al 1999; Hummer and Chin 2011), public safety and involvement in the criminal justice system (Gilbert and Ray 2016; Alexander 2012; King, Johnson, and McGeever 2010; Pager 2003; Wakefield and Uggen 2010)—the list goes on and on.

One demographic group that is perpetually in the proverbial “eye of the storm” is young adults. Age-wise, young adults are exiting the secondary education system, the limit of “free” education for citizens in this country, and are either pursuing or finishing post-secondary and professional degrees or are at the beginning of their future careers. Young adults are in the prime of their lives, and as such social concerns may be even more consequential for them. Given this, I find it very fitting to look at young adults when attempting to understand racial ideology in the 21st century. In this chapter I make the case for using the current generation of young adults—Millennials—as a focal

research group. I outline the expectations I had when I began this research, as well as detail my methodology. I finish by overviews my analytic strategy, and how I came to the conclusions I present in later chapters.

MILLENNIALS

Millennials, born between 1980 and 1998 and currently ages 18-36, are the most racially diverse generation in U.S. history, with just over 40% being non-white, and have come of age in a time with unprecedented racial events, like the election of President Barack Obama as the first black-identifying president of the U.S. (Pew Research Center 2014). As a whole Millennials have been characterized as confident, upbeat, opinionated individuals who are more liberal in their political leanings (although relatively unattached to particular political parties), less religious than previous generations, and open to change (Pew Research Center 2010). Millennials have also grown up in the midst of pervasive media coverage of a supposed “post-racial” U.S. society, which their seemingly more tolerant racial attitudes appear to support (Mueller 2013). Racial tokenism is the rarely acknowledged order of the day, leading to the impression that race is simultaneously highly visible and unimportant: successful people of color predominate media, and racially coded products and styles are widely available (Gallagher 2003; Mueller 2013). Because of the availability of such racial *mélange* and racial messaging, white Millennials in particular, through their knowledge of pop culture, believe in a society that is more racially equal and integrated than exists in reality (Mueller 2013); a reality in which the persistence of segregation means that most whites have very little

meaningful contact or engagement with people of color (Bonilla-Silva and Embrick 2007), even when attending more racially diverse colleges (Stearns, Buchmann, and Bonneau 2009).

Research on Millennials also has many compelling implications. The way Millennials identify racially matters for future demographics in the U.S., for instance, school composition or neighborhood segregation—where will people live and with whom will they live, given their expressed and perceived racial identities? There are major implications for public policy and voting. Are current policies meant to alleviate racial disparities actually working, and what is the future of these policies? Additionally, Millennials are overwhelmingly voting democrat, but many white Millennials voted republican in the most recent election (CNN Exit Poll 2016; CBS National Exit Poll 2016), even despite Donald Trump epitomizing what many see as very “old school” racist views (i.e. racism as the “irrational” or “incorrect” thinking of individuals, like when Trump called Mexicans rapists; see Kinder and Sears 1982 and Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith 1996). Finally, recent studies show that Millennials are the most stressed out generation (American Sociological Association 2015; Twenge 2015). For Millennials of color, there are often stresses above and beyond “normal” stressors, which are directly connected to their race. For instance, Sternthal, Slopen, and Williams (2011) examined the distribution of stress across Latinxs, blacks, and whites for eight stress domains that reflect fundamental areas for people’s lives (acute life events, employment, financial, life discrimination, job discrimination, relationship, early life, and community stressors), finding significant racial differences in overall and cumulative exposure to these domains. Additionally, we know there are long-lasting negative effects of racism and

discrimination for racial and ethnic minorities on psychological and physiological health (Williams 1999; Ray 2014; Gilbert et al 2016), including things like more mental and emotional stress, acceptance of societal stigmas of inferiority, and racial bias in institutions like health care and education that result in reduced opportunities for socioeconomic mobility. Further, we can look at the disconnect that often happens between how Millennials identify and how others perceive them, and the way this disconnect also impacts their health outcomes negatively (see Chapter 3 for more detail). So what are the implications of these differences on racial identity? How are Millennials making sense of themselves and others within existing racial classifications that fly in the face of colorblindness?

The general belief is that Millennials are more racially tolerant than previous generations; this aligns with dominant social archetypes that suggest individuals with higher levels of education are also more racially tolerant and less racist, and data indicating that Millennials are on track to becoming the most educated generation in history (Pew Research Center 2010). In reality, however, Millennials came of age in a social landscape entrenched in colorblind ideology, such that by the time they arrive to begin their journeys through college, they are already very adept in the use of colorblind racial ideology—particularly whites (Bonilla-Silva 2010; Mueller 2013). Whites in college often engage in racist thoughts and action, although they often attempt to hide it from non-whites by presenting a non-racist front to people of color (Picca and Feagin 2007), or explain it away as “playful” expression, such as with Halloween costuming (Mueller, Dirks, and Picca 2007).

Recent studies investigate the racial attitudes of college-age Millennials, citing differences across and within racial groups. Apollon (2011) finds that while a small minority of Millennials initially assert that race is no longer a significant factor in people's lives, when asked specifically about the impact of race and racism in different social systems, most Millennials (across race) express a belief that race does still matter. Similarly, a majority of black and Latinx Millennials believe that racism is still a major problem, although white Millennials are significantly less likely to agree (Cohen 2011). Millennials of color are more likely than their white counterparts to bring up issues of race and to make connections across social systems to race (Apollon 2011). Overall, Millennials (both whites and racial/ethnic minorities) also have difficulty defining contemporary racism, usually resorting to interpersonal understandings of racism (e.g., acts between people). White Millennials in particular, however, continue to follow the trends of previous generations, seeing racism as the sole purview of individual actors with negative intentions (Goldsmith 2006; Kleinman and Copp 2009). Additionally, white Millennials increasingly assert greater social distance between themselves and old-school, "real" racists, and between the presumed contemporary racially equal society and generations past in which racism was overt and upheld by law (Harlow 2009). In fact, for many white Millennials, social facts of disproportionate representation of racial minorities among the poor and whites among the higher socioeconomic echelons are more or less historical chance, or are irrelevant to their daily lives (Apollon 2011). Instead of linking racial inequality to systemic racism, many white Millennials claim the opposite: that they are victims of systemic discrimination because they are white in a society that is attempting to deal with its negative racial history by favoring multicultural

efforts and rhetoric (Feagin 2010). Although Millennials of all racial groups have difficulty defining contemporary racism, whites more often see racism as an intentional act and specifically *not* as systemic, while young people of color have relatively little problems classifying a system as racist because of their own personal experiences (Apollon 2011).

While these studies serve as incredibly informative and contemporary explorations of the racial attitudes of Millennials, they do not investigate how the racial and ethnic identities of Millennials impact their racial ideologies. This current work will fill this gap, furthering understanding of the racial attitudes of Millennials as well as creating new knowledge about their racial identities.

Millennials In College

My research focuses specifically on college-aged Millennials, specifically those currently enrolled in undergraduate school. My spotlight on college-educated Millennials is intentional: despite general U.S. archetypes suggesting that whites with higher levels of education are more tolerant and less racist in their ideology, previous work has indicated that educated whites still learn and express racist views, even if cloaked in the language of colorblindness or kept hidden from those who are not white (Bonilla-Silva 2010; Picca and Feagin 2007). By looking at individuals with higher education, I aim in part to uncover whether or not this is applicable for racial and ethnic minorities.

Furthermore, looking at individuals who are currently enrolled in college⁷ provides another layer of the analysis of colorblind racial frameworks, because colleges are racialized spaces. Racialization occurs when social structures and social actors take on a racial dimension, whereby the thoughts and actions of individuals as well as the organization of social structures are influenced by race (Omi and Winant 1994). By understanding colleges as racialized spaces, the analytical focus shifts to emphasizing the process and ideology behind racism, as opposed to just the outcome of racism itself (Barjas and Ronnkvist 2007). Since the vast majority of postsecondary institutions in the US are predominantly white (many overwhelmingly so), coupled with whiteness as the country's dominant racial frame, colleges are most typically white racialized spaces. This means that there are meaningful implications for how non-whites in particular navigate these institutions, and how the experiences of college students in general impact their understanding of race.

It is a well-researched fact that racial and ethnic minorities have very different experiences on college campuses (Fischer 2007; Allen 1992; Cabrera et al 1999; Nora and Cabrera 1996; Loo and Rolison 1986). Students of color constantly deal with racism and microaggressions related to their racial and ethnic identities (Robertson, Bravo, and Chaney 2016; Yosso et al 2009; Harwood et al 2012). They are often seen as having inadequate intellectual preparation and abilities who were only accepted because of their status as a racial minority (Hurtado et al 2009; Cokely 2003; Harper 2009). As a result, students of color often see colleges as hostile, unwelcoming, and racist spaces, while their

⁷ There is dearth of scholarship that specifically addresses Millennials in college; however, much research exists that looks at college students. By looking at research that utilizes students in college (with a consideration of when studies were performed) I effectively find relevant information about Millennials, even if it lacks the specific label.

white counterparts see schools as friendly, racially welcoming, and non-racist (Rankin and Reason 2005; Harper and Hurtado 2007; Solórzano et al 2000).

Even though in the aggregate students of color have very different experiences on college campuses than their white counterparts, it would be a mistake to assume that all racial and ethnic minorities understand race in similar ways. Recall that even though all racial and ethnic minorities experience the “shopping while nonwhite” phenomenon (Bennet, Hill, and Daddario 2015), they do not always share similar beliefs about the existence of this type of discrimination. Another example of the dangers of assuming racial minority homogeneity can be seen in research on the phenomenon of stereotype threat. Owens and Lynch (2012) investigated the resilience of black and Latinx immigrants against negative-ability racial stereotypes, looking at immigrant, second-generation, and native-born students. They found that immigrant minorities are the most resilient against the mechanisms of stereotype threat as compared to their second-generation or native-born peers, while second-generation minorities are more resistant than native-born minorities, but not as much as immigrants. Owens and Lynch attribute these differences in large part to identification with American racial categories: immigrants are least identified with the US racial classification system, while second-generation minorities are typically much closer to a native-born identity, which is consistent with work on immigrants (Waters 1999; Portes and Rumbaut 2006). These differences speak to complexities in understanding the experiences of racial and ethnic minorities, and the interracial and intraracial variance that exists based on compounding factors like generation or racial group.

My research starts with the assumption that there are differences in how various racial and ethnic minority groups experience and understand race. Simultaneously, I leave space for the possibility that some racial and ethnic minority groups may have beliefs about race that are similar in varying degrees to those of whites. Given that colleges are racialized (white) spaces that exert influence upon students, and colorblind racial ideology is a dominant contemporary script, current college students are an ideal group to use to investigate how utilization or rejection of a colorblind racial ideology differs by race.

COLLEGE MILLENNIALS AND COLOR-BLIND RACISM

As the data suggest, the complexities of racial and ethnic identity play a role in racial ideology. This study incorporates an understanding of these identities in order to understand the racial ideologies of college Millennials, specifically how racial identity impacts the utilization or rejection of colorblind racial frameworks. I approached this research largely expecting new emergent findings, but I had preliminary expectations that could still be explored based in small part on Bonilla-Silva's original study, and large part on current understanding of the racial and ethnic identities of people of color.

Research has consistently shown that whites subscribe to color-blind racial ideology (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Ryan et al 2006; Hartmann, Gerteis, and Croll 2009; Vargas 2014). Because colorblindness recasts race as an insignificant background feature, other factors like social class, personal values, and the economy are seen as the drivers of social outcomes. Racial discrimination is purported to no longer be an issue because

legislation has outlawed it, and so all race-based policies to address inequalities are seen as unnecessary and even unfair. Whites subscribe to color-blind ideology because they benefit the most from “race-lessness,” because of their (invisible) racial privilege as the dominant racial group. As such, **I expect that white college Millennials will overwhelmingly utilize a colorblind ideology that mirrors Bonilla-Silva’s original framing** (which, if you will recall, included college students as one analytic group⁸). White college students will still assert that they do not “see color,” yet will engage in the linguistic maneuvers and rhetorical strategies of “race talk,” describing racial matters through materialistic interpretations that perpetuate the racial status quo. This will include ideology structured within the four frames of color-blind racism Bonilla-Silva describes: abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism. For instance, the following response from a white respondent would indicate the use of abstract liberalism: “Affirmative action is basically giving minorities special treatment, and besides, it’s an outdated policy. I mean, look at the president: he’s black, but he worked hard, and made it to the highest position in the country!”

In his book *Racism without Racists*, Bonilla-Silva addressed blacks’ usage of color-blind racism. He found that the blacks in his study were much less likely than whites to directly utilize the various frames and styles of colorblindness, but that the ideology indirectly affects them such that they have more contradictory and nuanced acceptance of color-blind racism—in effect, he labeled them as “slightly color blind.” Other research supports Bonilla-Silva’s findings, suggesting that blacks subscribe to color-blind ideology at significantly lower rates than whites but accept certain aspects of

⁸ In *Racism without Racist*, Bonilla-Silva included white college students from three institutions (one each) from three U.S. regions: the south, Midwest, and West Coast.

colorblindness, such as abstract liberalism (Tynes and Markoe 2010; Manning, Hartmann, and Gerteis 2015). In a similar manner, **I expect that black college Millennials overall will be significantly less likely to accept colorblindness than their white counterparts, demonstrating a “slightly color blind” racial ideology in the same manner as the black respondents in Bonilla-Silva’s study.** The crux of color-blind ideology is a removal of race as a significant factor in social life, but blacks often experience racial discrimination very acutely throughout their lives. Black college students in particular are very likely to have experienced this discrimination throughout their educational careers, starting as early as preschool and continuing through primary and secondary school into their current post-secondary matriculation (Ferguson 2000; Pringle, Lyons, and Booker 2010; Dow 2016; Griffin, Cunningham, and Mwangi 2016). As such, black college Millennials will likely recognize racial inequality and believe it is consequential for their lives. At the same time, however, they may buy into certain color-blind scripts, such as naturalization and materialization of racial matters, because color-blind ideology has so effectively explained away racial matters through political and economic liberalism.

I agree with scholars who suggest America is moving away from a bi-racial system of black and white to a tri-racial system of white, honorary white, and collective black (Bonilla-Silva 2004; Bonilla-Silva and Glover 2004). This shift is related to expectations for how other racial minorities may use color-blind racial ideology. Here generation level comes into play, because ethnic black, Latinx, and Asian groups include large percentages of immigrants and their children. Foreign-born and second-generation Americans are more likely to have stronger ties to a particular non-American racial/ethnic

home culture and conception of race, but must come to terms with America's racial system.

Overall, **I expect that ethnic black college Millennials will follow similar patterns for color-blind ideology as their African American peers**, because they are largely subsumed into the collective black group. However, there may some differences that arise for ethnic blacks because they may specifically desire to *not* associate themselves with African Americans. Since many black immigrants understand that being African American is associated with downward mobility, they may wish to create not only social but *ideological* distance: as such, ethnic blacks may subscribe to color-blind ideology as a method of differentiation. However, because ethnic blacks are still perceived as simply black (part of the collective black), their experiences with racial discrimination will disallow complete ideological separation from African Americans—hence, in the aggregate they will still be only “slightly color blind.”

Expectations for Latinx and Asian college Millennials are more complicated than blacks and whites, just as complicated as is their categorization into the expanding tri-racial system. Location along the tri-racial system is based on things like phenotype (i.e. skin color) and cultural characteristics. Therefore, Latinxs and Asians can fit along all three tiers as white, honorary white, and collective black, depending on their subgroup: for instance, assimilated white Latinxs (e.g. Senator Ted Cruz) and some Asian-origin people are part of the white group, certain lighter-skinned Latinxs (e.g. most Cubans, portions of the Puerto Rican and Mexican communities) and some Asian groups (e.g. Chinese, Koreans, Asian Indians) are honorary whites, and dark skinned Latinxs and other Asians (e.g. Dominicans, Filipinos, and Vietnamese). With this in mind, **Latinx**

and Asian college Millennials will reflect color-blind ideology in line with their position in the newer, tri-racial system: those who are part of the white group will share ideological similarity with their white peers, those who are part of the collective black (similar to ethnic blacks) will align ideologically with African Americans, and those who are part of the honorary white middle group will fall somewhere in between.

Lastly, **the very nature of the college experience is likely to shape the ideology of all of the Millennials of color.** College⁹ is a decidedly middle-class endeavor (meaning that even if students enter from working class backgrounds, if they graduate, they will leave more likely to move up in class via their college degree), and as I will explain in the next section on methods, the institutions from which I recruited participants are all higher quality schools. As such, these students are more likely to come from higher-than-working-class backgrounds, and racial minorities from higher socioeconomic groups typically have a greater exposure to whiteness, particularly through their educational institutions. This exposure actually plays into why these college students of color are likely to have more nuanced usage of color-blind racial ideology: increased interactions with whites may lead to increased experience with discrimination, but it might also mean that they develop their ideologies in tandem with the white peers.

⁹ I am referring to college in the most traditional sense—four-year institutions that grant bachelor’s degrees. I recognize that certain colleges, e.g. community college and other non-traditional institutions, may not be classed in the same way as more traditional schools. Regardless, however, one could still make the argument that even non-traditional institutions still cater to individuals with more resources or aid in upward social mobility on some level.

DATA AND METHODS

This study involves 70 college-aged Millennials (18-24 years old), 47 women and 23 men. I sampled Millennials from four major racial and ethnic groups: whites (n = 23), blacks (n = 17), Latinxs (n = 9), and Asians (n = 14), with eight students identifying as multiracial. About one-half of the total sample has immigrant parents, while ten students are foreign-born themselves. I employed a non-representative, disproportionate sampling method (Bennett, Hill, and Daddario 2015).

Recruitment

I gained access to individuals pursuing undergraduate degrees through academic courses at multiple colleges. Utilizing school networks helped to ensure that I was able to reach my target demographics. According to the U.S. Census, approximately 11% of undergraduate students and 19% of graduate students in the U.S. were foreign-born in 2011 (Davis and Bauman 2013), and the U.S. Department of Education indicates that in the 2007-08 school year, about 13% of undergraduates were second-generation Americans (Staklis and Horn 2012). Recent trends in the increase of immigration to the U.S. suggest that current enrollment will be about the same, if not higher, which allowed me to achieve my target of one-third of my sample being foreign-born or second-generation Americans.

I selected institutions within close geographic proximity to the greater Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. I decided on this research location because of my focus on racial minorities, particularly given my desire to explore generational differences, and the greater D.C. metro area is a highly racially diverse geographic area.

More specifically, the 2010 census determined that the greater D.C. metro area had become a majority minority area, with black, Asian, Latinx, and Other races making up over 51% of the population (CRA Census Series 2011). Additionally, the greater D.C. metro area has one of the nation's fastest growing foreign-born populations, with more than one-fifth of the area's population being foreign born as of 2010 (CRA Census Series 2012). Performing the study in the D.C. metro area helped to ensure that I had access to large populations of racial minorities, as well as second-generation and foreign-born individuals.

I involved students from three universities located in the greater D.C. metro area: two private and one public. The overwhelming majority of student participants were enrolled in the public institution (over 95%). While I find my work to be both compelling and correct, I do recognize limitations given the sample. Most importantly, my work is largely based on a convenience sampling, which is non-representative. This means my work is not generalizable to larger populations.

Since most of the students in my study come from the one university, I will give a little more background about it than the others. The public institution is a large, land-grant state school that hosts nearly 30,000 undergraduate students. About 55% of the student body is white students, while Asians, blacks, and Latinxs make up about 17%, 13%, and just under 10%, respectively. Although the campus is fairly diverse as far as large state universities go, reports from the participants in this study about whether or not different racial groups interact on campus are mixed, leaning more towards less interaction across race, at least in any significant way (see Chapter 5 on experiences with race for more details). The campus is mixed commuter and residential—nearly all first-

year students live on campus, as compared to slightly less than half of all students. In-state cost of attendance is about \$27,000, while out-of-state costs are nearly double that. In terms of needs-based funding, the university meets almost 80% of students' needs on average, and about one-third of aid recipients have their full needs met (CollegeData 2015). The university is located about 15 miles from Washington, DC, and is surrounded by various neighborhoods that range socioeconomically from low and working class up to middle class, and racially from majority white to majority Latinx and black, with some more racially diverse neighborhoods. While there are buses that transport students to all of the surrounding areas and to DC (both university buses and city buses), the campus is largely self-sustaining, so it is not necessary that students venture off campus unless they choose to do so, or their individual circumstances require it (i.e. they live off campus).

I will briefly discuss a few relevant points about the other two institutions that students came from in my study, though I will leave more detailed information to be discussed as it is relevant when talking about various students' experiences and ideologies. As mentioned, both institutions are private, and predominantly white, and have nearly identical racial composition: over 60% white, and 10% each of black, Latinx, and Asian, give or take 2% for any particular group. They are both of a similar size, just under 8,000 undergraduates, and the cost of attendance is over \$60,000 per year for both schools.

At these schools, I targeted undergraduate courses with a tangential connection to race and ethnicity—in other words, race and ethnicity was covered in some way, but was not the main focus of the class. Most of the classes were sociology courses—Contemporary Social Problems, Introduction to Sociology, and Inequalities in Education

are some examples—but I also used a course in American Studies and a first-year university course.

Once I identified potential courses, I contacted the professors to confirm their course has a tangential focus on race, and ask if they would be willing to participate in the study. Specifically, I asked instructors if they would include a journal component as part of their course, possibly for extra credit in the class, where students would ostensibly complete daily or weekly entries for a period of four to eight weeks (Picca and Feagin 2007).

Garnering participants through these courses with a tangential focus on race was intended to maximize the likelihood of course instructors agreeing to participate—although this proved to be less compelling than I thought—as a journal about race could be utilized in a more meaningful way in the class. For instructors that did incorporate the journal as an assignment, for either extra credit or for regular credit, I let this be the incentive for students to submit their journals to me. For instructors who did not want to use the journals in class or offer any extra credit, I simply recruited students directly out of the course. These students I offered a small monetary amount for completion of the study.

There are potential limitations given my choice of classes. First, by sampling from courses that investigate race even tangentially, my respondents may have had more in-depth knowledge about racial issues than the general public. This is only a minor limitation, however. In life, as with all things, some people are more or less exposed to racial issues and experiences than others, and some people give more or less consideration to race, for a multitude of different reasons, including various social

identities, social location, and experience. Second, the selection of mostly sociology courses may have biased my sample to mainly sociology majors, thus limiting my findings to students who have a sociological mindset. The data suggest otherwise, however: the participants held a wide range of major and minors including various STEM fields, behavioral and social sciences, health related fields, and business majors. Table 2.1 shows an overview of the majors of the participants. Over 30 distinct majors and minors were represented in the sample, and sociology majors only accounted for 13 students total. The next most popular majors and minors were government and politics (six), psychology (six), and communications (five).

Table 2.1. Participant Majors and Minors

Disciplinary Area of Study	# of students
Arts and Humanities <i>(studio art, women's studies, languages, etc.)</i>	5 (7%)
Behavioral and Social Sciences <i>(sociology, psychology, government and politics, etc.)</i>	43 (57%)
Engineering, Mathematical, and Natural Sciences <i>(engineering, computer science, biology, etc.)</i>	14 (18%)
Journalism and Business <i>(business, finance, journalism, etc.)</i>	9 (12%)
Undecided	5 (7%)
TOTAL	76

Note: Number totals do not match up exactly with the number of students in the study because majors and minors are not separated in this table. Six students had double majors, and five listed minors. Seven students did not report major/minor data (4 whites, 2 Asians, and 1 Latinx).

Methodology

I implemented a two-part study in order to investigate contemporary racial ideologies. The first part was a diary study, modeled after Picca and Feagin's Goffmanic exploration of racial performances (2007). The second part of this study involved in-depth interviews, with participants selected from a subset of those completing the journals, which allows for a close mirroring of Bonilla-Silva's original work that included interviews.

Journals

A total of 65 students submitted journals for my analysis: 21 whites, 15 blacks, 7 Latinxs, 14 Asians, and 8 multiracial students. Journals allow researchers to traverse into spaces they cannot visit (Picca and Feagin 2007)—insides the minds of people. In *Two-Faced Racism*, Picca and Feagin solicit undergraduate students to keep daily journals of “everyday racism,” allowing for exploration of the private thoughts white students have about race. Because of their chosen methodology involving journals, Picca and Feagin were able to find that white students had two “faces” or outward presentations of their racial beliefs: a front stage presentation, or the ways they acted in public when nonwhites were present; and a back stage presentation, or a way of speaking about race when in private settings with only other whites. In a similar fashion, I had participants keep journals of their own racial lives and thoughts. Because I purposefully include people from the four major racial and ethnic categories, this allowed me to gain access to the private thoughts of different racial groups—the ways they think about race when nobody else is around. The time period each student kept their journals varied, between 3 – 12

weeks, as did the number of entries each student completed. The shortest journal included three distinct entries, while the longest journal had 31 entries.

A mixture of diary methods was available to the participants, in order to facilitate the highest level of participation possible. The traditional method of journaling (e.g. typing) was the most highly suggested method, and the most used by participants. Non-traditional methods were also encouraged, however, specifically vlogging (video blogging). The last few decades has seen an explosion of technological advances, and for Millennials, this technology has become a fact of life—like death and taxes, as the saying goes. Millennials are, in fact, “digital natives”—they are the only generation who has not had to adapt to the new digital era, having been born into it (Pew Research Center 2014). More recent trends in technology are the advent of social media that allows for the instantaneous sharing of daily life, not only in words, but now in full sound and color as well. Social media outlets like SnapChat, Instagram, and Facebook let users post real-time (and even live-stream) pictures and videos for the world to see. My intention was to make full use of new technology, plugging into these digital natives in ways that are already natural to them—one in five Millennials has posted a video of themselves online (Pew Research Center 2010). This was also a way to include students who are otherwise averse to writing in general to still complete the study and provide their perspective, and I thought this would be especially appealing to Millennials. As with my ideas of using race-related courses to entice professors, my intentions for drawing in Millennials with technology were similarly unfounded. Only six students chose to use vlog-style journals. However, collecting diaries through these multiple avenues allowed me to capture the

racial ideologies and views on race of Millennials in the 21st century, utilizing 21st century media.

I collected these data in two main ways. First, if the journals were a part of a class for credit, I waited until after the course was completed and students received grades to ask for permission to be used in my study, and then had professors send me the students' journals. Students were also clearly informed that their grade in the class (or any extra credit received) would not be impacted negatively if they choose not to complete the diary or do not consent to be a part of the study. Second, for students I recruited directly out of classes, I had them submit each week on Google Drive via a private folder.

I created several journal prompts that I sent out to participants throughout the journaling period (see Table 2.2 for a list of prompts). These prompts were intended to allow for specific points of comparison across participants, and were about the following topics: racial and ethnic identification, racial diversity at the participants' school, interactions with race on social media, interactions with the police, and race in the era of Barack Obama. I sent these prompts out periodically with instructions for participants to journal about them if they had not already addressed the topic in a previous entry.

Table 2.2. Journal Prompts Used During Study

	Themes	Response Rate %
Prompts I sent to journalers (either directly or via their instructors)		
Reflect on your own race and/or ethnicity. What is your race and/or ethnicity? Why do you believe this is your racial identity? What does it mean to you to have this particular identity? Do you have specific cultural beliefs or traditions that go with this identity?	racial and ethnic identification	89
Write about the diversity at your school. What is it like? Do different people interact? Do you interact with different types of people?	diverse interactions	40
Some people believe that the election of President Obama proves that we are now in a society where “race doesn’t matter,” or that race/racism can no longer be used as an “excuse” for lack of success in society. Do you agree with this idea that race and racism do not matter any more? Why or why not? Give examples, if you have any, to back up your ideas.	significance of racism	30
Write about a time in which you had an experience with race on social media —perhaps you or a friend posted something, or you saw something particularly troubling or interesting about race on a social media outlet. What platform was it on and what was the post about? If you posted it, what led to you posting it? How did you or other people react to the post?	experiences with race	62
Reflect on an experience you (or your friends) have had with the police. What was it like? How do you think other people's experiences compare?	experiences with race	40

Table 2.2. Journal Prompts Used During Study

	Themes	Response Rate %
Prompts used by individual instructors (in lieu of or in addition to those I sent)		
<p>Write about how you believe identity and difference is discussed on social media. Typically, is it constructive or divisive? Have you ever had to confront a friend on social media about a post that you were offended by or vice versa? If so, describe that situation.</p>	experiences with identity	6
<p>Reflect on your understanding of and feelings about the #BlackLivesMatter movement. What do you know? What have you heard? Have you had any conversations with others about it, or heard other people talking about it? What are your own thoughts?</p>	contemporary events	30
<p>Write about America’s most recent mass shooting incident in Orlando, FL. at Pulse Nightclub. What has been your reaction or the reactions of those around you? Think/write about conversations you may have heard or been a part of, or television/media coverage.</p>	contemporary events	14
<p>Reflect on the recent shootings of 2 different black men by police, in Louisiana and Minnesota. What are your thoughts? Have you had/heard any conversations about it?</p>	contemporary events	14
<p>Journal about the ways in which you see privilege operating in the world around you in your daily life. Is it in your own life, or someone you observed? Give at least one specific example and talk about it.</p>	privilege	6
<p>Do you think that your physical attributes (ex. accent, skin color, hair, weight, sex, visible disability, etc.) influence the way people perceive you? Do these characteristics matter to others or you when making assumptions about your/their background, opinions, or interests? If so, when and how do they matter?</p>	physical attributions, perceptions	6
<p>What is a stereotype you have heard about a "group" with which you identify and how does it make you feel to hear it?</p>	perceptions	6

Table 2.2. Journal Prompts Used During Study

	Themes	Response Rate %
Reflect on the activities done in class on 10/17/16 and discuss what having "privilege" mean to you? How did you feel when you added a paperclip versus when you didn't add a paperclip? Is privilege bad, good, or neither?	privilege	6
What aspect of your identity are you most conscious of on a day-to-day basis and why?	identity salience	6
Is there anything that you intentionally hide or suppress about yourself when you are around others? If so, why? If not, why do you think others do?	identity, identity salience	6
Have you ever had an experience with another identity group or culture that changed your perspective? If so, explain. If not, why?	identity, diverse interactions	6
How do you define yourself? What do you want others to value about you?	identity	6

Note: No substantive differences in analysis emerged as a result of response rate. Individuals who completed fewer journal prompts still wrote about similar ideas overall as those who did all of the prompts. All major analytic differences emerged between the journals and the interviews because of the more directed nature of interviews. I interviewed individuals who had completed all of the journal prompts, only a few of the journal prompts, and some who did not submit journals at all, and interviews provided similar results for each of these groups.

In-class journals were managed largely by the individual instructors, although I did send the professors the same prompts to pass on to their students. I allowed professors a lot of leeway in constructing the journal assignment if they were including it as a regular component of their course, as a method of increasing participation, although I did tell them about my intentions of capturing thoughts about race, and asked that they structure the assignment to cater to this in some way. For some professors, this meant that they constructed some of their own prompts to give students, which resulted in some journal entries that did not speak directly to race in the ways I wished. What this leeway also meant was that in some ways I was dependent upon the mercy of these individual professors, and so sometimes my prompts did not get included. I attribute this to the nature of research involving human participants.

Response rates for the prompts I created were not as high as I would have liked. While about 90% of participants completed the initial prompt (about their racial and ethnic identification), far fewer students wrote to the remaining prompts I sent out (see Table 2.2). I attribute a large portion of the low response rate to my dependence on professors to communicate my prompts to students in their class completing journals and my decision to allow instructors a lot of ownership in how they utilized journals in their class. For students with whom I was in direct contact the entire duration of journaling, response rates were well over 90% for all prompts.

As my analysis in subsequent chapters demonstrates, there were no substantive differences in the responses of students that completed more of the journal prompts. In terms of the journals, individuals who completed fewer journal prompts still wrote about similar ideas overall as those who did all of the prompts. The major differences that

emerged are between the journals and the interviews, because the interviews were much more directed. Further, I interviewed individuals who had completed all of the journal prompts, only a few of the journal prompts, and some who did not submit journals at all. The interviews provided similar results for each of these groups.

Interviews

For this research, I conducted 35 qualitative interviews with Millennials. I interviewed 7 white Millennials, 9 black, and 6 each of Latinx, Asian, and multiracial Millennials. These students were recruited from those who completed journals¹⁰. After the journaling period ended, I reached out to the students via email to solicit their participation in a one-on-one interview. The students were told that the interviews would last about 90 minutes and they would be given a small cash honorarium for their participation. The interviews this research includes represent all of the students who responded positively to my request and completed the subsequent interview.

Since racial ideology comes from the nuanced understanding of the individual, interviewing is particularly useful because it allows for the deepest exploration of these individual interpretations of thoughts (Weiss 1994). I conducted each interview myself, in private locations, and the interviews lasted on average an hour and fifteen minutes. I utilized a semi-structured, open-ended format for the interviews, which created a space for emergent themes (Lofland et al. 2006). The interviews were all digitally recorded and transcribed using pseudonyms to ensure personal anonymity. In addition, I collected field notes during interviews, which are also important for capturing aspects (e.g., facial

¹⁰ Four of my interviewees did not complete a journal. Two of these students were recruited to complete journals, but at the end of the journaling period failed to submit anything. The other two students were recruited towards the end of my research in an attempt to balance the number of participants from each racial group being interviewed. This was part of my non-representative, disproportionate sampling method, which was utilized mainly to ensure sufficient racial diversity.

gestures, attire, time of day, social environment) of interview interactions that might not be evident in the transcripts (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995).

All but three of the interviews were video recorded (n = 32), per the consent of participants. Audio recording interviews is a widely-utilized practice, because it allows for interviewers to be fully present in the moment while interviewing, knowing that they will have a recording they can refer to later during analysis. Video recording not only allowed for the same thing, but also had the added benefit of preserving the previously mentioned non-verbal aspects of the interviews (e.g. body language) for my analysis. While field notes will be collected, this again allowed me to be a much more present interviewer.

My interview protocol was adapted directly from the original of Bonilla-Silva, which he printed in the 2nd edition of *Racism Without Racists*. I chose to use his interview protocol as a starting point because his work is the basis of my extension, and the continuity would provide a certain level of comparison between our works. Bonilla-Silva's interview guide had about ten main sections, with between 3 – 7 questions and follow-ups per section. These sections were on the following topics: background information on the participants; socialization in schools; employment, home, and school information; romantic life; overall views on minorities; racism and life chances; government intervention and minorities; reverse discrimination; job competition; and crime.

For my interview protocol, I kept the same basic format—I had eight main sections with multiple questions and follow-ups for each—but with a few notable differences. First, I combined some sections (e.g. I rolled “reverse discrimination” into

the section on “racism and life chances”) and removed some sections or portions of sections (e.g. I cut “job competition” and other similar questions because all of the participants were college students and not full time workers). I did this in order to make the protocol more manageable in terms of interview length—asking students to participate in three hour interviews during their busy semesters (and without significant financial incentive) did not seem advisable. Second, I updated some of the original questions for a more contemporary feel. For example, Bonilla-Silva’s protocol included a question about the OJ Simpson verdict; as this is not a relevant social occurrence for Millennials, I instead asked them about the Black Lives Matter movement. Another update is that where Bonilla-Silva’s protocol focused on the black-white racial dichotomy, I expanded mine to include all racial minorities in a broad sense. For instance, where one of Bonilla-Silva’s questions read, “Many *blacks* say that they experience a lot of discrimination in their daily lives,” I changed this to read, “A large percentage of *racial minorities* say that they experience a lot of discrimination in their daily lives.” Finally, I added several questions of my own design related to racial identity. I did this because a major focus on my study is the impact of racial identity on racial ideology, and so I wanted participants to discuss how they personally identified as well as the roles their parents played in their identity development. See the Appendix for details of both interview protocols.

There are potential limitations that result from my alteration of Bonilla-Silva’s original protocol. By changing questions, as well as removing and shortening sections, I potentially sacrificed some detail from participant responses that was present in Bonilla-Silva’s analysis. Additionally, my protocol is not perfectly comparable to Bonilla-Silva’s.

I believe the benefits outweighed the potential limitations, however. Specifically, I was careful to leave in the major question themes Bonilla-Silva envisioned, so the essence of the protocol remains the same. Further, I did succeed in widening the scope, so to speak, so that the protocol speaks to a wider range of racial groups.

Interviewer Positionality

It is important to discuss the implications of myself as an interviewer. I am in my mid-thirties, but I tend to present as someone in his mid- to late-twenties, and undergraduate students are often surprised at my actual age. For the interviews, I purposefully dressed more casually than I do when teaching, in an effort to put the students I was interviewing in a more relaxed mindset. To this end I also started every interview by telling the students that it was not meant to be a very formal endeavor, but more like a conversation, and that they could express themselves in whatever way they wanted. Additionally, I am a black man, with brown skin that, in the tricky world of skin color, probably lies somewhere right in the middle of the spectrum. Suffice it to say, most people identify me as black.

There are potential limitations that arise because of my race. Since I am asking students their views about racial matters, some may have higher or lower levels of comfort disclosing their true feelings to me. In fact, there is research that speaks to the effectiveness (and limitations) of race-matching for interviews. Twine (2000) discusses the origins of race-matching as a research methodology, and its limitations. Chiefly, while it can be very important, race is not the only significant identifier, and other things like social class, language, and gender may supersede race in any given situation. Further, race-matching may essentialize race (Twine 2000). In the end, I decided to conduct the

interviews myself; I believe my skill set as a qualitative researcher and interviewer would help significantly mitigate any potential issues I might face by not using a race-matching approach. Further, I am interested in colorblind ideology, which involves a level of masking racist or race-driven views. If students attempt to talk around racial issues or use coded or constrained language, they are using the stylization of colorblindness in the same ways that epitomize the ideology itself, the same ways they likely use these frames when speaking to *anybody* that is of a different race with whom they interact or is not a member of their “backstage.”

The Backstage and Front Stage—Journals and Interviews

Some differences in the data derived from the nature of the journals and interviews as distinct sources, which connect to my positionality as an interviewer. As Picca and Feagin (2007) outline, whites often have two different self presentations with regards to racial matters: a front stage self that is a public presentation, where they speak about race in more socially acceptable, very careful ways because of the presence of nonwhites; and a backstage self that is a private presentation, where they speak more freely and much less carefully about race because they are surrounded by racial insiders, or other whites. The journals in my study represent a form of backstage presentation, a space in which students are ostensibly writing for themselves, free from the gaze of outsiders. The interviews are decisively front stage presentations—particularly for participants who do not see me as a racial insider. While this may apply to anyone who is not black, it is likely to be much more pronounced for whites specifically.

Because of the different presentations journals and interviews may represent, the data from these sources may be substantively different, particularly for the white students

in my study who do not identify as a person of color. For example, white Millennials might be more forthcoming in their journals when writing about race than they are when speaking directly to me in an interview. Based on my analysis, however, while some differences did exist, I do not believe these were significantly substantive. I base this on several facts.

First, there were no significant differences in length of the interviews when comparing whites to other racial groups. Shorter interviews for whites might indicate less willingness to speak with me about racial matters, but no differences were present; on the whole, the average length of interviews was consistent across all racial groups. Second, as you will see in the coming chapters, I pull from journals and interviews at roughly similar rates for whites and Millennials of color—on average, I use interview data for all groups about twice as much as I use journal data, which makes sense given the directed nature of interviews. What this means is that the data were just as rich from interviews for white Millennials as the data from their journals: the white students still shared enough with me during the interviews that I was able to fully assess their usage of color-blind racism.

Third, the degree to which journals represent a fully backstage presentation is uncertain. As journals, they were ostensibly “private,” however students were aware that these journals would be read by their professors or that they were being written for a study to be read by a researcher (or both). Students were very aware of their professor’s race (at least on a general, visible level), and some students were aware of my race as a researcher prior to the start of their journals. Importantly, there were no noticeable differences in the substantive content of journals, regardless of whether the race of the

professor or researcher was similar to or different from the race of the participant. As you will see in later chapters, participants were quite forthcoming about their beliefs, across all racial groups.

Finally, what was apparent was that the white students were often trying to be very careful in how they spoke about race during our interviews, something that happened much less with students of color overall. This is a substantive difference between the interviews of whites and nonwhites, as well as between some of the white students' journals and their individual interviews. However, these differences did not change the nature of the findings of my research. As previously mentioned, colorblindness is rooted in explaining away race or masking race through its various ideological tools (i.e. the frames and styles). Because I am investigating color-blind racial ideology, I am specifically interested in the ways in which Millennials speak around or deny race. Further, when comparing the journals and interviews, white students were still using color-blind racism even in their more "private" backstage, writing many of the same ideas in their journals as they expressed aloud in their interviews. This provides even stronger support for my findings, given that colorblindness as an ideology is decidedly more of a front stage, public presentation.

Sample

Table 2.3 and Table 2.4 provide descriptive data for my sample. As previously stated, I involved 70 college-aged Millennials: 47 women and 23 men, with an average age of 20.

Twenty-three students identify as white, 17 as black, 9 as Latinx, 14 as Asian, and 8 students identify as multiracial (although three of these students effectively identified as one race in practice; see discussion in Chapter 3). A little over 60 percent of the students have at least one immigrant parent, and ten students are immigrants themselves.

Table 2.3. Descriptive Data by Percent

Race	
White	23 (30%)
Black	16 (25%)
Latinx	9 (13%)
Asian	14 (20%)
Multiracial	8 (10%)
Gender	
Women	47 (68%)
Men	23 (32%)
Age	
18	10 (14%)
19	17 (25%)
20	17 (25%)
21	13 (19%)
22	6 (9%)
23	3 (4%)
24	3 (4%)
Year in School	
First-year	7 (10%)
Second-year	14 (20%)
Third-year	20 (29%)
Fourth-year	17 (25%)
Fifth-year	5 (7%)
Generation Status	
No immigrant parents	25 (36%)
One immigrant parent	8 (12%)
Second-generation	27 (39%)
Immigrant	10 (14%)

Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate percentage of total participants (N = 70)

Table 2.4. Descriptive Data by Race

	White (n = 23)	Asian (n = 14)	Black (n = 16)	Latinx (n = 9)	Multiracial (n = 8)	Total
Female	18 (38%)	8 (17%)	11 (23%)	4 (9%)	6 (13%)	47 (100%)
Male	5 (22%)	6 (26%)	5 (22%)	5 (22%)	2 (9%)	23 (100%)
Average Age	21	20	20	21	20	20
2 Parents Hold College Degree	9 (30%)	6 (20%)	7 (23%)	2 (7%)	6 (20%)	30 (100%)
No Parents Hold College Degree	1 (8%)	4 (31%)	3 (23%)	4 (31%)	1 (8%)	13 (100%)
Both Parents Born in US	13 (68%)	3 (16%)	0	0	3 (16%)	19 (100%)
Second-Generation	2 (8%)	6 (23%)	11 (42%)	5 (19%)	2 (8%)	26 (100%)
Immigrant	1 (10%)	2 (20%)	3 (30%)	4 (40%)	0	10 (100%)

No specific data was collected to ascertain the specific social classes of the participants, however one measure was collected that is regularly used as an indicator of class for college students: parental education (Lacy and Harris 2010; Fingerman et al 2015; Lareau 2011; Blau and Duncan 1967). The participants were asked to indicate the highest level of education achieved by each parent. Over 70 percent of the students in this study (n = 53) had parents who earned a college degree or beyond, either both parents (n = 40) or one parent (n = 13). Only ten students had neither parent earn a college degree, but of these ten, four had parents who had completed some college. This means that only six students had parents who had no reported experience with college. Table 2.5 details the parental education levels of the participants by race. Every racial group except Latinxs were similarly likely to have two parents with a college degree. Equal numbers of Latinx students had parents with college degrees and without college degrees.

Table 2.5. Parental Education by Race

	White (n = 23)	Asian (n = 14)	Black (n = 16)	Latinx (n = 9)	Multiracial (n = 8)	TOTAL
2 Parents College +	15 (38.5%)	8 (20.5%)	9 (22.5%)	3 (7%)	5 (12.5%)	40 (100%)
1 Parent College +	4 (31%)	3 (23%)	3 (23%)	1 (8%)	2 (15%)	13 (100%)
0 Parents College	1 (10%)	2 (20%)	2 (20%)	4 (40%)	1 (10%)	10 (100%)
1 Parent Less than HS	0	1 (20%)	2 (40%)	2 (40%)	0	5 (100%)

Note: Percentages are of the subtotals for each racial group. The first three rows (2 Parents College +, 1 Parent College +, and 0 Parents College) are mutually exclusive. The final row (1 Parent Less than HS) is not mutually exclusive, and includes individuals who may be counted in other categories. Six students did not report parental education (3 whites, 2 blacks, and 1 Latinx).

Analytic Strategy

I examined the interviews and survey data using narrative analysis, which puts at its center the respondents themselves. The participants in this study told stories about their thoughts and feelings, “mental maps” that give clues to how they perceive their world (Luker 2008). Although these are individual narratives, the storytellers are entrenched in larger social landscapes, in particular the different institutional types. By analyzing the multiple narratives told by participants, I am able to bring forth the meaning these students make of their experiences from an insider perspective (Weiss 1994).

As a result of my overarching analytic approach, I very carefully cultivated the data I discuss, in order to best represent the ways in which the participants presented themselves. Since the journal data were largely typed by students, I did very little editing

for the examples I give—I corrected obvious misspellings and other grammatical errors that impede understanding, unless those mistakes were relevant to the analysis. I did about one-third of the transcriptions myself, which enabled me to stay very close to my own data. In doing the transcriptions, I removed all identifying information, and assigned pseudonyms to all participants. The rest of the transcriptions were done by a professional transcription service used by many colleagues and faculty advisors. Once these transcripts were received, I went back through them to ensure they were done to my standards. All transcripts were done verbatim, which means they include stutters, false starts, repeated words, nonverbals (“mm hmm” and laughter), and fillers (“uh” and “um”). Short pauses are indicated by close ellipses (...), and self-corrections are indicated by a short dash (—). I also added emphasis by using italics or capital letters to indicate tone. I chose this approach because part of Bonilla-Silva’s explanation of the style of colorblindness includes consideration of how ideas are presented, such as with rhetorical incoherence. I wanted to present data that are as close to what participants said as possible, so I did only minor editing to ensure readability and understanding. For example, I typically removed repeated use of the word “like” (e.g. “Like she was like a really bad like person and like I just didn’t like want to hang out with her like that much.”). At times I took out words for the sake of reducing quote length and focusing on the particular part of the evidence that speaks to my point, although I made sure this did not alter the meaning or interpretation in any way. These instances are indicated by a series of four wide-spaced ellipses (. . . .). Any words I added or changed (e.g. for anonymity) are enclosed in brackets.

I utilized the qualitative software NVivo to help organize my analysis, and categorized respondents based on race, social class, and generational status. I took the data through a multiple stage coding process, in which I used a combined iterative and grounded theory approach (Charmaz 2014). I began with iterative analysis, by looking for Bonilla-Silva's colorblind racist frames (abstract liberalism, naturalization, minimization of race, and cultural racism) as well as incidents of the ideological styling he outlined in his book (semantic moves, projection, diminutives, and rhetorical incoherence). While checking my data against the previous work of Bonilla-Silva, I also began the first stages of my grounded theory analysis, which involved the inductive construction of new, abstract categories (Charmaz 2014). This process allowed me to identify emerging patterns in the data, of which I found two overarching themes related to the racial and ethnic identification of Millennials, and experiences with race in the 21st century. After identifying these themes, I began composing various analytical memos to help clarify my findings (the next stage of my grounded theory approach). I sorted my memos into theoretically related concepts, which were informed by consistent reviews and integration of existing literature (Simmons 2010). Subsequent rounds of coding were more focused on taking the developed themes, as refined through the analytical memoing, and superimposing them on all data. The final analysis was more of a deductive process, in which I mapped out the larger themes and compiled evidence from each respondent. Direct quotes—often in longer block form—are used as often as possible, so that the voices of the participants are central to the findings; again, this is a fundamental feature of narrative analysis.

I will make some brief notes about my findings moving forward. Although I analyzed my data for race, social class, and generation, neither social class nor race came through as meaningful categories. In other words, as I will explain in subsequent chapters, there were no noticeable differences that occurred across social class or generation. This was somewhat surprising for my analysis of generation level, although not completely. Given that such a small portion of my sample are foreign-born immigrants who moved to the U.S. in late adolescence (roughly three¹¹), the majority of the immigrants (about seven) moved to the U.S. before age ten and are more aligned with second-generation students (see Chapter 3 for a discussion of generation status and racial identity). Further, neither the immigrants nor second-generation students distinguished themselves in meaningful ways from individuals whose families have been in the U.S. longer (except for one student; see subsequent chapters). The fact that social class did not come through as a substantially meaningful category was not surprising at all. As I have described, my sample shared very similar characteristics in terms of their social class, vis-à-vis parental education: over 70 percent (n = 53) of the students have parents who earned a college degree, and only 10 students had neither parent earn a college degree. Additionally, only six students had parents who had *no* experience with college whatsoever, and all of the participants are themselves enrolled in fairly to highly selective colleges. Given the fact that social class and generation did not appear to be significant factors, my analysis focuses mainly on the racial identities of students. I do, however, address the points I just made in more detail throughout subsequent chapters.

¹¹ As I will explain in later chapters, not all participants clearly indicated when they moved to the U.S. or how long they spent in home countries. For instance, at least two students marked that they were U.S. born or moved to the U.S. before age one, but then used language in their journals that suggested they may have been born in the U.S. but moved *back* to their parents' home country for a significant amount of time.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I laid out the case for using college Millennials to study colorblind racial ideology, as an update to work previously done by Bonilla-Silva. I do this through a two-part study: individual journals and in-depth interviews. The journals that college students produced gave me insight into how they are processing various race in their everyday lives. The ways in which these students detailed and reflected on personal experiences, as well as those of close friends and families or observed strangers and current events happening in the world around them, showcase complex and often contradictory usage of color-blind racial ideologies. The individual interviews provided further evidence of these results, as students answered straight-forward questions about the ongoing significance of race in theirs and others' lives. It is obvious that all of the students in my study are impacted in some way by colorblind racial ideology, but these impacts differed across and within racial and ethnic groups, based largely on racial identity. Some racial minorities used color-blind racial frameworks in the same ways as whites, while others did not use the frames but rather experienced colorblindness in meaningful ways.

Before I delve into the specific findings regarding college Millennials' usage of colorblind racial frameworks, I will first explore how these students identified racially and ethnically. In the proceeding chapter, I discuss two major themes: how Millennials identify racially and ethnically across and within racial groups, and the various experiences Millennials have with their racial and ethnic identities.

Chapter 3: The Racial and Ethnic Identities of College Millennials

MILLENNIALS AND RACIAL & ETHNIC IDENTITIES

According to broad, traditional formulations, race and ethnicity are considered separate, distinctive categorizations. I align myself with other scholars (e.g. Hitlin, Brown, and Elder 2007) in arguing that this view is often problematic because it is too narrowly defined and unrealistic. Treating race and ethnicity as wholly distinct concepts largely ignores how people experience social boundaries (notwithstanding, as Hitlin and colleagues point out, the structural differences that exist based on distinctions between race and ethnicity). In other words, in “real life” people draw social boundaries that blur or crisscross the lines between their racial and ethnic identities. This can be seen in the responses of people when asked to define race and ethnicity, or to do something as simple as fill out the Census about themselves—and my data support this difficulty, as I will show later in this chapter.

Everybody has various identities that make up their selves, an idea that sociologists and psychologists have theorized about for over a century (Cooley 1902; Blumer 1937; Mead 1934; Goffman 1959). These identities can be personal, so more individual, or social, and thus based more on collective associations. Many sociologists in particular focus on the belief that there is no self without social construction, and that social interaction takes center stage when identities are being developed. One such

sociological theory is social identity theory (Tajfel 1959, 1969), wherein the self is seen as something that emerges out of social interaction. A major aim of social identity theory is explaining the self in terms of social associations, or in other words, the groups to which people belong (Hogg et al 1995, Brown 2000, Stets and Burke 2000). An individual's social identity is encompassed by the knowledge and belief that they belong to specific social categories or groups; as such, an individual derives their place in society relative to others (Turner 1975).

When it comes to social identities, the agency of individuals is a key component. People actively construct their selves within social contexts: how people view themselves and their experiences are central to their identities. This can be explained through the process of self-categorization (Turner 1987). The individual becomes the reference point for social identities, and people divide others into “like” or “unlike” people. The impacts of self-categorization are far reaching: people tend to favor in-group members over out-group members, and people are more likely to select certain in-groups based on their experiences. In other words, if I have more “Asian” experiences (e.g., my parents speak to me in Chinese, all of my friends are Chinese), I will be more likely to identify as Asian and to then see Asians more favorably than non-Asians (e.g., I will continue to seek out Asian friends over other groups).

One often significant social identity for many people is racial identity. Janet Helms (1990, p. 3) defined racial identity as “a sense of group or collective identity based on one's *perception* that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group” [emphasis in original]. The idea of perception is very important for how an individual identifies racially, and it speaks to the agency component of social identities.

However, self-perception is only one part of racial identity, as how individuals are perceived by others also plays an important role (one that I argue often supersedes self-perception, later in this chapter). As I described in chapter 1, in the U.S., race is largely based on physical attributes—i.e., that which can be seen.

In the U.S., identities are racialized in specific, meaningful ways. More precisely, racial identities are imbued with meaning beyond simple categorization: race is symbolically (and often tangibly) tied to various social, economic, and political statuses. This means that based on racial identity, people are implicitly assigned a place in society (e.g. upper class or working class, dominant group or subordinate group), and are assumed to occupy certain roles (e.g. stereotypes). For instance, being black in America means not only that you should have a collective black group identity, but you also occupy a racially-defined status (Demo and Hughes 1990) that comes with particular social roles: in other words, people might expect that you are a single or non-present parent, vote Democrat (if you vote at all), and likely work a blue-collar job.

Ethnic identity is very similar to racial identity, also being a social identity. Phinney et al (1994) defined ethnic identity as the “feeling of belonging to one’s group, a clear understanding of the meaning of one’s [group] membership, positive attitudes towards the group, familiarity with its history and culture, and involvement in its practices” (p. 169). Within the context of the U.S., ethnicity itself is a racialized concept. Social convention considers ethnicity as a subset of race; thus, Japanese (ethnicity) people are Asians (race), and Polish (ethnicity) people are white (race). The racialization of ethnicity can be seen in several historical examples in the U.S. Immigrants from places like Ireland and Italy were once not considered to be parts of the white race, but over

time, this changed. Contemporary examples can also be seen: Middle Easterners, who are often phenotypically white, are not considered “white” in the classical American sense. In fact, the U.S. Census Bureau is rethinking racial classifications so as to allow Middle Easterners to identify as something other than white on the census.

Ethnicity is a component of an individual’s overall identity, and as such its salience varies across individuals. Recently, scholars have moved from categorizing ethnic identity as a simple self-categorization (e.g. Korean American) to more complex understandings that take into account orientation and attachment to ethnic origin, as well as degree of self-exploration of ethnic group membership (Umaña-Taylor 2011).

Millennials exist in U.S. social context, which means they have racial and ethnic identities that are racialized in the same ways as everyone else in this country. Millennials, however, have also been raised amidst claims of colorblind or post-racial rhetoric. This begs the question, what does it mean to be racialized in a society that, at least in public messaging, denies race as a significant identity? In this 21st century context, what are the impacts of racial and ethnic identities?

As my data suggest, race is still a significant part of these Millennials’ lives, in many different ways. In the rest of this chapter, I will outline how race impacts Millennials. First, I will discuss the struggles Millennials have in attempting to define race and ethnicity, and what these struggles mean for their own identification as well as how they classify (or attempt not to classify) others. Second, I will explore how these Millennials identify racially and ethnically, which will include trends across and between racial and ethnic groups, and important social influences on identity. Finally, I will discuss experiences these Millennials have with their racial and ethnic identities,

including identity pressures they feel, concerns with racial authenticity, and issues of legitimacy and identity.

DEFINING RACE AND ETHNICITY

As I outlined in Chapter 1, race is often defined as an identity based on a person's physical characteristics, such as skin color (Brunsma and Rockquemore 2001; Phinney 1996), while ethnicity is typically based on country or region of origin (Pearlman and Waters 2002), and includes things like cultural traditions and values that transcend generations (Spencer and Markstrom-Adams 1990). Further, race is largely a social construct that constantly changes based largely on dominant social groups (and to a much lesser extent, pushback against classifications from those with lower social power).

Howard Winant (2006) described the constructed nature of race very well:

Although the concept of race appeals to biologically-based human characteristics (so-called phenotypes), selection of these particular human features for purposes of racial signification is always and necessarily a social and historical process. There is no biological basis for distinguishing human groups along the lines of 'race', and the sociohistorical categories employed to differentiate among these groups reveal themselves, upon serious examination, to be imprecise if not completely arbitrary (p. 999).

When attempting to define race and ethnicity in a way that disaggregates the two, arguments can be quite circular, and sometimes seem tantamount to “race is not ethnicity, and ethnicity is not race, because they are different.” As the definitions I previously explained showcase, the difference between the two is most often simply the choice of descriptive word—race or ethnicity—particularly when thinking about racial and ethnic identification (Worrell and Gardner-Kitt 2006). In other words, racial identity is based on

identification with a racial group, and ethnic identity is based on identification with an ethnic group—and both include forms of shared history.

“It’s like this and like that and like this, and uh...”—How Millennials Defined Race And Ethnicity

Given the slipperiness of race and ethnicity, how did the Millennials in this study define the ideas? In order to get a picture of how these young adults conceptualized race and ethnicity, I asked each of the 35 interviewees a direct question: How do you define the ideas of race and ethnicity? If a respondent needed prompting, I told them to imagine themselves explaining the concepts to a Martian, or someone ostensibly unfamiliar with the terms.

Overall, there was general confusion and lack of certainty for all of the Millennials in my study when defining race and ethnicity. This inability to coherently define race and ethnicity came through in respondents across age, race, ethnicity, and various other identifiers, signaling that this was a universal issue for all of the respondents. I will highlight two examples.

I interviewed Alejandro, a government and sociology double major from Mexico, at his school in a conference room that is reserved for members of a scholars program to which he belongs. Alejandro was very confident throughout the interview, and his responses suggested he was a very conscious, well-read, and well-informed student. When I asked him to define race and ethnicity, however, his answer was as confusing as the concepts themselves can be: “It’s ... [laughs] I’d start sort of from a general angle, and

sort of work my way in, but not be too narrow about it, because it's a broad concept, and not try to generalize a very subjective concept.” You can hear Alejandro literally attempting to grasp these slippery ideas.

Maya, an Indian American student who is an undecided sophomore with interest in joining the business school, pointed out the same “subjective” nature of race and ethnicity, labeling race as a “social construct. . . . that doesn’t even exist.” To Maya, ethnicity has more to do with cultural and religious background, but she had trouble separating that from race: “But I guess in terms of what people like to label it, um, like a similar thing but not exactly the same, but similar enough where I think just eth- like ethnicity carries that like—like a-a specific cultural like thing to it that maybe race doesn't, but I know they're like very similar.”

As you can see with the previous examples, which are representative of the entire sample, nearly every student had significant enough trouble attempting to define race and ethnicity that they became much more incoherent in their speaking than was typical. These students were often reduced to spit-balling, and it came through in numerous “uhs,” “ums,” and pauses. One Millennial, Jameson, a 20-year old self-identified African American, provided one of the more humorous explanations, still very typical of many of the respondents’ answers. Jameson was largely a very articulate person; as a journalism minor who hosts a regular radio show at his university, he is obviously used to speaking. However, when asked to define the ideas of race and ethnicity, he suddenly lost his train of thought:

“Race and ethnicity. Race and ethnicity, how do I define the ideas. When I think about, let's see. When I think about race versus ethnicity. I'd say, typically, when I think about race, I think more about ... It's a loaded question. I think about ... Honestly, I think about them pretty intertwined, because when I think about race

and ethnicity, I think about heritage, and it's kind of hard to brand a race or an ethnicity, sort of, because the thing that popped into my mind right now is, say I'm like an Afro-Latino or something like that, I have that African, I could say, like, "I'm black," on the one hand, but I could also say, "I'm Latino," like, ethnically, so I might say, then, that ethnicity is more to do with, like, heritage, and, like, your background that way, whereas race is more, yeah, I don't know. I'm going to have to go on to Wikipedia real quick. Come back to me in five minutes."

Jameson finally gives up at the end, and simply shrugs and says, "I don't know."

Jameson's response is also indicative of another trend in thoughts about race and ethnicity: the two concepts are obviously interrelated, but also somehow different. These Millennials understood the general conceptualizations of race as having to do with physical features, and ethnicity involving a person's culture or nationality...but then, as their explanations illustrate, race can at times also be culture, and ethnicity might include a person's physical attributes too. While these Millennials saw race and ethnicity as intertwined, the limits of the overlap were often blurry. That Millennials appear to be just as confused about race and ethnicity as the broader population of U.S. residents showcases that clarity on the topic is not getting any better; in fact, due to the increasing "boxes" one can check, it may be getting worse.

The Subjective Nature of Race

Millennials also clearly described the subjective nature of race and ethnicity as categorizations. Several Millennials specifically mentioned that race was a social construct, although this may be somewhat unsurprising given that many of the participants were enrolled in sociology courses at the time of the study. Beyond this, however, many of the Millennials spoke or wrote about how race is a moving target: it is something that changes based on different things, including social construction, but also

social context and the perceptions of others. Regina, a 21 year old whose father is African American and mother is a Filipina immigrant, spoke about the subjectivity of race overall and from the perspective of someone who may not present clearly as any one race.

“How would I define them? Well, um they are kind of hard to define because you know they’re fake (laughs). But like there’s something. There’s something that is like pretty fluid, doesn’t make much sense. Um, I guess peoples race and genes, gosh yeah, I don’t know. I don’t have a solid definition for you. It’s like yeah, what would you say that is? Yeah, I don’t know. That’s like ... it’s something. Like it’s a concept, but like it can’t even easily be defined because it changes ... because it can change. And it can change within a day, like my race at 10:00 a.m. might be different by 2:00 p.m. depending on who’s looking at me (laughs) so I don’t know. Yeah, I have no idea.”

Regina has a medium brown skin color and at first glance looks like a typical African American woman. Upon a closer look, however, she has longer, very curly hair, and almond-shaped eyes: indicators that she *might* have racial or ethnic origins other than solely African American. What is also interesting is that Regina is a sociology major, who has had plenty of exposure to theoretical understandings of race and ethnicity; yet and still, she herself had trouble with clear definitions.

Other Millennials took a different approach to the subjective nature of race and ethnicity, intimating that it depends on how you personally identify. Again, this cut across racial groups and generation. I will highlight the responses of four Millennials, each from different groups.

Djeneba, a 19-year old biracial woman with an African immigrant father from Mali and a white mother from the Midwest, talked about how race and ethnicity changes based on where and how you were raised, and who was around you while you grew up.

“Um, I think it has a lot to do with how you grew up and who you grew up with, how you were raised and um kind of like where you were raised and all that. Um, 'cause for me although my par—like my dad's African American, my mom's white, um, I

was raised in an area that was like I said, very Americanized, very white, so that's kind of how I grew up. So I think that although it does have to do with you know where your family is from, I think it also has to do with where you're from, so where, how you were, where you were born and raised, who you grew up with, like what type of friends you have, um, what type of ideas your parents kind of placed around you.”

Patti, a second-generation Dominican and Mexican woman, echoed Djeneba’s ideas regarding upbringing. “In some scenarios, like people who are adopted, you know may, they may identify as one way and people may say something about it, but if that's how you were raised, if that's how you grew up, then I would say, ‘Yes.’” Patti clearly believes that a very important part of how people identify racially and ethnically is their upbringing, to the point that upbringing could potentially supersede actual race.

Sanjay, a third-year Asian Indian student whose parents immigrated from India, simply said that he was not in a position to tell other people how they identified; it was up to them as individuals: “...it's also not my call to tell what other people identify as in terms of race. Um, so, I guess, it's also independent decision.” For Sanjay, personal agency is key. Skylar, a white 18-year old first year student with no immigrant parents, talked about personal choice in light of societal pressure.

“I think it's like a something you personally identify with. Um, but I think ... I don't know. I'd say ... I don't know. Just something I guess you identify with even if, or something you're forced to identify with, in a sense. I think it's something that society has like kind of made of thing, well obviously, but yeah, just your culture, I guess. For ethnicity I'd say your culture. For race, I don't really know how I would identify that, because, I think, that's just something society has like determined. "Oh this is your race. This is what you should identify as," even if you necessarily don't identify.”

As Skylar indicates, race and ethnicity are personal choices, even if individuals decide that they want to conform with societal pressure or choose not to do so.

Confusion with Latino/Hispanic Label

The subjective nature of racial and ethnic classification also came through prominently in confusion with the Hispanic origin categorization on the census. At least one Millennial from each of the broader racial groups (and all of the Latinx Millennials except one) expressed confusion about the census' classification of "Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin" not being considered a racial category or just being confusing overall. For example, GIANNA, whose mother is from the Philippines and father is from Haiti, spoke about the complicated process of identifying Latinxs along the racial spectrum:

"It's very interesting that Hispanics, Latinos have their own category, because I know learning in class they don't really know where to put them in the racial spectrum. It was always black, white. It was Asian and yeah, that's about it: black, white, Asian. I remember learning in sociology how race was always red, yellow, white, and black, and it's interesting people don't really know where to put Hispanics."

The confusion these Millennials experienced while looking at the census question fits with existing research on the categories the Census uses: in the last U.S. census, Latinxs accounted for over 95% of all people who checked "Some Other Race" as a racial classification (Cohn and Krogstad 2014). Personally, I regularly experience this same confusion regarding the official classification of those with Latinx or Hispanic background. When looking at governmental or official forms, I can easily answer the race question—I identify as black or African American—but when I am asked if I have "Hispanic or Latino origin," I pause. My maternal grandfather is Puerto Rican, but because I was not raised with any connection to my Latinx heritage, I simply identify as black. Technically, however, I do have Latinx origin. What do I check?

HOW COLLEGE MILLENNIALS IDENTIFY RACIALLY AND ETHNICALLY

As I have argued, and as the voices of the Millennials in this study echo, race and ethnicity are slippery, intertwined concepts. Racial and ethnic identities are based not only on physical attributes, but also cultural beliefs and practices. These are all based in part (if not in large part) on social interaction. Your physical features are perceived and confirmed (or contested) by others, and cultural practices are by nature social, hence how they are maintained through generations.

Here I bring back in self-categorization theory. Self-categorization theory proposes that individuals are made up of multiple selves, at both personal and group levels, which are associated with different comparative contexts (Turner et al 1987). Because self-categorization theory conceptualizes the self at different levels (e.g. individual and group), it has been used to explore a variety of social phenomena, including identity salience (when and why different selves become activated in various situations), social influence, and collective behavior (Spears 2011). Considering race and ethnicity, group membership often occurs within American culture that blurs lines between race and identity; similarly, self-identification often blurs lines between race and ethnicity. Understanding how people self-categorize is important for measuring race and ethnicity, because there are social consequences for particular identities (Hitlin et al 2007). Identifying with particular social groups defines us and those around us, and these groupings are based on cultural labels, not analytic differences (such as those employed by the U.S. Census, which I discuss shortly). We saw this come through in how the

students in this study talked about race and ethnicity, particularly with regards to Latinx identity: Hispanics in America do not neatly fit into the general racial categories based on their own lived experiences and thoughts.

Fortunately, a perfect, complete separation of race and ethnicity is effectively unnecessary for my analysis—at base, these Millennials choose racial and ethnic identities that are both specific (“I’m Caribbean American;” “I’m Salvadoran”) and general (“I’m black;” “I’m Latino”), depending on the level at which they are thinking at the time. Other scholars have posited and explored the same idea, suggesting that individuals assert racial and ethnic identities differentially depending on things like contextually specific demands, social circumstances, and structural constraints (Sellers et al 1998; Okamura 1981; Nagel 1996).

In the proceeding analysis, I discuss the racial and ethnic identification of the Millennials in my study. I first outline the various measures of racial and ethnic identity I used, as well as how I classified the students along generational status. Following that, I explore the differences and similarities between and among white Millennials and Millennials of color, which includes parental and other social influences.

Measuring Racial and Ethnic Identity

In this study, I employed three different measures of racial and ethnic identity: an online demographic survey that participants filled out at the time of consent for the study, an initial journal prompt that asked them to reflect on their race and ethnicity, and a direct

question in the interview that asked them how they identify racially and ethnically according to current U.S. Census categories.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, race and ethnicity are two different categorizations, which have been represented by two separate questions on previous censuses (see Figure 3.1). The first question asks if the respondent is of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin; ethnicity is essentially relegated to either having or not having these origins, and the question explicitly states, “Hispanic origins are not races.” The second question is the “race” question, and the current iteration asks respondents to indicate their race or races by checking applicable boxes. As Figure 3.1 shows, the choices are loosely grouped into categories: White; Black, African American, or Negro; various Asian, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander groups; and Some Other Race. The census is obviously based on self-identification, as individuals can choose whatever identity they feel best represents them.

Figure 3.1. 2010 Census Race and Ethnicity Question

→ **NOTE:** Please answer **BOTH** Question 8 about Hispanic origin and Question 9 about race. For this census, Hispanic origins are not races.

8. Is Person 1 of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?

No, not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin

Yes, Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano

Yes, Puerto Rican

Yes, Cuban

Yes, another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin — *Print origin, for example, Argentinean, Colombian, Dominican, Nicaraguan, Salvadoran, Spaniard, and so on.* ↴

9. What is Person 1's race? Mark one or more boxes.

White

Black, African Am., or Negro

American Indian or Alaska Native — *Print name of enrolled or principal tribe.* ↴

<input type="checkbox"/> Asian Indian	<input type="checkbox"/> Japanese	<input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian
<input type="checkbox"/> Chinese	<input type="checkbox"/> Korean	<input type="checkbox"/> Guamanian or Chamorro
<input type="checkbox"/> Filipino	<input type="checkbox"/> Vietnamese	<input type="checkbox"/> Samoan
<input type="checkbox"/> Other Asian — <i>Print race, for example, Hmong, Laotian, Thai, Pakistani, Cambodian, and so on.</i> ↴	<input type="checkbox"/> Other Pacific Islander — <i>Print race, for example, Fijian, Tongan, and so on.</i> ↴	

Some other race — *Print race.* ↴

The Census Bureau’s treatment of race and ethnicity has changed throughout history, which speaks to the broader shifting constructions of race and ethnicity in this country. In fact, the 2000 Census was the first opportunity people had to self-identify as more than one race. As a result, racial demographics between 1990 and 2000 (or other years prior) are not directly comparable, and the Census Bureau cautions “interpreting

changes in the racial composition of the U.S. population over time” (Grieco and Cassidy 2001, p. 2). This trend towards change continues, as the Census Bureau has been experimenting with new methods of collecting race data for the upcoming 2020 census. There have been several iterations tested in the years since the 2010 census involving various combinations of race and Hispanic origin. In fact, as I write this, the Census Bureau is testing a version in which they eliminate the terms “race” and “origin” altogether, instead favoring the term “categories” (Cohn 2015) (see Appendix for visuals).

I utilized one of the Census Bureau’s experimental question formats as the race and ethnicity question on my online demographic questionnaire. As Figure 3.2 shows, this test version included a series of open-ended boxes where respondents indicate either “race or origin.” In essence, this version leaves room for a respondent to indicate all of their racial and ethnic identity or background. Interestingly for the participants in my study, aside from individuals who indicated they were of two or more racial backgrounds, whites were most likely to list more than one ethnic origin (e.g., Swedish, Irish, and German). As I will describe later in this chapter, however, whites were also least likely to meaningfully identify with their ethnic backgrounds.

Figure 3.2. Census Test Question for Race and Ethnicity

8. What is Person 1's race or origin? Mark one or more boxes AND write in the specific race(s) or origin(s).

White — *Print origin(s), for example, German, Irish, Lebanese, Egyptian, and so on.* ↴

Black, African Am., or Negro — *Print origin(s), for example, African American, Haitian, Nigerian, and so on.* ↴

Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin — *Print origin(s), for example, Mexican, Mexican Am., Puerto Rican, Cuban, Argentinean, Colombian, Dominican, Nicaraguan, Salvadoran, Spaniard, and so on.* ↴

American Indian or Alaska Native — *Print name of enrolled or principal tribe(s), for example, Navajo, Mayan, Tlingit, and so on.* ↴

Asian — *Print origin(s), for example, Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Hmong, Laotian, Thai, Pakistani, Cambodian, and so on.* ↴

Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander — *Print origin(s), for example, Native Hawaiian, Guamanian or Chamorro, Samoan, Fijian, Tongan, and so on.* ↴

Some other race or origin — *Print race(s) or origin(s).* ↴

My second measure of racial and ethnic identity was a prompted journal entry. I sent the initial prompt out to each student who was keeping a journal for the study, either directly or via the professor of the course in which they were completing the assignment.

This initial prompt was meant to help jumpstart participant journaling, as well as to give me insight into how the students identified racially and ethnically. The prompt read as follows:

Reflect on your own race and/or ethnicity. What is your race and/or ethnicity? Why do you believe this is your racial identity? What does it mean to you to have this particular identity? Do you have specific cultural beliefs or traditions that go with this identity?

Nearly every student (approximately 90%) who completed the journals responded to this initial prompt.

Finally, for the Millennials I interviewed, during the interview I handed them a copy of the 2010 census race question (Figure 3.1) and asked, “If you were filling out the census about yourself now, what would you check and why?” This question was preceded by a series of follow-ups designed to uncover the respondents’ thoughts behind their choices and the question format overall, as well as questions about what they believe it means to identify racially and ethnically in the ways they do.

Looking at my data, for nearly every participant I have two measures of racial and ethnic self-identification, and for half of my participants I have three measures of self-identification. Additionally, for the half of my participants that I interviewed, I also have data on how I perceived their race as an observer. Using multiple measures of racial self-classification (as well as observed racial classification) is important, because individuals may report their race differently not only based on ancestry, but also on a number of factors that include social cues and contextual demands, symbolic group membership, as well as the strategic pursuit of various sociocultural outcomes (e.g., political gain, citizenship rights, economic gains) (Saperstein 2006; Almaguer 1994; Davis 1991; Lopez

1996; Waters 1990). The various measures I use allow me to develop a deeper understanding of how my participants self-identified, in keeping with my strategy of narrative analysis wherein the individual is seen as the central source of truth about their life and experiences. In essence, I did not want to assume particular identities for these Millennials; rather, I wanted to be able to present these students as they see themselves, as accurately as possible. Additionally, this triangulation would then allow me to see if there were any differences in how students identified at different times. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, the identity choices of the Millennials in my study showcase the *messiness* of race and ethnicity, in particular through the rigid racial and ethnic categories that often do not match their lived experiences. This speaks to the broader trends for racial and ethnic identity categorization that entities like the U.S. Census are picking up on: despite expectations for clearly defined and delineated racial groups (i.e., “Check this box or boxes to say what you are.”), the existing categories do not work very well at all. People constantly push back against the limiting choices, often because of confusion. The Millennials in my study were no exception.

Generational Status

I classified the participants into three broad groups for my analysis: native born individuals with either no immigrant parents or only one immigrant parent, second generation Americans (both parents are immigrants), and immigrants. Although second generation Millennials are also born in the U.S., most literature recognizes differences for this group because both of their parents are foreign-born immigrants. Under certain circumstances, some second generationers may identify more closely with foreign-born

individuals; for instance, if they spend a significant amount of time in their parents' home country (Waters 1994).

Although I make these classifications, I recognize that immigration data is a bit messy with regards to nativity—there are somewhat inconsistent classifications (Oporesa and Landale 1997). For instance, “true second generation” typically refers only to individuals born in the U.S. to immigrant parents (Zhou 1997), but second generation may also include foreign-born children that immigrated before they reach adulthood (Gans 1992; Portes 1996). This group is often referred to as the “1.5 generation,” a term coined by Rubén Rumbaut (1991). The 1.5 generation can be further broken into those who immigrated very early, say before age thirteen, and those who immigrated between ages thirteen and seventeen. Of the ten Millennials in my study who identified themselves as immigrants, three moved to the U.S. by the time they were one year old, so although I describe them as immigrants, I treat them like second generationers in my analysis. I did not utilize the label 1.5 generation because there were no noticeable differences between those who immigrated as adolescents and those who immigrated as teenagers. Additionally, in keeping with my analytical frame, the students' voices are central, so I typically allowed the participants to label themselves without much reclassification by me. Alejandro is one example of this—recall that technically he is U.S. born, and so officially would be second generation. However, based on his own experience (living in Mexico until 16 but crossing the border almost daily), he identifies as an immigrant. In Alejandro's case, I use the label he gives himself (immigrant versus second generation) in favor of how he analyzes his own experiences.

Identity Trends Across Race

The Millennials in this study follow the known trends of racial and ethnic identification for whites and people of color. The white students tended to not identify strongly with a white racial identity, while the students of color typically had stronger identification with their specific racial or ethnic identities.

White Millennials

The white Millennials typically identified as simply white or Caucasian. It was clear that for the majority of the white Millennials in the study, they were only talking or writing (or even thinking) about their own race because the study specifically called for it (or there was a specific journal prompt asking for it). Many of the white students spoke or wrote about a lack of connection to their racial identity. Skylar, an 18-year old first-year student with no immigrant parents, offered commentary that is very representative of the majority of responses:

“I don't know. I think for a lot of people in my generation, we just like ... I don't know. There's kind of a weird blur of what people identify as, cause like you want to ... like I don't think anyone would be like, ‘Oh hi. I'm [Skylar]. I'm white.’ I think everyone would say like, ‘I'm American. I'm from these ...’ I don't know, like, ‘... this descent.’ I don't think me or anyone I know like has a real connection to being white.”

This is a perfect example of how whites operate within colorblindness—they are white if it has to be pointed out, but they generally do not think it is a big deal. In Skylar's case, she even tries to say that she and other Millennials would rather identify as American than as a distinct race. Skylar was the only other white student who made such an explicit connection between a broad “American” identity and whiteness, however.

Leah, a 21-year old psychology and business double major and no immigrant parents, invoked this same idea in her journal, comparing white identity to other racial groups, writing, “I do not feel super close with my racial identity, I feel as if the white community is not very close or intertwined unlike other racial groups.” Avery, a 20-year old white woman who only completed the journals and has no immigrant parents, wrote about white being a lack of culture:

“I always thought I felt culturally insufficient, and I recognize that as a white person this seems very insincere because I am aware of the privileges that being white has granted me, but it’s always nice to have strong aspects of your identity. It’s not that I’ve given this much thought really, but I’m just now thinking of this while focusing on this prompt. So to me, I don’t really feel like I have a racial identity but a lack thereof; being white is like the absence of culture.”

This is an interesting view, because it is clearly not true. All racial and ethnic groups have “culture,” and white groups in the U.S. celebrate different cultures quite often—whether it is holidays like St. Patrick’s Day, American versions of other countries’ celebrations like Oktoberfest, or Greek and other ethnic festivals held regularly around the country. What Avery is speaking to however is how these events often become subsumed under “normal” culture because of the dominant position whites enjoy.

When asked about their racial identities, the white students either had very little to say about what it meant to be white or, in the case of the interviews, became quite incoherent while attempting to describe it. Ben, a 22-year old fifth-year sociology major, answered the question very succinctly during his interview. After establishing that he identified as white, I asked him what it meant to have such an identity. He responded, “Um, nothing, really. I try not to make my race, like, who I am.” Again, this is classic color-blind thinking: in this “post-racial” society, race is not supposed to matter. Ben’s

call for this regarding his own identity is almost a challenge to others who might try to “make race who they are.” In fact, Ben consistently stated that things were “not about race” throughout his journal and during his interview.

The white students who were not as concise as Ben became incomprehensible or were obviously stumped by the question about their racial identities. Evelyn, a 19-year old woman from North Carolina, showcased this confusion well, repeating the question over and over as she attempted to work out an answer: “Hmm? What does it mean? I guess it means...I mean... Uh, [laughs]. Yeah, these are like curve ball questions. I've never got these before. What does it mean?”

Evelyn began to qualify her answer, stumbled a bit more, and then asked me to repeat the question. After I did, she launched into another confusing attempt at answering:

“Um, honestly, I've never thought about it before. So, whenever I get any of these—Like on the SAT, obviously I'm white, so I will check this box. But , I don't know. Obviously, you're African American, so you would check this box. But like, if this was on the SAT at my school, people would be very confused, because ... Wait, it might even be ... I don't know. Samoan? Native Hawaiian? I don't know. It's kind of goofy. Or they could make it a lot bigger too, and just include a lot more options, you know? But I mean, yeah. I guess, what does it mean to identify as white? I mean ... uhh ... it's like, good, I guess? I don't know. I mean, I don't really know like—We tried to go to Ellis Island to see where we were from, and we didn't really get anywhere. Oh, except for my dad's side wasn't on there, wasn't on any of the lists. And then we found out that we came down from Canada. Which is cool, because I always felt a bond with Canada. And we always lived right next to Canada, until I was 13. And we went skiing there all the time. And Toronto's so fun. I don't know. Just a good vibe there. But yeah.”

As you can see, she takes several detours, comes back to the question, and still does not provide an actual answer. In fact, when I pushed her further, she went into an even *longer* story that had nothing to do with the topic (and covered some experiences she had in high

school that would rival the plot of *Mean Girls*). But she could never come up with an answer to the question of what it meant to be white. While the other white Millennials did not quite take it as far as Evelyn did, many still showcased the same type of incoherent ability to answer the question.

What was also interesting was that although the white Millennials did not identify very strongly with their racial identities, many of them were very well versed in the ethnic backgrounds—they simply did not connect to them. In fact, aside from multiracial individuals, whites listed the most ethnic backgrounds on their demographic survey, many writing in as many as four ethnic origins. Part of the expectation and privileged ability of white immigrants, however, is that over time, they give up previous ethnic identities to become “American.” The whites in this study demonstrated this trend.

The three second-generation whites in the study provide interesting examples of how white ethnic identity can work. Simeon, who, because he emigrated to the U.S. from Armenia when he was only one year old more closely fits the profile of second-generation, simply identified as white. He generally spoke about his Armenian heritage with a seeming cold detachment—it was simply something that *was*, more like an uninteresting fact rather than a meaningful identity. Nadia, who is also Armenian, expressed much more connection to her ethnic identity. She spoke energetically about father pushing her and her sister to be involved in the Armenian community, their attendance of an Armenian church, and going to an Armenian camp when she was younger. Interestingly, however, she also talks about being white, and that people typically simply view her as white and do not assume anything else—unless she happens to tell them she is Armenian, which does not seem to be often. Her friend group is also

almost exclusively white, which she laughs off as something that just “happened” because an on campus group she is a part of is majority white. This is also an example of how white students often used color-blind ideology to naturalize the fact that their social circles were almost exclusively white (see Chapter 4 for more details).

Zahiya was the only white Millennial to not take this hands-off approach to her racial and ethnic identity as a white person. Zahiya’s parents were born in Turkey, and even though she was born in the U.S., she identifies very strongly as a Turkish woman. When I interviewed her, she was wearing a headscarf, and she had an almost imperceptible accent. Although she identifies her race as white, she noted, “But I don’t feel very white.” Speaking about her racial identity, she said, “Because like—I feel like what's weird about Turkey is it's white, but it's like, ethnic? So when it's like, what's your race, it's like, I'm white, but when you talk about white people, you don't really picture an ethnic person?” She also talked about how when she and her parents are standing around with other white people, they do not “look as white” or “sound as white.” Zahiya firmly identifies as Turkish, a Middle Eastern person who might be considered white technically, but was very different from a typical American white person. This is indicative of newer trends in the U.S. in terms of racial classification—even the U.S. Census Bureau is considering making Middle Eastern a new category on the next census, to better capture how people really identify (Cohn 2015).

Millennials of Color

The black, Latinx, and Asian Millennials typically identified more strongly and in a much more straightforward way with their racial or ethnic identities. There was very little discrepancy between what they listed on their demographic questionnaires, and how they

answered questions about their racial identities in the interview or wrote about their racial identities in their journals.

All of the Millennials of color talked or wrote about similar ideas being part of what made up their racial and ethnic identities: cultural foods, music, languages, holidays, and travel to parents' (or their) home countries. Often these were talked about as happening in concert with more traditionally "American" things (e.g., celebrating two Independence Days, a home country's and July 4th). Two of the Asian Millennials, both Chinese, talked about attending Chinese School while they were growing up, which was intended to teach them language and other cultural Chinese things.

There was some expected nuance for black Millennials, given that the terms "black" and "African American" are often used interchangeably, yet actual racial identification is more complex. The differences occurred across generational status. Native born blacks with no immigrant parents identified as either African American or black, usually both (i.e. they switched between the two freely, in their descriptions of themselves and others). Blacks with immigrant parents or who were immigrants themselves typically described an ethnic identification. What was interesting is that all of the black Millennials with Caribbean heritage not only specified Caribbean as part of their ethnic identity, but actively distinguished that they were *not* African American. For instance, Aisha, whose parents immigrated from Jamaica, strongly identifies as Caribbean American, and Delilah, who immigrated herself from Jamaica, identifies as Caribbean. Both women made a point to say that they do *not* identify as African American. Sophie, a 19-year old information science major who completed the journal portion of the study, indicated on her demographic survey that she was born in the U.S.

and her parents were from Trinidad and Tobago. At the same time, however, in her journal she uses language (“When I moved to America...”) that suggests that she spent significant time there herself before moving to the U.S. While she does not explicitly address whether she would consider herself an immigrant or second-generation, she specifically identifies herself as Afro-Caribbean, and never once addresses herself as African American (or American at all, similar to Delilah).

Conversely, all of the black Millennials with African heritage named themselves as African American, while still discussing their specific African culture. None of these Millennials said they were *not* African Americans. This could be because “African” is both their heritage and literally in the descriptor “African American.” In fact, some of the Millennials talked about this very fact, like Esse, a participant in the journal portion of the study whose father is from Nigeria, did in a journal entry: “I am a Nigerian and African-American (so by definition I guess I am literally African-American).”

What was common, however, across all of the black Millennials, was that they used “black” to describe themselves and others, in the interviews and in journal entries. This is to be expected given the way the term black is applied in conventional terminology, as well as how blacks are typically viewed—as a monolithic group. Scholars like Mary Waters (1994, 1999) has well-known work on the racial identities of black immigrants and their children, in which she discusses the ideas that while many black immigrants come to the U.S. with different notions of race, they are typically forced into the U.S. racial system, whether they want to be or not. The children of black immigrants often have the most difficult time distinguishing themselves from native born African Americans, because they may lack markers like distinctive accents that set them

apart. Of the black individuals I interviewed (or who completed a video journal, so I could hear their voice), only two had recognizable accents: Delilah, whose accent was very light, and Jasmine, a second-generation self-identified Afro-Latina. Jasmine's mother is Colombian and her father is Trinidadian, and she spoke at length about her parents' impact on her racial identification. Her family only listened to Caribbean music in the house when she was growing up, and her mother pushed her to identify as Afro-Latina, so she could recognize her Latina and Caribbean heritage. Her father took an even more active role, out of concern for her accent—and arguably her general identity:

“Cause, my father when I young, he told me that I was talking like an American. He was like, 'You're talking like an American, no more Zack and Cody, no more SpongeBob. No more nothing!' And he put nothing but like, Caribbean and African films so I could get some type of accent. And he was like [laughing], 'No child of mine will be speaking like that. You're speaking like your name is Zachary or something.' I was like, 'Dad, wow!' [laughs]”

As a result, Jasmine has an accent, although she can mask it well enough when she chooses. Regardless of her attempts to hide her accent, Jasmine also spoke about recurring incidents with friends who playfully rib her about her accent, saying that she is not “American” (many of these friends are immigrants or second-generation students themselves).

There was a pervasive narrative about doing well educationally for second-generation and immigrant black and Asian Millennials, which appeared to be tied to their ethnic identities. I will showcase two examples that serve as examples of how all of these students framed parts of their ethnic identities in terms of educational achievement. The first is from Kumar, a 21-year old computer science major with immigrant parents from India. Kumar participated in the journal portion of the study, and in his journal, he

reflected on his racial identity, writing: “Yeah, I guess growing up, being Indian, it's really different. A mentality of what school is supposed to be, and how you're supposed to, what kind of grades your supposed to get in school. Anything less than a B is kind of unacceptable.” The second example is from Gabriel, a 20-year old information science major from California. During his interview he talked about the influence his Nigerian parents had on his racial identity, and how education was an important part of it. He had reiterated the same idea in his journal as well.

“In the Nigerian culture education is highly important. Basically it's one of the biggest factors when being Nigerian is that you do well academically. It's disappointing if you don't do well academically. It's disrespectful if you don't do well academically, from a young age I've always been, thanks to my mom and dad, I've been always on my books most of the time.”

Latinx Identity: Revisiting the Confusion of the Latinx/Hispanic Label

As previously discussed, there was confusion across the board for Latinx identity. Millennials from all races were unsure why it was a distinct category or why it was not considered a race in the same way as Asian, black, or white. Interestingly, all but one of the Latinx students expressed in some way that they believe their race *is* Latinx, whether or not they would check a different race if they “had to” because of a technicality (e.g. skin color). These results fit with existing research on Latinxs in the U.S., given that all of the Latinx Millennials in this study are either 2nd generation or immigrants. Immigrants and second-generation Latinxs are more likely to identify racially as Other, Asian, or no race at all (Vaquera and Kao 2006).

Yoseline, a 19-year old second-generation woman whose parents immigrated from Honduras, discussed the paradox of Latinx racial identity very clearly. When asked to indicate what she would check on the census form, she responded, “I would check

‘Yes’ on other Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin. My race would be none of these. . . . I don't know what I would put for race. I would write under Some Other Race.” When prompted further, she intimated her own confusion, stating, “I feel like it's not really clear. I don't know. This isn't clear at all. Like I said, **I would consider my race as Hispanic**, but under here it is asking for what my race is, and none of these apply to me. I don't think these options are ... I feel like they're missing stuff.” By saying that she felt like “they’re missing stuff,” Yoseline is explaining that the current categorizations are not sufficient to accurately capture her racial identification. She believes her race is Hispanic, and as her demographic questionnaire indicates, her ethnicity would be Honduran.

Camila, a government and politics major with immigrant parents from El Salvador and Spain, also talked about the insufficient nature of the census questions. “I know it already says Hispanic, but just to re-clarify because **I don't fall into the rest of these [other race options]**.” I asked her to speak a little more about her racial identity as she sees it, in terms of the census questions.

“I don't know. I just feel like the optionsThey still don't cover where I think ... I don't know. **I know I'm not white and I know I'm not black. I know I'm not American Indian, clearly not. I'm not like the rest of these.** I know it says Some Other Race, like you could click that, but I don't know. I feel weird writing it because you've already specified in the top that you're Hispanic, so why would you redo it?”

Camila clearly struggles with the various options in light of her Latina identity. For her, even the Some Other Race category does not work.

Four of the Latinx Millennials talked specifically about their skin color and how that impacts the way they would fill out the census. Julieta, a 19-year old junior communications major with immigrant parents from El Salvador, talked at length about

her racial identity, and the fact that Latinx people are a very diverse community. “Yeah, we're Latino, we're Hispanic, but we come in white, we come in black, we come in Native American—or *mestizo*.” When looking at the census form, she easily rattled off that she was Latina, but then when looking at the race question, she focused on it being a technicality: she would select white, “because race is ... I see it as the color of your skin, and technically white-ish is the color of my skin. So I'd go with White.” When prompted for the reasoning behind her choices, she spoke more about the curious case of Latinx people and race:

“Race is so hard sometimes, because you have technically the skin color, and then you have Asian Indian, Japanese, and ... So you have the actual races and where people are actually from, but yet Latinos have to put "Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin" and then identify your actual origin. To answer your question really, I also like just calling myself Salvadorian American. Just because I feel like it encompasses what I really feel like. If I could do that, I would.”

Alejandro evoked his skin color as well, but to a different end. As previously mentioned, Alejandro is from Mexico, but he has an interesting background that makes classifying his generation a little more complicated. Alejandro was technically born in the U.S., in a small border town in Texas, but as soon as he was born he spent the next 15 years of his life living on the Mexican side of the border. He attended school in the U.S., however, traveling back and forth each day. As such, he is technically U.S. born, but he considers himself to be an immigrant. When he was faced with the census form, his response was more reluctant given the categories: “...if I had to choose, I guess I would pick Some Other Race, and I would just put Hispanic probably. Uh, because I wouldn't check off the white one, even though I'm not as dark for being Mexican.” For Alejandro, he understood that his skin color would make him white in the U.S., but rejected that notion.

When speaking about her racial identity, Patti, the Mexican and Dominican Millennial, invoked technicality in the same way that Julieta (Salvadoran) did—that she was *technically* white because of her skin color. Patti also talked about other family members, however, and how their different skin colors would lead them to check a different box.

“Um, for race I would have to put, uh, white because technically I don't qualify as anything else. Um, and because I was born in this country. Um I, I guess I'm considered to be white by like kind of my counterparts here. Um, but other people in my family would be considered black because, um, they're either born in Dominican Republic or the color of their skin is darker than mine so they would identify more as black. . . . Um, but that doesn't describe who we are. **So, we usually leave the race part empty and just check off, um, Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish.**”

Patti's final claim, that she and her family “usually leave the race part empty” because the race options “don't describe who we are,” showcases how these measures do not cover their perceived needs as Latinx. Fernando, a 19-year old immigrant from Bolivia, relays the same concept:

“And then, honestly, this always confused me because like I noticed like for a while in elementary school, race and ethnicity I think were like together, so I always checked Hispanic. And then like here I kind of distinguish it, so I was like, ‘Okay, I guess I'm Hispanic and white.’ But like, I don't—I don't know. I know there's a little bit of um, German descent but it um, it means nothing to me, you know what I mean? Um, so I was just, I—I would've put white just because I wouldn't have identified with any of the other ones. Yeah. Just kind of like, out of default [laughs].”

Fernando recognizes that he has some German descent and his skin is white, so his “default” choice is Hispanic and white. Importantly, however, he notes that this background “means nothing” to him, and when possible, he would just check Hispanic.

José, a 24-year old immigrant from El Salvador who moved to the U.S. at age 11, brings up the paradox of his own skin color, writing “There isn't a race for people who look like me.” He recognizes that he has white skin, and can even present as white if he

chooses—but that he is not considered white like other people who have the exact same skin color as he does. In his journal, José wrote:

“I’ve noticed people from the Middle East fall under ‘white,’ though. Somehow they do and I don’t, even though I share many (if not most) of the physical markers of those with Middle Eastern heritage, which according to [my sociology class], would define me as part of their ‘race.’ I don’t mean to say I want to be considered white, I’m trying to make a point about how flawed the system is.”

Later in the same entry, José writes about how complicated he feels it is for him to identify himself according to the racial categories in America:

“I don’t believe I have a racial identity. At least America has taught me I have no race. My ethnicity? Well, let’s call me a really assimilated Latino or a really foreign American. Is there a category for those of us stuck in the middle?”

José clearly does not see the current racial categories as covering his own identity. He also speaks to the complications immigrants often face when coming to the U.S., given that race operates in very different ways in their home countries.

The sole Latino Millennial in the study who did not outright state that his racial identity is Latino was Miguel. Similar to Alejandro, Miguel is an immigrant who did not move to the U.S. until he was 16 years old. Unlike Alejandro, however, Miguel grew up in El Salvador, and never came to the U.S. until he immigrated. In his journal, Miguel wrote that he saw himself as white before he came to the U.S., but then as soon as he arrived here, he was constantly reminded of his new minority status. In El Salvador, labels like “Latino” or “Hispanic” were non-existent. He knew he was white because of his skin color, writing, “I was born in a foreign country where race does not matter much as much as the color of your skin.” Racial classification in the U.S. is very different, however, and his experiences continue to reinforce this. He still views himself as white,

but understands that he is now also Latino. Having been in the U.S. less than 10 years, Miguel's understanding of race is very different from the rest of the Latinx Millennials in this study. He still sees it largely in the same ways he did growing up in El Salvador.

The Importance of Parental Influence

Recall that self-categorization theory describes self-categorization as occurring within larger social processes, based on an individual's social context throughout life. People are more likely to identify in certain ways based on their experiences. In other words, if I have more "black" experiences because I interact constantly with other black people or I celebrate black holidays like Kwanzaa at home, then I will be more likely to identify as black. Adolescents' social worlds are often significantly impacted (or even determined) by their parents, and many of the Millennials in this study confirmed the significance of their parents' decisions.

For the Millennials who connect strongly to their racial and ethnic identities, they typically discussed how their parents were strong influences on these identities. These were most often Millennials of color; as previously discussed, the white students by and large did not express a strong connection to their white racial identities. Several of the Millennials of color talked about how their parents instilled a sense of pride for their racial and ethnic identities, or intentionally taught them things about their racial and ethnic cultures, ranging from language to traditional foods to the observation of various holidays. Additionally, parents made decisions about where families would live and what schools children would attend, which had important impacts on the development of friend

groups. Some Millennials even discussed their parents making trips to old neighborhoods after moving to less racially diverse areas, in order to maintain intraracial friendships. All together, parental influence often shaped not only the social worlds around these young adults, but how they responded to the social worlds in which they were immersed.

Nearly half of the Millennials in this study had parents who emigrated from countries where English was not the primary language (or they themselves immigrated from these countries). For many of these Millennials, whether or not they spoke a language other than English was typically dependent upon their parents. If the parents did not push learning a non-English language, then their children typically never learned to speak or understand it. For the Millennials who did speak their parents' native language, the majority of their parents utilized the practice of enforcing the use of that language at home. When I asked Camila, the second generation Latina with a mother from El Salvador and a father from Spain, how she learned to speak Spanish fluently, she told a somewhat humorous story about her parents making her and her siblings copy lines as children: "Yeah. They enforced it a lot. We would have to sit down and write like pages from a book when we were bad. It was also like a reward, so it didn't make any sense. They were like, 'Oh, you did a great job. Here, write another page.'" Other Millennials of color talked about using their parents' native language at home, or learning it as a way to be able to communicate with family who did not live in the U.S. The two second-generation Chinese students both mentioned their parents enrolling them in Chinese School, a program run by volunteers on Saturday mornings aimed at teaching the students about their Chinese culture. This included language lessons as well. All of these Millennials intimated that at the end of the day, they learned these languages because of

their parents. In fact, Sarah, one of the second-generation Chinese students, pondered whether or not she was going to do the same thing for her children, noting that even though she could speak Chinese, she was unsure of whether or not she would really speak the language at home with her future offspring. Regardless of whether she will or not, she was clearly thinking about it and her thoughts showcased the importance of parental direction.

For the few Millennials who did not speak their parents' languages, they described how their parents did not pressure them into learning to speak or understand something other than English. Maya, the 19-year old sophomore whose parents emigrated from India, talked about what it was like for her and her brother, and the hands-off approach her parents took.

“And like they also for the most part when I was growing up too, they only spoke English. Like they only speak another language now when they don't want us to know what they're saying, but I feel like because if, if they had wanted ... If it was really, really important to them for like ... Like I have a brother too, so for us to be very involved, I feel like they would have done more, because they definitely could have, but I feel like it was that balance of, ‘Okay, we want to show you this stuff, and we want to expose you to it, so that you have a connection to your heritage and culture, but it's not like you need to learn another language, learn, do this, do that, whatever.’ It was more of like, I chose to not really engage so much in it, and I'm sure if I had shown more interest then they would have like done more, kind of thing.”

Maya also mentions that some of the impetus is on her: had she been more willing to engage or showed more interest, perhaps her parents would have done something different. Whatever the case, though, her parents did not feel it was important enough to teach Maya and her brother any of their native tongue. Maya also described her parents as Indians who “assimilated well” to American culture, and never pushed her to learn much about her Indian background. As a result, Maya generally showed very little connection

to her racial identity as an Asian Indian. Her family lived in a predominantly white neighborhood, and her friend groups have always been predominantly white. Additionally, Maya does not take part in any cultural-specific activities on campus.

Nadia and Simeon provide interesting counterexamples of how parental influence is an important factor in shaping the social worlds of young adults, which in turn impacts their racial and ethnic identities. Recall that Nadia and Simeon are both second generation Armenians (Simeon is an immigrant, but he moved to the U.S. when he was one). Both identify as white, and both grew up in predominantly white neighborhoods, attended predominantly white schools, and have predominantly white friend groups (although Simeon also has multiple Asian friends). However, Nadia is much more connected with her ethnic identity as an Armenian than Simeon is, which she attributed to her parents. Nadia's parents are really involved in Armenian culture, and encouraged her to do the same. Nadia also speaks French, Armenian, and Arabic, and she spoke about how her parents speak these languages and so she learned them as well. Simeon, on the other hand, while allowing that he learned to speak Armenian and Russian from his parents, admitted that his Armenian is "poor," and when I asked about how his parents influenced his racial identity, he gave a one-sentence response: "Um, I guess they've told me where I'm from, but I, I think I'd say that on my own, before." Nowhere else in his interview did he speak about his parents doing anything to build in him an Armenian identity.

Religion and Race

Many of the Millennials drew connections between their race and ethnicities and religious practices or beliefs. Ishita, an Indian immigrant who came to the U.S. when she was seven, expressed the general idea that many of the Millennials spoke or wrote about with regards to identity and religion: “I think that your culture that you're brought up in or the one that you adopt also plays a role in your ethnicity. I also group religion within ethnicity because. . . I think religion also plays a role in it.” Ishita is saying that religion is simply a part of ethnicity. For some Millennials, the association of religion with race and ethnicity was more a *meaningful aspect* of ethnic identity, while for others it was an association they made almost as a *replacement* of their racial identity.

The Millennials that talked about their religion as part of their ethnic cultural beliefs were all second-generation Americans, either Asians or Latinxs. During her interview, Patti, the second-generation Dominican and Mexican woman, talked about how some people see religion as something that is not a big deal, but because of her Dominican background, religion was an important aspect of her identity:

“You know, some people use religion the way they vote and others don't because to them, religion isn't a big sense. But in our culture it is, so it—To me, it effects what you do daily, the importance of religion. So my mom just didn't say, "Well you're Catholic because, you know, I want you to be Catholic." But she told me how she was raised Catholic and what it means to be Catholic in Dominican Republic and Mexico and the influence that the Catholicism has had on their families. Um, and why that's important that I follow that.”

Camila echoed a similar idea about her Latina heritage and religion in her journal.

“A lot of Hispanic music references God, and it isn't even just like religious music, like modern radio music. Believing in god and going to church with your family is a large part of the culture. In America you get to choose, but I know in

El Salvador until like noon, everything in small towns on the countryside close down because everyone is at mass.”

Camila is writing about the significance of religion in her culture. Similarly, Sanjay, as an Indian-American, talked about the significance of Hinduism for Indians and himself. “The, the generally accepted thing is that I'm also Hindu, even though being Indian and being Hindu are not mutually exclusive. *Or*, you don't have to be both, you can just be one, even though it is more common for an Indian to be Hindu.”

Some of the Millennials talked about religion almost as though it *was* their race or ethnicity, instead of just one meaningful aspect of it. In response to direct questions about race, they spoke about religion—and, interestingly, *all* of these individuals were white, except one: Djeneba, the multiracial woman with a white mother and African father who generally identifies as “American.”

When I asked Djeneba about the ways in which her parents influenced her own racial identity, her answer did not mention race at all. Instead, she spoke about religion.

“Um, I think just by, well first of all, they kind of just let my brother and I, like they didn't make us have a religion or anything because my dad grew up Muslim and my mom grew up Christian and um, she was never super into her religion or anything like that. . . . I think it honestly makes me like more open-minded because technically my dad is Muslim, technically my mom is Christian, but like I just don't care about religion when people ... not care, but like I don't um, I don't like judge people on their religion...”

Skylar, one of the white respondents without immigrant parents, does the exact same thing in response to the same question. When asked about her parents' influence, she responded: “I was kind of brought up in two different religions, so my parents obviously identify in religion different than I do, but I think that whole, well, I was brought up in two different places, so I kind of learned two different cultures.” The same as Djeneba,

Skylar identifies herself as “American,” and does not express a racial identity. What is also interesting about Skylar is that she wrote an entire journal entry about her religious identity in response to the prompt to explore her race and ethnicity, writing, “I am always reminded that I have ‘the best of both worlds,’ meaning I get to experience the best of two religions. I live in an interfaith family, in which my mother is Christian and my father is Jewish.”

Leah, another white respondent without immigrant parents, talked about her religious practices when I asked her what experiences she has had that let her know she is a part of her white identity: “Um, I mean the closest thing, I guess, is that I’m a Christian and that we celebrate Christian holidays, but otherwise, no.” Leah said the same thing in a journal entry reflecting about her race and ethnicity, writing, “I do not really have an specific cultural beliefs or traditions that go with this identity unfortunately, besides the ones that come from my religion (Christianity). Those traditions are ones that many Americans follow though, they do not feel specific to my family.” For these white Millennials (and Djeneba), they identify so little with any racial identity that religion seems to become the stand-in.

That these (mostly) white Millennials seemingly conflate their race and religious beliefs speaks to the phenomenon of religion becoming racialized. Racialization occurs when racial meaning is attributed to things with which race was previously unaffiliated, like groups or social structures (Omi and Winant 1994). When a religion becomes racialized, the particular faith is associated with the phenotypic characteristics (e.g. skin color, hair texture, eye shape) of the practitioners; eventually this process moves beyond physical attributes to encompass people with shared ethnicity and nationality (Joshi

2006). For example, Asian Indians are often assumed to be Hindu, even though they may vary in physical appearance or be practicing Muslims.

In the U.S., Christianity has been racialized as white (Alumkal 2004). This goes back to the colonization of America, when Protestantism was a fundamental aspect of the new white settlers' social organization (Gaustad and Schmidt 2001). In the subsequent centuries of interactions with indigenous people and African slaves (and then eventually new immigrants), whiteness and Christianity became the "two strands of the double helix of American identity" (Joshi 2006:213). The result is that, in America, whites are the racial norm (as the dominant racial group), and Christianity is the religious norm. This means that non-white, non-Christians are *othered* as minorities, either as racial minorities, religious minorities, or both. For instance, individuals who practice religious faiths like Hinduism, Sikhism, and Islamism—often South Asian or Middle Eastern Americans—are brown-skinned (nonwhite) non-Christians. Since race in America is also inextricably linked to systems of power, there are obvious implications for how social categories like religion take on important meaning within social and ideological life. Specifically, as one of the more subtle outcomes, these social categories become subsumed into our "cultural vocabulary," such as our broader cultural stereotypes. Joshi (2006) writes about how this happened for Muslims in the U.S.: the racialization of Islam occurred in conjunction with encounters involving foreign enemies who profess Islamic beliefs. Thus, individuals who share physical characteristics or nationalities (broadly defined) with these enemies are *associated* with these enemies. In short, any Muslim or Middle Easterner is a terrorist.

Because Christianity has been racialized as white and is therefore normative, it makes sense that some of the white Millennials appear to conflate their racial identity with their religious affiliation. One of the consequences of dominance is that all things associated with a dominant group become normalized, and thus seem invisible. In the same manner as the label “American,” “Christian” can become a stand-in for white racial identity through this invisible privilege the dominant racial group enjoys. Interestingly, as previously mentioned, none of the Millennials of color—particularly those who are part of racialized religions or racialized *as* particular religions because of their race—spoke about their religious identities as stand-ins for their racial identities. They did, however, speak about their religion as a part of their cultural identity, which does illustrate racialized religions—just in a very different way than the white Millennials.

EXPERIENCES WITH RACIAL AND ETHNIC IDENTITY

Identity Pressure

Race and ethnicity are created and maintained by mutually influential—and sometimes conflicting—internal and external opinions and processes, including individuals’ self-identification and social ascription (Nagel 1994), or socially-ascribed race. In other words, what do I think about my own race and ethnicity, and how do other people see me? While agency exists in self-identification, external forces are particularly powerful: for example, blacks and whites have very different limitations in terms of their racial and

ethnic choices, based on dominant power structures that afford whites much more privilege with regards to their racial identities. Cognitive categorization theories indicate that people automatically categorize others (and themselves) into social groups, most often on the basis of observable and salient characteristics (Fiske 1998; Sears et al. 2003). Since distinct physical features typically serve as markers for race, such as skin color, shape color of eyes, hair texture, and body build (Hunter 2005), people are often limited in terms of their racial and ethnic self-identification based on their phenotypic appearance. In fact, what individuals believe others perceive them to be influences the construction and expression of racial identity (Brunsma 2006). This idea is based on the sociological theories of the looking-glass self (Cooley 1902) and reflected appraisals (Mead 1934), wherein an individual's self-identity is developed in part as a response to how they are perceived by others. In essence, there is a type of feedback loop that involves how a person sees his or herself, how others see that person, and what the individual thinks about these opinions of others. With regards to race, what this means is that an individual's racial identity is created, activated, and maintained through social interaction. External classification is not the end-all of identity development, there are other processes at play (see Saperstein and Penner 2014). However, I posit that socially-ascribed race can be more influential than other forms of self-identification or personal agency, particularly for certain groups.

The Millennials in my study often talked about pressure they felt to identify in particular ways. This pressure is a form of socially-ascribed race overshadowing self-identification. Maya, one of the Indian American respondents, wrote about this in her journal.

“My racial identity doesn’t extend too much beyond the way I look So when it comes to my racial identity, it’s almost like this foreign concept to me that I have to accept because I look a certain way, and so I am perceived a certain way, but it’s not necessarily something that’s important to me.”

As you can see with Maya’s journal entry, this pressure was typically related to the students’ physical appearance, and how other people perceived them. Like others in the study, Maya felt she had to identify racially in a way she might otherwise not, because that was how people saw her.

Zara, a first-year biology major whose parents emigrated from India, alluded to societal pressures for racial identity during her interview. In response to my question about her thoughts regarding the census question for race and ethnicity, she said, “The choices overall, I don’t know how I feel about these usually. Usually it’s been ingrained into our brains since we were kids. We started taking standardized tests since we were so young. The teachers are like, ‘Okay, if you’re from Asia, check Asian.’” Even though Zara agreed with the choice—she spoke passionately about being Indian, with a clear love and appreciation for her culture—she still felt the pressure to make it.

Miguel not only wrote about the pressure he feels from society with regards to his racial identity, but he also explicitly discussed the impact this pressure has on his life. If you recall, Miguel is an immigrant who came to America from El Salvador when he was fifteen. In his journal, he wrote:

“When I moved to the United States at the age of 15 I added another two labels to my life, I became a Latino/Hispanic and also a minority. Usually Countries in Latin America, especially upper class, do not identify as either Latino or Hispanic. A person is simply a nationality. Ever since I moved I have been constantly been reminded of my ‘minority’ status and even though I do not like to admit it, it makes a huge impact in my life.”

Miguel goes on to write about his experiences, which include friends in his white fraternity on campus making Mexican jokes, and that even though he is not Mexican, sometimes he feels that he is “somehow less” and that his “opinions mattered less than their opinions.” He follows up by writing, “To me being a Latino in the United States means that people will judge you and pretend the typical stereotypes of being undocumented or that my parents do not have a college degree or that I only got into [college] because of affirmative action and not by my own merits.” Clearly he feels not only the pressure to identify as “Latino/Hispanic and also a minority,” but the effects of being labeled by others in this way.

“Do you see me like I see me?”—Millennials and Skin Color

Skin color is an important part of racial identification, and studies on skin color and its impacts on self and identification abound, looking at things from mental health (Codina and Montalvo 1994; Spencer 2005), assimilation paths (Bonilla-Silva 2004; Feliciano and Robnett 2014), and biracial identity choices (Gonzales-Backen and Umaña-Taylor 2011). Skin color did come up among the participants when discussing their racial and ethnic identities.

Ishita, the Asian Indian immigrant who came to the U.S. at age seven, talked about her skin color multiple times during her interview, and addressed it more than once in her journal. In one of the journal entries, she wrote about a time one of her professors was surprised to find out she was Indian, telling her that she didn’t “look Indian,” to which Ishita replied, “That’s because both my dad and mom, they’re very pale.” In another journal entry, Ishita wrote about how her authenticity as an Indian is often questioned by others because of her skin color (for more on authenticity, see later in this

chapter): “[B]eing pale, sometimes I am separated from my fellow Indians, as they think that being pale means you cannot be a true Indian.”

One of the journal participants, Brittany, a white woman with no immigrant parents, told a story about one of her friends and how her skin color impacted her in a very negative way.

“My best friend from elementary school happens to be a white Muslim, so in simplest terms, she seems white but the rest of her family was born with darker skin, which makes her stand out physically from the rest of her culture. Although physical appearance does not define us, no one ever assumed there was a chance she would be Muslim because she didn’t fit the stereotypical norms. This was never a problem growing up since religion didn’t matter to children, she always said, but as she grew up, she started to notice the difference being “white” made for her. One night, I remember receiving a call from her hysterically crying. She started to tell me that during her study time at her university’s library, [Students] For Trump came in to start rallying for Trump awareness. As it was hard to focus, she took off her headphones to hear what they had to say, as they were clearly disrupting her. They said some demeaning things about the “Muslim faith causing an issue to our nation” and continued to walk around and personally handout Trump pamphlets and stickers to further promote him. They continued to ask if she was pro Trump or would be willing to discuss it more, and she said no because she was proud of her faith and did not want to promote someone who planned to discriminate her entire family and culture based on certain people. The student responded with “I know you’re just messing with me, you’re clearly one of us.” The conversation only worsened as he continued to keep offending her culture and religion to the point where she left the library in tears. She never felt so discriminated against and she truly believed that the boy would not have had enough confidence to say the same things to her if she physically appeared Muslim or if he believed she was. It was the first time she was really affected so harshly, but after that, it was not the last. She’s progressed to standing up for herself, but she still says it’s a struggle for her, as it is for many others in her position. It opened my eyes to this considering as someone that is not a minority, nor “mismatches” my identity; I was never opened to a personal situation like this.”

This story, as told to Brittany by her friend, really showcases the impact of skin color as an identifier. Her friend clearly believed that the young man antagonizing her in the library never would have done that had he really perceived her as a Muslim (and even

though Muslims can be of any color, newer social stereotypes state that to be Muslim is to be brown, not white). Not only was her friend bothered by the situation, Brittany was herself. She recognized that she did not have to deal with this since her identity is confirmed by her outward appearance—she looks white, and is considered white. Research demonstrates that some people experience psychological distress and threats to self when racial identities are not confirmed or believed (Campbell and Troyer 2007). Brittany shows how she does not have any psychological impacts based on her race because she identifies as white and is identified as white; her friend, on the other hand, as a Muslim with a racialized religious identity, did experience trauma because other people did not perceive her to be nonwhite.

“This is what people see...”—Blackness as the Defining Trait

Black Millennials in particular discussed identifying as black at least in part *because* other people see them as black. Millennials from other racial groups—Latinx and Asian—talked about a similar idea, but it did not have the same significance as it did for blacks. The black Millennials who talked about other people seeing them as black and the impact of that classification on their racial identities spent more time and gave more detail overall, often citing it as a standout feature, as opposed to the Latinx and Asian Millennials mentioning this as more of a passing detail in the midst of other, more “important” things. I showcase some examples below.

Gabriel, whose parents are from Nigeria, wrote about the phenomenon in his journal, and his musings give voice to several other black Millennials in the study: “I believe being black is my racial identity because growing up that's all that was kind of, I guess pointed out. That's not the only thing pointed out to me, but it was one of the main

things pointed out to me versus a lot of my other counterparts, peers, classmates, whatever you want to call it.” Gianna, who is a half black and half Asian second generation student, has adjusted her self-identification based on constant external evaluation: “...I'm Haitian and half Filipino but I consider myself to be black more than identifying myself as mixed because generally people judge based on what they first see. They're not going to see this girl is half something and half black. They're just going to be like, ‘She's black.’”

Non-black Millennials did mention physical appearance, but it was not a defining trait for them. Usually, they talked about their physical appearance as simply something that just *was*, or as a part of a list of other factors that added up to their racial identity. Thomas, a second-generation Chinese American, put it most succinctly: “Of course, there is the obvious physical appearance component, but there are also a number of more abstract reasons, such as language and values.”

“Society wants us to choose.” —Expectations for Multiracials

Those Millennials who were multiracial often described an acute pressure they felt to identify with only one race. Taliyah, who is half Thai and half African American, wrote about this very explicitly in her journal: “I personally don’t have any cultural beliefs for being multiracial, but I do feel that society wants us to choose one race.” Mason, a 20-year old third-year student, identifies as Chinese, but in reality he is Chinese and Irish. He wrote in his journal about feeling the need to identify with one race over the other because of his physical appearance, and how people perceive him.

“My mother is Chinese and my father was Irish (he passed away in 2007), but I look more Chinese than Irish so I classify myself as Chinese. I believe this is my racial identity because if someone were to ask me what I am, race wise, and I said Irish, they would most likely look at me funny because I obviously have something else in

me too. I see Chinese as the trumping race over Irish so that is what I consider my racial identity to be.”

Mason clearly wrote about how he felt very real expectations to identify in a particular way. Mason’s commentary is very enlightening because it is a great example of how reflected appraisals work in these Millennials’ lives. Mason has clearly altered his own self-identification because other people would find it unbelievable if he mentioned a part of his true lineage (Irish)—at least without explaining the other, more visible portion (Chinese).

According to identity theory (Burke 1991), we experience stress when the identities we assume are not confirmed by those around us, and when this occurs we work to balance the perceptual difference—either correcting the perceptions of others or succumbing to their perceptions of us. Mason appears to be a clear example of the latter. Studies on racial misclassification align with these ideas. Campbell and Troyer (2007, 2011) found that some individuals experience psychological stress as well as threats to self when racial identities are not confirmed or believed. Conversely, Stepanikova (2010) suggests that racial misclassification is not the culprit per se; rather, some misclassification results in a loss of social status, which does negatively impact well-being. In either case, whether or not there is a direct causal link, disconfirmation of identity results in a negative impact on the self.

“One drop to rule them all.” —The Significance of Black Blood

Of the eight Millennials who identified as multiracial, seven of them had racial makeup that included black. Of these seven, four identify either almost exclusively as black or consider their blackness to be an integral part of their racial identity. Gianna, the half

Filipina-half Haitian woman, and Kennedy, who has no immigrant parents but has West Indian, white, African American, and American Indian heritage, both effectively identify as just black. Gianna summed up both of their beliefs during our interview:

“I usually just identify as black because people don't really second guess if I'm another race, so I always just automatically just say I'm black and if they really want to go more into depth, then I explain more my ethnicity. People, I just feel like, sometimes they just don't really want to know more to my race or ethnicity, so I just give them the easy route and just say I'm black.”

Both of these women understand that the world typically sees them as black, and so they do not even fight the perception. Regina, whose mother is a Filipina immigrant and father is African American, does not say she identifies exclusively as black, or even more strongly as black—yet almost everything she does is tied to the black portion of her identity. She does research on blacks in her major, her friend group is several black women, and she talks about the impacts of being black on her life. Obviously it is a very important aspect of her racial identity. Jasmine, the second-generation woman with a mother from Colombia and a father from Trinidad, identifies as Afro-Latina and referred to herself as black at other times during her interview.

Blackness is clearly a strong influencer on racial identification, which makes sense given the sociohistorical nature of “black” as a racial category in the U.S. (e.g., the “one-drop rule” that required anyone with known black ancestry to be legally considered *only* black) (see Davis 1991). Looking more closely at two of the three Millennials in this study for whom this was not true sheds some light on the reasons they might not identify solely or strongly with being black. Djeneba was adamant about an “American,” race-less identity. Djeneba grew up in predominantly white areas, went to predominantly white schools, and has predominantly white friends. Djeneba is also very fair skinned, and

presents like someone who is racially ambiguous.¹² Although Taliyah identifies as multiracial, she also says that she leans more towards simply saying Asian, which may have to do with her upbringing. In conversation with her during the interview and after reviewing her diary, it seems as though she does not have a strong relationship with her father, who is African American. Phenotypically, Taliyah looks like someone who could simply be a darker-skinned Asian woman, which, considering many Thai people are brown skinned, is not far-fetched at all.

In general, these findings mirror those of other researchers who have studied the impacts of the one-drop rule on black racial identity (Harris and Sim 2002; Brunisma 2005, 2006; Rockquemore and Brunisma 2002; Khana 2010). In her qualitative work, Khana (2010) examines racial identity among black-white adults in the U.S. South, and how these individuals identify both publicly and internally. She finds that most of the adults in her study internally identify as black. While Khana discusses the differences in how blacks and whites perceive black-white biracial people (blacks typically see shades of blackness, while whites see only black and white), the majority of the adults in her study believe that both whites and blacks see them as black. I did not ask my respondents about differences in perceptions between specific groups of people, because that was beyond the scope of my study, but it is not difficult to imagine that had I asked, the Millennials would have described similar differences between races. In the end, however,

¹² I would be remiss if I did not at least attempt to address another potentially significant factor about Djeneba and her racial identity: her name. Djeneba has a fairly common Malian name (at least based on my own cursory internet search), which is quite obviously *not* a traditional American name. It is possible that Djeneba wishes to express a generic “American” identity in part because of a desire to fit in and not be seen as different, and her name may add to this potential desire. This does not seem very likely, however, because Djeneba did not express any feelings that would lead me to this conclusion, in either her journal or during her interview. In fact, she mentioned things that would suggest the opposite: as I discuss in Chapter 5, Djeneba talked about enjoying the attention her racial minority status afforded her, for instance as a minority who could “represent” her school in a “diverse” way.

in the same way that Khana found, it appears any existing differences were not significant enough to change the fact that most of these multiracial black Millennials were perceived as black.

Racial Authenticity

Broadly speaking, authenticity is based in socially constructed ideas of a particular portrayal of an identity being given the privileged status of “authentic,” such that everyone that claims that identity are then judged against these “authentic” scripts (Cornell and Hartmann 1998). Since racial identities are often believed to be “essential and unchanging”—even though they are not— individuals can use existing scripts of racial groups to claim or question authentic racial identity (Warikoo 2007:389). What racial authenticity effectively does is maintain boundaries of racial and ethnic identities, and these boundaries can be more firm and “bright,” or more ambiguous and blurred (Alba 2005). People are kept in or out of these racial and ethnic boundaries on the basis of things like language, skin color, religious affiliation, and citizenship, among other things (Zolberg and Woon 1999).

The boundaries of racial authenticity can be both experienced and enacted. For example, I can *experience* boundaries based on racial authenticity if other black people (or people of a different race) claim that I am not black enough because I listen to country music. Likewise, I can *enact* boundaries based on racial authenticity if I claim that other black people are not truly black because they have never seen classic black movies or wear Abercrombie and Fitch. The boundaries of racial authenticity can be experienced or

enacted at societal levels, such as when governments legislate rules for who can claim particular ethnic identities (e.g. for access to Affirmative Action or American Indian reservations), or at more individual or smaller group levels, such as questions about cultural depth of ethnicity (e.g., Latinxs asking other Latinxs if they speak Spanish) (Nagel 1994). The Millennials in my study wrote and spoke about experiences in which their authenticity was questioned by others (experiencing boundaries), and where they questioned the authenticity of others (enacting boundaries). The majority of the respondents experienced these boundaries themselves, rather than enacting them. These challenges came not only from those within their various racial groups, but also racial outsiders.

Experiencing the Boundaries of Racial Authenticity

Sarah, the 20-year old second generation Chinese student, wrote in her journal about experiences where people question her authenticity.

My close friends have all made the statement that I am not Asian. Instead, I am White... [They] suggested that it is the way I dress, the way I talk, and overall just myself. My boyfriend also claims that I am very whitewashed, that I do not necessarily fit in with the Asian culture. I think this is because of the stereotypes and generalizations made about Asian people. People feel like every Asian person should fit into these constraints, and those who do not are not truly Asian.”

Sarah repeated this narrative during her interview, and also spoke about how she actively stays away from some stereotypically “white girl” things, because she does not want to be perceived as white. These challenges to her racial identity obviously bothered her a great deal.

Stories about students experiencing exclusion or questioning based on racial authenticity came through from all of the Millennials of color, across generation level.

Whites did not report this phenomenon at all. Several black students talked about having their authenticity as black questioned because of their speech or their academic success. Charlotte, a 19-year old African American woman from Massachusetts, wrote about how upset it made her to hear people questioning her race because of things like her grades: “I used to hate growing up and hearing people call me white because of the way I talked or because I got good grades. That always deeply offended me because I didn't understand why being proper and educated meant I could no longer be black.” Three other black students said nearly the same thing. Jameson echoed the sentiment in a similar idea, saying, “I've definitely, like, gotten the Oreo thing, you know, where I identify as black but, like, people will be like, ‘Oh, yeah, you're like a white,’ or whatever, ‘because you're smart,’ or something like that.” Four other students specifically mentioned being called an “Oreo” at some point in their lives.

Miguel, the Latino immigrant from El Salvador, wrote in his journal about his identity being questioned because of something as simple as his music preferences. He wrote:

“One of the things I learned over spring break is that some of my friends do not understand that you can still be a Latino and like country music. And that you can still be a true Latino and not like beans. I think the concept of race and culture are real and important but in my personal (family) experience we believe that you do not need to like certain things just because we live in a country that says, ‘Latinos need to love Latin music all the time.’ To me, my identity is formed at home, and I grew up listening to country music, just because it was my family's preference.”

Sanjay, the second generation Asian Indian, talked about the impact his decision to grow a long beard has had on him. Since he grew his beard out, he often gets asked if he is Muslim or Sikh. He spoke at length about the rift between Muslims and Hindus in his culture, and because of a beard that evidently makes him look “Muslim,” he has also

experienced claims against his authenticity from family members, saying, ““So yeah, I have gotten that from a lot. Mostly from other Indians and family members. Where it's mostly been like, ‘You look like the out-group and you shouldn’t.’””

During her interview, Olivia, a 20-year old psychology major with immigrant parents from Ghana, reflected on her experiences at a predominantly white high school. Close to the end of her tenure at that school, she decided to become more outspoken about social issues. Her decision resulted in some of her peers then questioning her authenticity on many levels.

“Yeah. I honestly I think people are surprised when they realize how pro-black I am. I remember, you know obviously I went to a very white high school, very conservative so just in general in high school you didn't really talk about race issues too too much, but my senior year in high school I started a discussion group about kind of like social issues and what not. So I feel like when that happened, people kind of looked at me differently like, ‘Oh you're black, you care about these issues and you're just you know one of us. Like you're not just the exception anymore.’”

After Olivia became more vocal about issues that dealt with social and racial issues, her (mainly white) friends no longer saw her as “the exception”—she was just a “regular black person” from then on. What was underneath that messaging was that they saw her as *not* black in the same ways prior this change; she was not authentically black in the same ways.

Enacting the Boundaries of Racial Authenticity

While it occurred much less often, some of the Millennials did indicate that they sometimes question the racial and ethnic authenticity of others. Rashida, a Pakistani woman who immigrated to the U.S. when she was less than a year old, provided a good example in her journal. She wrote:

“My race or ethnicity is South Asian. I don’t only associate with this race because I look like a South Asian but also because I’ve spent an equal amount of years in both America and South Asia. That’s why I don’t get too mad when someone groups me into this category but I know a lot of my friends get mad who are ‘South Asian.’ I put this in quotation because some of them have never been to South Asia. They can’t speak the language of the country they ‘belong’ from. They have nothing except their physical appearance, which connects them with this country yet they are grouped and identified by it.”

She is obviously questioning the authentic “South Asian” identity of some of her friends, because they cannot “speak the language” of their home countries. To her, simply looking South Asian is not enough to claim a fully authentic identity.

“Where are you from?”—Questions of Legitimacy and Identity

Several students talked about people asking them the question of where they were from, meaning one thing (i.e., “What is your racial/ethnic background?”) but trying to mask the question. At face value the question seems innocuous, but in reality it serves to question the legitimacy of these individuals belonging in the U.S. The underlying assumption behind the question is, “You must *not* be from here,” or even more sinister, “You must not be *American*.”

Julieta, a third-year communications and sociology major with immigrant parents from El Salvador, wrote a cogent explanation of this line of questioning in her journal.

“‘Where are you from?’ I get asked this a lot. And it tends to be one of the first questions people ask me when I meet them. I typically would just answer, my parents are from El Salvador, but I was born in the U.S. And it never bothered me too much, until I was talking to my sister about it. Why do people assume I’m not from here? Because of my name, perhaps? Or my appearance? Those details signify to them that I’m different, making them assume I’m not from the U.S. I was born in the U.S.! I remember one time I was asked where I was from. I told them Maryland. They responded with, ‘No, but like where are you really from?’

Like what country?’ Or! Another time: ‘Where are you from? Your English is so good.’ Oh I also get, ‘How old were you when you came to the U.S.?’ My English surprises people, even though I was born in the U.S. and first language is English. What about me made them think I am less American-born compared to them when we JUST met? How could they gather that I’m from a different country? There are millions of American-born Latinos, yet people consistently assume we were born in our families’ countries.”

Julieta touches on several forms of the same question that all get at the same thing, and question the legitimacy of these individuals as Americans. The students who were asked these questions come from all backgrounds—Latinxs, Asians, blacks, and even one white student. Zahiya, the second generation student who is Turkish, indicated that she gets this question quite often, much to her chagrin: “And then they’re like, ‘Where are you from? No really?’ I’m from Texas, I’m from Maryland. They’re like, ‘No really, where are you from?’ I’m like, I’m from Texas and Maryland. They’re like, ‘Ok, where are your parents from?’ I’m like, Turkey. They’re like, ‘Oh that’s so cute! That’s so nice. I love Turkish coffee.’” As Zahiya (and other students) indicated, the questioners would not let the issue go. They were *certain* that Zahiya was not a “normal” American like themselves, and continued to press the issue until she finally divulged the “truth,” that her immediate heritage is not American. Zahiya also talked about how irritating it was that the people further trivialized her ethnicity as well, saying there is more to Turkish culture than coffee.

Of the students who mentioned this, none of them had strong accents that would suggest they are from somewhere other than the U.S. Only one even had anything that could be construed as an “accent”—Zahiya—and it was so minor as to almost be nonexistent. I make no claims to being an expert on foreign accents, but I do have a pretty good ear for them, and I only noticed a hint of an accent with Zahiya, and it was

not consistently present. All of the other students who mentioned getting this question sounded distinctly “American.” There are very likely two major underlying factors at play here that have to do with dominant scripts for what is “American”—looks or name. These students either do not look “American” (i.e. they are not blonde-haired or blue eyed), they do not look like a clear-cut, stereotypical representation of a particular race (i.e. they do not look like a “regular” black person), or they have a name that is not traditionally American. Sanjay spoke about the issue of his name at length during his interview, telling me that for most of his childhood he used his middle name, which was decidedly “American” (imagine common names for country singers). His mother had given him this middle name knowing that he might face trouble because of his more traditionally Indian first name, and Sanjay internalized this for quite some time. Eventually, he said, he decided he was proud of his name and his Indian heritage, and so he began to use his first name regularly.

Two students, Sanjay and Camila (Salvadoran and Spanish), mentioned accents when discussing the “where are you from” question in their journals. Camila wrote about having a “slight lisp” when she says certain words, and Sanjay discussed pronouncing the names of foreign countries properly: “I am in the habit of saying country names as they are pronounced in their respective tongues (ex: “paak-ih-staan” versus “pack-ih-stan”) and as a result, a lot of people assume I am a native from one country or another.” As their examples indicate, this is not an issue of a *consistently* foreign accent, and is more indicative of the tendency or ability of people who are fluent in another language: to pronounce certain words in the accent of that language. I noticed this in both of these students’ interviews. It appears as though, at least in these students’ experiences, some

people perceive this as a reason to question their legitimacy as Americans. This, of course, is an asinine assumption—I tend to approach pronunciation of foreign words in the same way, and I am not currently fluent in any other language other than English. Interestingly enough, I often get questions that assume I am not a “regular” American, for reasons unbeknownst to me. Perhaps this speaks to larger issues of cultural awareness with in the U.S.

All of the students who mentioned the “where are you from” question said they disliked it, unequivocally. Some students were so bothered by the question that they have developed methods of actively fighting against the question and its underlying assumptions. Regina, the multiracial woman with an African American father and Filipina mother, spoke passionately about the resistance she offers:

“Oh, yeah. I’m an asshole. Yeah. Um, so it depends on how they ask though, because a lot of people like to dance around it, which it doesn’t make sense to me. I guess I think it’s rude. It is though. Huh. But um, I think it would be better if you asked it straightforward than some of the more irritating questions I’ve got was like, ‘Well, where are you from?’ Maryland. [Laughs]. ‘Okay, right, right, right, right, right, right. So but like, where’s your family from?’ Maryland. [Laughs again]. Um, by then I know what they want but I just, I love to be intentionally difficult. Yeah. They’re like, ‘Okay. Right, right, so but where are their ancestors from?’ And I’m like, ‘Well, I’m pretty sure that, you know, at some point they came from, you know, uh, Africa or something like that.’ And then—or sometimes I’ll just like ride it all the way out and just not answer at all and pretend like I have no idea what they’re doing. But um, the one that frustrates me more I guess, is um, ‘What are you?’ What am I? A person? Um, I’m a woman. Anyways, it doesn’t make sense to me, the questions I guess. I’d be more willing to answer if somebody were to ask what’s my race or ethnicity. Well, I don’t like the answer. I like that question better than ‘where are you from’ and ‘what are you?’ Because those are offensive to me. Yeah.”

Regina is clearly offended by all of these questions about her racial legitimacy. What I find most interesting is that she considers herself an “asshole” for not wanting to answer what is clearly a hurtful question. In essence, she is taking on all of the psychological

burden of this question, as opposed to placing the burden squarely where it belongs: on the shoulders of the individual who is questioning her. Other students discussed similar strategies of answering (or not answering) this question. Some students even attempt to communicate that they are bothered by the question, although typically not in a direct manner. Take for instance Maya, who again is the child of Asian Indian immigrants.

“I’m always careful when answering questions about my racial identity. When people ask me where I’m from, sometimes what they’re really trying to ask is what my ethnicity is. The nuance in the question is not lost on me, and so when people ask where I’m from I just say Philadelphia. I answer this way not because I don’t know what they really mean, but because I want them to think about the way they word their question. To me, that means a lot. It’s extremely important. Usually this response is met with, ‘Where are you from originally?’ This one really pisses me off sometimes, and if I’m in a bad mood I’ll still say Philly. If I’m feeling nice I’ll offer up, ‘My parents are from India,’ **hoping they get my silent message that I am certainly not ‘from’ there.** My parents are from India, and my ethnicity is Indian, but I’m completely American. I don’t like when people confuse those two things. Being bi-cultural doesn’t mean you are foreign, yet people tend to automatically assume that subconsciously.”

As you can see by Maya saying that she hopes people “get my silent message,” she is using a more indirect approach. For whatever reason, she does not want to call people out directly for the assumptions she recognizes they are making.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I overviewed the racial and ethnic identities of the college Millennials in this study. The concepts of race and ethnicity are slippery and overlapping, as the Millennials’ attempts to define them confirmed. How these Millennials identified their own race and ethnicity follow generally expected lines of identification—white Millennials were aware of their racial and ethnic histories, but typically did not identify

strongly with them, while Millennials of color identified racially and ethnically in much more straightforward ways.

These Millennials also described their own race and ethnicity as decidedly social identities, which were created, activated, and maintained through social interaction. Social contexts and other people were crucial parts of their identity decisions. Chief among these social influencers were parents, who in many cases actively directed their children's racial and ethnic development. Parents often taught Millennials about their racial and ethnic histories, pushed language learning, and even helped purposefully construct their social worlds, including where the families lived, where children went to school, and even friend groups. As a result, many of the Millennials with strong connections to their racial and ethnic identities had friends who were of the same race (or widely diverse), and were involved in culturally-specific activities and groups. For white students, there was very little indication that parents were actively considering racial or ethnic identity when raising their children (aside from Zahiya, the one second-generation white student whose parents raised her with their Turkish culture at the forefront). For a very small number of Millennials of color, their parents were seemingly not considering race or ethnicity as they raised their children (e.g. Maya, whose Indian parents "assimilated well"), but these were exceptions, not the rule.

The Millennials also had experiences that were a direct result of their racial and ethnic identities, which further showcased the social nature of these identities. Many of the people of color experienced boundaries based on racial authenticity, where their racial and ethnic identities were questioned by racial outsiders and racial insiders. Typically the challenges to their authenticity happened as a result of their phenotype or the way they

presented themselves (e.g., the way they spoke). None of the white students experienced any concerns with being considered authentically white. That questions about racial authenticity occur for people of color speaks to the disconnect between the pervading notion of a post-racial or color-blind society, and even fly in the face of the dominant ideology. People of color who question racial authenticity are declaring that race *does* matter, and that it continues to be a meaningful identity. Further, when whites question the authentic racial identities of people of color, this constitutes slippage within the framework of color-blind ideology: these whites are alluding to the racial stereotypes and beliefs they continue to hold, even though race is supposedly a nonfactor.

Many of the Millennials of color (and one white Millennial, Zahiya) in this study also experienced questions of their legitimacy as Americans. This was most commonly a question of “where are you from?” While the question seems innocuous to the asker, the Millennials at the receiving end of this question understood the implications—that the questioner had reason to doubt that they were fully American. Similar to questions of racial authenticity, questioning the legitimacy of people of color as American also belies the importance race plays in whites’ ideology—despite their best efforts to hide it.

In a color-blind society, race is ok as long as it is relegated to a “fun fact” or a personal style (e.g. how the white students spoke about their cultural backgrounds). According to colorblindness, race should be the functional equivalent of wearing skinny jeans when everyone around you prefers loose fit: “My family does Pho Fridays as a way to stay in touch with our Vietnamese culture, but I eat McDonald’s and Starbuck’s most of the time.” Race crosses into the realm of unacceptable—“that which should not be

mentioned”—as soon as it is used to point out inequalities, unfair treatment, or anything that suggests that whites have it better than other racial groups.

Considering how Millennials identify racially and ethnically—what I did in this chapter—is important, particularly in light of these being social identities. Millennials have come of age in a time when people (mostly whites) continue to assert that race is no longer a significant factor in the lives of racial minorities. Broader messaging with colorblindness as its aim only serves to further marginalize people of color. Because they still have experiences that spotlight their racial and ethnic identities, the social expectation is that they conform to this race-less society, which effectively asks them to ignore the implications of living in a racialized society.

In the next chapter, I will further explore the impacts of this predominating color-blind ideology. I turn my attention first to white Millennials, showcasing the ways in which they use the various frames and styles of color-blind racism. I demonstrate that these college students are using colorblindness in the same ways that Bonilla-Silva found in his work decades ago. In the second half of Chapter 4, I investigate how color-blind racism impacts white students, focusing on the discrepancies that exist between white Millennials’ beliefs about their “diverse” lives and reality, the guilt they feel as whites, and the power of color-blind racism.

Chapter 4: Color-Blind Racism in White Millennials

Broadly speaking, racial attitudes are the ways in which individuals think about race (for a critique on attitudes as an analytical concept, see Blumer 1969). Racial ideology, on the other hand, is “the racially based frameworks used by actors to explain and justify (dominant race) or challenge (subordinate race or races) the racial status quo” (Bonilla-Silva 2001:63). In short, racial ideology allows us to make the connection between attitudes and our larger social system, which, as I will explain below, is a *racialized* system. Understanding how ideology operates generally helps us conceptually explain how racial ideology works. Although dominant racial ideology generally serves the interests of the dominant race (whites), it is not rigid, but is rather very flexible and interactive. A major strength of ideology is its flexibility (Jackman 1994)—if it did not allow for “accommodations of contradictions, exceptions, and new information” (Bonilla-Silva 2001:64), the ideology itself would be limited in its effectiveness. In this way, color-blind racial ideology is highly flexible and thus very durable. Further, it is difficult even to pin down because of its seemingly non-racial features. In this chapter, I first briefly review color-blind racism, and then examine how Millennials used its central frames and various stylizations.

COLOR-BLIND RACISM

Color-blind racism emerged as a new racial ideology after the dust settled from the Civil Rights movement. Prior to the 1960s, discrimination and prejudice were very overt because of their legality; after the Civil Rights movement, it became both illegal and amoral to discriminate so overtly against racial minorities. Thus, racism became much more subtle and covert, making it much harder to identify (Quillian 2006). As the new racial ideology, color-blind racism incorporated many of the ideas that racial minorities fought for during the Civil Rights movement—equal opportunity, the removal of racist commentary from public discourse, etc.—but it did so in a hegemonic way. In other words, as hegemony suggests, color-blind racism gained the implicit support of racial minorities by including pieces of their views, but it ultimately served to protect systemic white privilege. Bonilla-Silva (2001) argues that color-blind racism, as the new form of racism, now reproduces white supremacy in a “mostly institutional and apparently nonracial manner” through the *token inclusion* as opposed to the *systemic exclusion* of racial minorities (p. 67).

As previously discussed (see Chapter 1), color-blind racism relies on a structural formation of race and racism, instead of viewing racism as “incorrect” or “irrational thinking” whereby racists are labeled as irrational and foolish (see Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith 1996; Kinder and Sears 1981). Structural formations of racism emphasize rationality: racial systems were built using some rational elements to begin with, which leads to racially motivated behavior being seen as rational—falsely, of course (Bonilla-Silva 1997). Racism is the part of the ideological structure of a social system that

solidifies racial stereotypes and ideas; in other words, it *rationalizes* the ways in which interactions between races are structured. Structural formations of racism are based on the idea of a *racialized social system*, in which “economic, political, social, and ideological levels [of society] are partially structured by the placement of actors in racial categories or races” (Bonilla-Silva 1997:469). These systems are “partially structured” by race because modern societies are marked by social systems with two or more forms of hierarchical patterns. In racialized social systems, races are situated in a hierarchy, producing clear social relations between the races. The race at the top of the hierarchy has the best position, and thus receives the greatest portion of reward and status (economically, politically, socially), and has the most power to draw social and physical (e.g. segregation) lines between itself and other races in the hierarchy—all of these together constitute the racial structure. Racialized social systems can exist simultaneously or within social systems structured by other formations, and as such other forms of oppression make take precedence over race at any given time (although this does not *eliminate* race). For instance, in the U.S., race also exists in gendered and classed systems, leading some people to assert that social class now outweighs race (e.g. Wilson 1978). Once social formations have been racialized, their “normal” components always contain a racial aspect; thus, in the U.S., class and gender are constructed along racial lines.

Thus, we see that color-blind racism, as a structural formation, allows individual actors to be largely inconsequential—the system will uphold itself in lieu of individual people holding traditional “racist” views. This happens because race is no longer seen as a meaningful or significant factor in social life, and instead we see a materialistic

interpretation of race—American ideals like individualism become the mechanisms for the perpetuation of racial privilege and subtle discrimination.

We can see the impacts of newer racial ideology (color-blind racism) in how Millennials understand racism conceptually. Since race is effectively removed as a meaningful category in social life, the ideas of racism and discrimination are often seen as things that happened “a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away.” Racism is a thing of the past, a remnant of a time when “true racists” called blacks “nigger,” claimed they were biologically superior to nonwhites, and had separate water fountains for “coloreds.” People who are racists now are anomalies, exceptions to the rule of racial equality. Further, racism is the purview of individuals, and is relegated to interpersonal interaction and individual thoughts. This comes through in my data in terms of how Millennials defined racism.

Most of the Millennials in this study expressed understandings of racism as something that is both individual *and* structural, however two important points should be made. First, I asked two separate questions about racism: I asked the students to define racism and give me an example of racism contemporary society, and then I asked them if they thought institutions could be described as racist. This means that students were *prompted* to think about institutional racism, when they might otherwise not have ever thought about the idea on their own. Second, nearly all of these students were enrolled in a sociology course at the time of the study, which means they likely encountered material covering multiple definitions of racism. While it is impossible to know whether these students were simply giving lip service to the idea of structural racism, were repeating ideas they heard from class that they did not really believe in, or actually understood

racism to be something both structural and individual, the data do offer some insight. Only 9 of the 35 interviewees mentioned structural or institutional racism in their original definitions or examples *prior* to the prompting question. Of the 34 students who only completed journals, the majority expressed an *individual* or interpersonal understanding of racism when writing about incidents they observed (“Donald Trump says all Mexicans are rapists, and that is racist.”). Looking at the journals and interviews together then, the results suggest that these Millennials likely still default to more individual-based definitions of racism. This is actually consistent with previous research that suggests Millennials (both whites and racial and ethnic minorities) have difficult defining contemporary racism, typically resorting to interpersonal understandings (Apollon 2011).

Another helpful idea in understanding color-blind racism is based on a definition of racism that is closely related to structural formations. In her book, *“Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?” And Other Conversations About Race*, Beverly Daniel Tatum (1997) elaborates on racism as a system of advantage that is based on race. Calling on the work of Peggy McIntosh, Tatum discusses how whites are the benefactors of their whiteness, whether they believe they have privilege or not: is a person of color is prevented from buying a house because of housing discrimination, that house is still available for a white person. The desires or feelings of that white person are irrelevant, and they still benefit from their racial privilege. Looking at this conception of positionality within our racialized social system helps to further explain how color-blind racism works as an ideology.

By definition, not everybody needs to subscribe to a dominant ideology in order for it to work—only *most* do (and once the ideology is set up as dominant, arguably even

fewer people need to subscribe to it in order for it to maintain its dominance). Because color-blind racism is a racial ideology, only *most* whites (as the dominant racial group) need to defend the racial-status quo or outwardly express color-blindness in order for color-blind racism to stay dominant. Also, in our racialized social system, whites *are* the dominant race, and thus occupy the dominant racial position. As such, even though whites are themselves a heterogenous group with divisions based on various social identities (social class, sexual orientation, gender, etc.) that result in varied and sometimes contradictory interests, most whites at minimum passively endorse the racial status quo because they systematically benefit from being white (e.g., white privilege, McIntosh 1989).

Furthermore, the hegemony of color-blind racism is nearly inescapable by nonwhites, and in many ways presents itself as attractive based on the tenets of the ideology (e.g. the token inclusion of racial minorities, using “American” ideals like individualism, asserting equal opportunity). Additionally, even as people actively fight against color-blind racism, they are operating within the ideology in order to oppose it. Thus, we have the maintenance of color-blind racism as a dominant ideology.

Intentionality and Labeling People As “Racists”

In his book *Racism Without Racists*, Bonilla-Silva made a point to discuss his intentions as a writer in the first chapter. He wrote about not seeking to demonize whites or call them “racist,” and that given his approach to racism as a structural formation, he sought merely to uncover the mechanisms and collective practices that operate to perpetuate the racial status quo. I want to take a brief moment to do the same.

My research is not an effort to label Millennials as “racist,” nor do I intend to parcel Millennials into “good” and “bad” people based on their views. Instead, in the same manner as Bonilla-Silva, I simply want to understand whether or not Millennials of all races are subscribing to color-blind racism (or actively contesting it), and if so, in what ways. Because I believe in racism as a structural formation, I agree with others that individual actors and their beliefs are far less important than the ideological practices that uphold our racialized system. As I will demonstrate, most of the white Millennials do not believe they are perpetuating racism in any way; in fact, many believe they are actively *not* racist (some more erroneously than others).

In this chapter, I will accomplish three things. First, I will further explain the various frames and styles of color-blind racism. I will do this by highlighting white Millennials, which will also allow me to achieve my second aim: I showcase that white Millennials are using the frames and styles of color-blind racism in the same way that the whites did in Bonilla-Silva’s original study. This is significant because many of the Millennials in this study were not even *alive* when Bonilla-Silva collected his data in the late 1990s. Third, I will discuss the impact colorblindness has on white Millennials’ experiences with race in the 21st century, specifically demonstrating the power of color-blind ideology. I will address color-blind racism for Millennials of color in Chapter 5.

THE FRAMES OF COLOR-BLIND RACISM

The frames of any ideology are its central components, because they create the ideological structure through which information is interpreted. As I outlined in Chapter 1,

Bonilla-Silva identified four central frames that uphold color-blind racism: abstract liberalism, minimization, cultural racism, and naturalization. He found that a majority of his white respondents used these frames when structuring their racial views. In the following section, I examine how white Millennials used these frames in various ways. Overall, my findings showcase that white Millennials typically fall in line with Bonilla-Silva's original work.

Lastly, I offer some final comments on how the data are presented in this chapter. First, although I present the frames (and then styles in subsequent sections) in a seemingly linear, clean-cut fashion, the Millennials in this study typically used them in more nuanced combination. As Bonilla-Silva points out, "informal expressions of ideology are a constructive effort, a process of building arguments in situ" (2010:30). In the same way as was present in his data, my respondents often mixed one frame with another, as the data will demonstrate. Second, while I present a lot of examples, I do not include every single one. At times I showcase more or less data, noting that in the cases of "less" data, what I highlight is representative of other examples. In general, I try to represent the range of responses, but if particularly relevant, I present more depth. In doing this, I hope to give readers a full picture of the nuances of color-blind racism for various races. Finally, as I detailed in Chapter 2, I attempted to let participants' voices come through exactly as I received them. This means I did very little editing, and included all of the pauses, stutters, nonverbals, and self-corrections participants used. Again, the voices of participants as they expressed their ideology and their personal stories is at the forefront of my analysis.

Abstract Liberalism

Abstract liberalism is the foundation of color-blind racism. As Bonilla-Silva outlined, this frame involves the use of ideas associated with political and economic liberalism in an abstract manner to explain racial phenomena. What this achieves is that whites can effectively oppose practical solutions to de facto racial inequality, all while appearing reasonable and even moral, because they are supporting American ideals of “equal opportunity” and individualism. Practically, this can take the form of opposing affirmative action because it represents “preferential treatment” for racial minorities, or justifying racially-segregated neighborhoods and schools by promoting “personal choices.” The only way this works, however, is to ignore that people of color are extremely underrepresented in higher quality jobs, schools, and neighborhoods, which necessitates the *abstract* quality of the arguments.

When speaking about race-related matters, particularly in terms of creating solutions that fix inequalities, some of the white Millennials in this study spoke in very ambiguous, abstract terms. For instance, when I asked Skylar, one of the first-year students,¹³ what could be done to make colleges more diverse, her response was extremely vague.

“Um. I think there, they should, or at least [my school] like definitely considers diversity. There's application process, and, cause I'm pretty sure one of the questions I answered on my application was about diversity. So I think just like keeping that in mind in the application process, and like how the people, how diverse the incoming class is, and just like, I don't know, I think that's important. Because I think that makes like a good experience for everyone in the incoming class.”

¹³ As a reminder, nearly all of the white students in my sample (18/23) are native born with no immigrant parents. As such, I only mention parentage for students who had one or two immigrant parents.

Here, Skylar really does not offer any solution, but she hints at the fact that “considering” diversity “is important.” Ostensibly, if a school “considers” how diverse the incoming classes are, then the problem is solved.

Given the centrality of abstract liberalism for color-blind racism, there were numerous examples from the white Millennials in this study. I will go through several different examples of the ways in which this frame manifested.

Individual Choices

A few students argued for individual choices as a way to defend their and others’ decisions about things like where to live and whom to hire for jobs. The issue here is that “choice” is often an illusion, particularly the idea that every racial group has equal power when it comes to making choices. In reality, different races are afforded differential power because of their location in the social hierarchy. Whites, as the holders of the top position, have the most power, and thus “individual choices” typically reify the occurrence of white spaces in society.

Skylar again provides us with a good example, using individualism to argue for neighborhood preferences. Skylar asserted that *she* would want to live in a more diverse neighborhood, but that other people should be able to make that personal choice themselves: “I think just like, uh, I'd personally want to live in a more diverse neighborhood, so I think it's just like, personal choice to go move to a more diverse community or like place to live, I think.” While this stance sounds reasonable, it serves to make it ok for whites to maintain racially-segregated neighborhoods.

No Government Intervention

In his exploration of abstract liberalism, Bonilla-Silva outlines that one of the central beliefs about liberal democracies is that governments intervene as little as possible in order to allow change to occur “naturally” as a result of a “rational and democratic process,” an idea used to justify Jim Crow segregation (2010, p. 34). Whites typically use the appeal of government not forcing people to do things as a way to keep the racial status quo in place, particularly with regards to residential and school segregation.

In the interviews, I asked multiple questions about the role of government in racial affairs, and several of the Millennials indicated that they believed the government should not be involved in addressing issues of residential segregation in particular. These Millennials typically expressed that the government should not step on people’s individual right to choose where they live. Three white students shared this opinion. One interesting thing is that while some students said explicitly that they were not in favor of government intervention, some of the Millennials tried to soften the language, saying instead, “I’m not sure what the government could do...” While rhetorically different, the end result is still the same: the individuals did not want the government to intervene, and believed that it was up to individuals to determine where they lived.

Ben, one of the interviewees, provided a direct, classic example of the “no government intervention” mentality. When I asked him what he thought about America having a lot of one-race neighborhoods, he said, “people just tend to want to live near people that are more like them, you know?” I asked him if he thought the government should do anything about the situation, and he responded, “I mean, I’m a very big believer in we shouldn’t have too much government regulations. So I don’t know what the

government can do without being like, ‘No, you can't live here. You should go live there.’” I followed up by asking him what could be done to help make neighborhoods more diverse, and he laughed and started off with a very abstract answer, saying that it was “the mindset of people.” He then offered a pseudo-solution, one that attempted to fix segregation issues, but was very indirect, quite abstract, and, per his ideas, did not involve the government:

“Um, I mean, there is jobs, when you think about it. People tend to live in certain areas because of their jobs. So I guess if companies hire more diverse- diversely, that could help. But, you know, I feel like in DC you—where there's very, like, diversely hired companies, you still have, like, segregated neighborhoods.”

Having “companies hire more diversely” appears to be a workable solution, because “people tend to live in certain areas because of their jobs,” yet this still does not directly address segregation, and leaves space for people to make individual choices that are often based on race.

Equal Opportunity

Two white students who were interviewed and three white students who only completed the journal portion of the study bought into the narrative of equal opportunity, that race should not be a consideration for things like job hiring practices.

I asked the interviewees direct questions about issues of opportunity for racial minorities (e.g. the question about a fictitious company choosing to hire a racial minority over a white person, making schools more diverse). There were no prompts for those who completed journals about this issue, however, so I feel that the individuals who mentioned this idea provide even stronger examples of the centrality of this frame. Peter,

a first-year student, wrote about equal opportunity in a way that is representative of how most of the other Millennials who mentioned the idea as well:

“I believe that race does not matter anymore when it comes to being successful or leading a successful life. Everyone in America has the opportunity to work hard and earn money, no matter how much or how little. I think success can be considered as having enough money to provide for yourself and your family. It is also not impossible for other races to earn a lot of money if they take the correct steps like go to college and spend their money wisely. President Obama is a good example of this, he is a minority and became the most powerful man in the country because he worked hard. If you work hard enough and put in effort you can accomplish anything you want in this capitalistic society.”

As you can see, Peter is a staunch believer in equal opportunity through America’s “capitalistic society.” He believes that anyone can achieve success, as long as they work hard, even drawing upon the archetype of President Obama as an example and a call to action. This issue with his example and belief, of course, is that President Obama is an extreme token, and the vast majority of people of color will *never* be able to achieve that level of parity with whites, due to long-standing institutional discrimination and racism. Even Obama started off in a place that many minorities never see, being raised in a middle-class household that afforded him the educational opportunities to attend Ivy League schools. But the narrative of hard work sounds good and reasonable. At another point in his journal, Peter writes about privilege, and again displays a similar inability to see the impact of race. He refers to privilege as an “opinion of a person or group of people looking in from the outside,” not a real thing from which people systemically benefit. He effectively tries to write off white privilege as only existing because “other races [see] the privilege that white people have over them.” Further, he tries to be facetious about privilege in order to alleviate himself as a white man of that burden, writing, “if you want to get philosophical, isn’t it a privilege to be alive?” Peter, along

with the other individuals who used the equal opportunity angle of abstract liberalism, desire to remove race as an obstacle for competition—even if they benefit from the color of their skin.

Qualifications: Meritocracy Above Race

Another ideologically liberal idea that is similar to the equal opportunity argument is meritocracy, or the idea that people should be rewarded because of how hard they work. As Bonilla-Silva indicated in his analysis, whites seem generally unconcerned that most of the people who are rewarded on the basis of “merit” are white.

Of the Millennials in my study who ascribed to this idea, the majority were white. Four of the six white interviewees used this argument: Ben and Leah, both with no immigrant parents, and Nadia and Simeon, both of the second-generation Armenians. These views typically came through when I presented the students with the job scenario, in which a fictitious company that was 97% white hired a minority candidate over a white candidate. Ben’s comments in response to this question are representative of all these students’ views, so I will detail his below:

“Um, I would say their decision shouldn't really—They shouldn't focus on the race of somebody. I feel like they should just focus more on the qualifications of somebody. I don't think anybody's race should help them or hinder them from getting any sort of job position. So, I don't know if I- I wouldn't say I agree with that all the way, but I can understand them wanting to be more diverse.”

What was also interesting about Ben is that he used a diminutive to soften his response (see below for more on this rhetorical strategy), saying that he did not agree “all the way” with the company’s decision. All of the other students who believed in meritocracy above race used very similar language, citing that the decision was not good, because an individual’s qualifications should be the only thing that gets them a job.

Naturalization

As a frame of colorblind racism, naturalization is the process by which racial matters or things that have racial implications are rationalized as non-racial and “natural.” Millennials spoke about things happening in their social worlds as “human nature,” or as the result of the “tendencies” of people to “be comfortable,” or as “just happening” without any conscious choice or action. As Bonilla-Silva notes, however, social scientists are quite aware that very little in our social worlds occurs naturally—in particular racial matters. Regarding naturalization, Bonilla-Silva writes, “Segregation as well as racial preferences are produced through social processes and that is the delusion/illusion component of this frame” (2010, p. 37). The white Millennials in this study used the naturalization frame to rationalize three major phenomena: neighborhood and school segregation, friend groups and cross-racial interactions, and dating preferences.

Out of all of the different racial groups, white Millennials were the most likely to naturalize their dating preferences. Abigail, one of the white journalers who has an immigrant mother from Germany, detailed her dating habits in a very interesting manner:

“So I recently came out as bisexual to my family and friends and now that I’m out, I’m starting to actually explore my options a little more. One thing I’ve found is that in theory, I’m attracted to most females of any race. But now that I’m actually looking to act on their newfound sexual liberation, I don’t find myself gravitating to women of color. Actually, the only girl I really like looks pretty much like me! It’s a little frustrating because I was looking to bring adventure and excitement into my world but alas, still dating within my race and socioeconomic background. It kinda sucks, but ‘you can’t help who you are attracted to’.”

Abigail does not speak about whom she dates as a result of her choices at all: she simply does not “find [herself] gravitating to women of color” (even though she is attracted to

them “in theory”). According to Abigail, “you can’t help who you are attracted to,” which, while sounding reasonable “in theory,” removes the onus of choice from the individual completely, and allows for the perpetuation of same-race relationships. I also find it insightful that Abigail was looking to bring “adventure and excitement into [her] world” by dating outside of her race, which exotifies race (not to mention that many might think that coming out as bisexual and openly exploring same-sex options is “excitement” enough). Abigail also uses the naturalization argument in a different post, asserting “It’s so interesting to see how people of similar race normally pair up together,” and that she “personally” sees herself doing this because “I’m most comfortable with other people of my own race.” Language like “comfort” or “similarity” was often invoked in this way to justify homogenous friend groups or lack of cross-racial interactions.

Looking at my data, I find that Millennials who utilized naturalization in regards to one issue typically used it for other issues as well, which indicated that they often attempted to explain away phenomena in their social worlds as not race-related. As examples of how this worked, I will profile several students below.

Ben used naturalization quite a few times. When I asked him if he thought school segregation was the fault of the government or a particular race, he answered using this frame:

“I wouldn't say it's—I would say it's more [a] race's fault. Um, because like I said earlier, like, this can't—This is a very diverse school, but the students here tend to really only, like, hang out with an associate of people that are of a similar race as them. Just from what I've observed, and I think it was kind of the same in s- in schools. **Like, people are—tend to be drawn to people who are more like them.**”

He used this exact same language when I asked him about neighborhood segregation.

“Um, I believe it. Uh, I think it also, like I said, just depend—**people just tend to want to live near people that are more like them, you know?** Um, I feel like you shouldn't, but everybody would feel uncomfortable being the only member of a certain race. I wouldn't— actually, no. "Uncomfortable" is a bad word, but I feel like they'd feel, like, different than everyone else, and they would want to be around people that, like, they could relate to. That are more like them.”

Ben also used naturalization when he spoke about his choices in dating partners up to this point in his life, saying, “it just happened to be, you know, me dating all, uh, white females” (although he did say he was dating an African American girl “briefly”).

Simeon, the white student who emigrated from Armenia when he was one year old, also addressed school and residential segregation. His use of the naturalization frame began with his definition of race, citing that humans created race because “it's just human nature to separate yourself from other people.” Regarding school segregation, Simeon disagrees with the idea that it should exist, but still believes it is natural: “[The government] can unsegregated [sic] schools, but still there's gonna be...human nature is to pack together in similar groups. And those groups are still gonna happen, even if they're illegally required or not required. People are still gonna go into schools with the same makeup as their own.” He also said nearly the same thing about neighborhood segregation, suggesting that it was a result of “group mentality,” and that “People go to groups with the same makeup, they like those groups, so they're going to move into the neighborhoods with those same racial makeups. I don't think you can really do anything about that. Maybe you can, I don't know. [laughs]” His conclusion that he does not think “you can really do anything about that” indicates just how natural he believes this process

is (even though he tries to offset this belief with a quick, “Maybe you can, I don’t know.”).

Nadia, the other white student with Armenian immigrant parents, discussed residential segregation as something that just “happens” and is not anybody’s fault (and that the government could not do anything to really change it, as I highlighted earlier). Nadia also illustrates how this frame can be dangerous, because it can be used to then justify race-based choices, such as friend groups. When I asked Nadia about her current group of friends, she defended the fact that they were all white by using the naturalization frame: “Oh, no. Like I didn't like [laughs], [say] I'm only going to be friends with ... (laughs) No. I think because like I made friends through [this student group], and [it] was predominantly ... It consists of white ... The students are white. I don't ... Yeah, so I think that's just how it happened but um, like I didn't voluntarily [say], ‘Oh, okay now ...’” To Nadia, her friend group just happens to be all white because that is the make-up of the student organization she joined. As you can also see, Nadia gets a little incoherent when discussing her all-white friends (see section below on the rhetorical strategies of colorblind racism), which is an indication that she is a little uncomfortable with the fact that all of her friends are white.

Minimization of Racism

The frame of minimization is all about downplaying the significance of race. For the most part, people of all races, including whites, believe that racial discrimination exists. As Bonilla-Silva found, however, whites tend to believe that discrimination is no longer a

significant factor in the lives of racial minorities; in other words, it does not impact their life chances. Overall, white students in my study were the most likely to use minimization. Typically, white Millennials used indirect strategies of denial (e.g. “I’m not a racial minority” or “I don’t see discrimination”), direct strategies, or accused minorities of making things about race when they were not (i.e., “pulling the race card”). It is also important to point out that many of these students gave lip service to discrimination—they acknowledged its general existence—but still believed that discrimination was no longer a significant factor in minorities’ lives.

Here is an example of a white student, Athena, writing in her journal about discrimination. Athena is a third-year communications major, who was enrolled in a social problems course when I recruited her. Yet and still, she merely gives lip service to existing discrimination, but clearly has strong beliefs about the role racism plays in racial minorities’ lives:

“Despite these disadvantages for minorities, is it not at all impossible for people of color to succeed and go to great lengths in this country. If anything, President Obama should serve as an example that with the right attitude you can accomplish anything you set your mind to, despite the fact that the kid up the street may have been given much more assistance along the way. In conclusion, racism is rarely a valid excuse for a lack of success, but it is by no means dead and gone.”

As Bonilla-Silva also pointed out, many of these Millennials, like Athena, were enrolled in sociology courses at the time of this study, and so it is likely that they were getting information about issues of race and discrimination. With this being the case, it is even more significant that many of these Millennials still minimize issues of race.

Indirect Minimization

Four white students used indirect strategies of minimizing the significance of race. As previously mentioned, indirect minimization typically came in the form of “I’m not a racial minority” or “I don’t see discrimination.” Simeon provides a good example, indicating that his views on the declining significance of race were based on the fact that he was not a racial minority:

“I think they do matter. So I guess it is a sign that racism is less relevant in our society, that President Obama was elected. But I can't see it being too strong of a factor. **Then again, I cant comment on it, because I'm not part of the minority,** so I can't tell you for sure what experiences other people have. I think a better person to ask would be President Obama.”

It is also interesting that he suggests asking President Obama about racism, implying that he believes the former president would have a better understanding because of his race.

Direct Minimization

Seven white Millennials from this study used direct minimization, demonstrating that direct strategies of minimizing the significance of discrimination were utilized even more often with whites. I will present an example from Ben that highlights the ways in which these students used direct minimization.

Ben drew from the tokenistic narrative of President Obama to minimize the significance of racism and discrimination, saying:

“I'd say it would matter less than it did years ago. I'd say we're slowly get—I would say we're actually on a good path right now. We're slowly climbing towards, you know, race not mattering, but it still is an issue, I believe. Um, you know, there were still a lot of people that were angry over having Obama as a president, you know, but he still won, so that shows that the majority of the country, you know, supports him.”

Ben glazes over the fact that “a lot of people were angry over having Obama as president” and all of the implications of this statement, instead using vague terminology to focus on the fact that “the majority of the country, you know, supports [Obama].” In reality, Obama faced treatment that no sitting president has ever faced before him, including questions about his legitimacy as an American citizen, being called a liar to his face in press conferences, and having unquestionably racist comments made about him (and his wife). Ben’s narrative, which barely acknowledges racial issues, merely works to downplay the significance of race in the U.S.

“Pulling the Race Card”

One white student used the minimization frame by claiming that racial minorities make things about race when they are not, or to borrow the colloquial phrase, they “pulled the race card.” Avery, one of the journalers, wrote an entry that demonstrates a more creative way that someone can use this minimization method.

“Last semester, I attended the Millions Man March in Washington, DC and it was definitely a memorable experience for me. What struck [sic] me the most was the lack of diversity there. First, it’s almost like getting to experience first hand what people of color sometimes have to go through when they live in a majority white neighborhood or community. Second, there have to be more allies than just me but yet we rarely see white participation in these movements. Everything is racialized. I remember watching on the news of the interview of one of the head members of the NAACP recently and they were accused her of not being of African American descent. I thought this was particularly rude because what does it even matter? If she’s passionate toward the cause, then what does it matter if she’s black or not.”

Avery clearly accuses racial minorities (most likely blacks, given the event) of “racializing” everything—even though she is clearly racializing her own experience. For Avery, social movements should not be racialized in such a way that whites are excluded (in her mind), and she calls upon the example of Rachel Dolezal to plead her case, citing

that it was “rude” that the NAACP “accused her of not being of African American descent,” because “what does it even matter?” Avery minimizes the significance of race by accusing the NAACP (a group of people of color) of making a situation unnecessarily racial, and by ignoring legitimate concerns of the implications of what Rachel Dolezal had been doing.

Cultural Racism

The final frame, cultural racism, is well established in the U.S. It originates from the “culture of poverty” thesis put forth by Oscar Lewis (1961, 1965), which posits that poor people developed a culture based on adaptations to their poverty status, which, because it is passed from generation to generation, serves as a barrier to exiting the poor class. Though originally put forth as a class-based model, its tenets transitioned into one based on racial groups. What we have ended up with is a frame that essentially “blames the victim,” arguing that racial minorities’ life standings are their own fault, because of a lack of effort or misguided and inappropriate family structures and values.

Among the Millennials in this study, this frame was manifested mostly through the guise of the “cycle of poverty” argument. Many participants talked about some racial groups falling into an almost-inescapable cycle of poverty, but there were two main ways of invoking this idea: one fit the mold of cultural racism, while the other did not. One white student used cultural racism in the style of the former.

In his interview, I asked Ben why he thought many blacks and Latinxs have worse jobs, housing, and income than whites. He started off by saying a lot of Latinxs are

immigrants, and that as immigrants, “moving to a different country [they’re] not going to start off being super well-off.” He went on to speak about blacks, citing:

“And then, um, with African-Americans, uh, it's kind of the same thing. Like mo—like, there's the ones that were born into, like, poor situations and I said, like, their schools don't get funding so they don't get educated as well, and so then they can't— **they don't get the motivation to go to college**, and then they end up not getting the good jobs, and I say that's kind of like a racial issue.”

Ben’s particular usage of the cultural racism frame, which other non-white students did as well (see Chapter 5), was couched within discussion that was on the verge of *not* being culturally racist. As you can see with Ben’s comments, it was only a short phrase or word that completely shifted the nature of their argument. Ben attempted to explain that unequal schooling opportunities hold back some African Americans, but then he focused in on African Americans as individuals, saying that they end up lacking the personal fortitude to go to college as a result of their schooling. For Ben, the cycle of poverty impacts the culture and mindsets racial minorities. It is important to note that the distinction between a culturally racist framing of the cycle of poverty and one that is not culturally racist could arise because some of these students are learning about sociological issues like the cycle of poverty, so they may not fully understand the concept in a way they can articulate clearly. I argue that this distinction does not significantly change the outcome of the students’ framing, merely their intent. And, to draw from a popular phrase, “The road to hell is paved with good intentions.” Even if students like Ben do not *intend* to perpetuate racist thinking about racial minorities, they do. Further, based on structural formations of racism, what an individual intends is largely irrelevant, because structural racism is not about individual people’s thoughts and beliefs, but rather a system that works in lieu of “bad” individual actors.

Some students used the cycle of poverty to describe a social structure that continually disenfranchises racial minorities, such that many end up stuck in poverty generation after generation, no matter how hard they try to get out. What exempted these students from cultural racism was that they focused on the social structures themselves, and how these blocked opportunities for racial minorities; the individuals themselves were not at fault. For instance, Zahiya, the second-generation Turkish woman who identifies as “ethnic white,” exhibits how some students focused on structures and not misplaced values or a lack of effort. During the interview, she gave a very detailed scenario in an effort to explain the standing of many racial minorities as compared to whites:

“Generations of the same thing happening and happening over again. And it's like, so like—Suppose one person, you'd have a black or a Latino guy, right, and he starts a family. But he has, he starts a job and he finds whatever he can. No one's hiring him. So he gets a low-income job. Then he can't invest in a good house, and his kids go to worse school because of property taxes. Property, not a state, because the state does the death tax. Property taxes, and then it just keep perpetuating because they go to a worse school, they don't have the same education, which means they don't have the same job opportunity. It's the cycle and then nobody can [escape], like there's no wealth accumulation. Like, middle class suburban. That's a wealth investment. Like, you don't use that money for anything, you use it just to live in the house and hope that in 50 years you can pass it to your kids. That doesn't happen in minority neighborhoods. Houses, again, aren't worth anything, from what I said earlier.”

Although wealth investment does happen sometimes in minority neighborhoods, Zahiya is correct in her general idea. We know that it happens at much lower rates for racial and ethnic minorities, particularly blacks and Latinos. Zahiya deftly explains the cycle that often ends up trapping racial minorities in poverty, again focusing on the structures that prevent upward mobility, not blaming the individuals themselves.

The Frames of Color-Blind Racism in Review

In the preceding sections, I showcased how the Millennials in my study were utilizing the four frames of color-blind racism: abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism. Further supporting Bonilla-Silva's original findings, I find that these frames are central in whites Millennials' formations of their racial ideology, and they use these frames often to explain various racial issues. These findings speak very clearly to the power of color-blind racism, as many of these Millennials were not even alive when Bonilla-Silva first conceptualized the new ideology of color-blind racism. The frames he outlined have succeeded in carrying colorblindness through the past two decades.

As I mentioned earlier, although I presented the four frames of color-blind racism in a linear fashion, their usage was often not so distinct and clear-cut. Often these students used the frames in various combinations, which is a key aspect of their purpose within color-blind racism. It is through their combined usage that the ideological walls become so impenetrable. An individual can say that they disagree with supporting initiatives that give assistance to racial minorities because they believe in meritocracy (abstract liberalism) and also say that most people have equal opportunities now because racism is a thing of the past (minimization). If someone argues this logic, pointing out racial inequalities, then that person can assert that some minorities simply have the wrong values or are not working hard enough (cultural racism).

Again, as Mary Jackman pointed out about ideology, rigidity is tantamount to ideological death. Flexibility is key to maintain ideological dominance, and because

color-blind racism can be used in such flexible ways, it is a very durable ideology. Part of what makes color-blind racism so pliable is also the ways in which people use the frames, or their particular stylizations. People use denials (“I’m not a racist, but...”), disclaimers (“I’m not black, so I don’t really know...”), and other rhetorical strategies to get around speaking directly about race, and to effectively appear as non-racist. In this following section, I will provide an analysis of these tools and how the white Millennials in my study used them.

THE STYLE OF COLOR-BLIND RACISM

The style of color-blind ideology is the ways in which people communicate its major frames, the linguistic and rhetorical maneuvers that allow people to speak about and around race. Bonilla-Silva argues that because the post-Civil Rights era brought significant changes in the racial climate of the U.S., “the language of color blindness is slippery, apparently contradictory, and often subtle” (2010:53). In other words, whites in particular often give confusing, ambiguous answers to direct questions, use disclaimers, or become altogether incoherent when speaking about race.

Bonilla-Silva outlined five stylistic components of color blindness in his book: whites’ avoidance of direct racial language, the semantic moves whites use to save face, whites’ projection of racism and racial motivations onto blacks, how whites use diminutives to lessen the impact of their racial blows, and how whites often become

completely incoherent when speaking about race¹⁴. In this investigation of college Millennials, I will discuss how each of these stylizations came through in my data.

What I found is that these stylistic components of color blindness were pretty much the sole purview of the white students in my sample. Only one Latinx, one black, one multiracial, and three Asians used any of these forms of race talk (see Chapter 5 for a discussion of the ways Millennials of color used them). This makes sense on a general level, as people of color are typically much more direct than whites when speaking about racial matters. For instance, the Millennials of color in this study were more direct with regards to their social circles: if they did not have white friends, they said so very matter-of-factly, without claiming a “white best friend,” and without wringing their hands in shame. White Millennials were inclined to do the exact opposite.

Before I showcase examples of how students in this study used these styles, I will once again address intentionality. I am not attempting to attribute intentionality to these students, nor am I labeling them as “‘racists’ trying to cover up their *real* views through these stylistic devices” (Bonilla-Silva 2010:54). As previously mentioned, I approach racism through a structural definition that is rooted in issues of power. As such, individual actors and their intentions are not necessary for perpetuating racist systems. Further, racism is not about “bad” people; it is not an issue of morality.

¹⁴ As Bonilla-Silva mentions, rhetorical incoherence is not technically considered an ideological style. However, since so many people in his study used it, he includes it as part of the stylization of color-blind racism. I consider it in the same manner.

Avoiding Direct Language

None of the respondents in this study used racial slurs or outright racist language when talking about racial or ethnic minorities. One white woman, Grace, did use the term “colored” (“I told my boyfriend that the nicest people at [my school] are colored and here [at your school] you're missing out on meeting these nice people.”), but it is likely she was trying to say “people of color” and got confused. Some white Millennials did avoid talking about race directly, however, and instead used the current language of political correctness, which is a form of coded language.

I will give another example from Grace that illustrates this idea. In her journal, Grace wrote about when she first decided to attend her university. She came to campus to do a tour, and found herself distraught over the racial makeup of the school:

“I'll be honest, when I came to [my university] for the first time I was terrified I wasn't going to fit in. As I took my tour all I saw were Asians. Not saying Asians are anything bad but I'm just not Asian and it was scary seeing nobody that looked like me. After my tour I went home crying because I knew [this school] was going to be my home for the next four years. [It] was the only school that I could financially afford. Therefore, leaving [the school] that day I was so sad and terrified and I had questioned everything. I went to school in August and automatically felt better; the school was so diverse it was amazing. All of my classes are very diverse and its great meeting people from all over the world and hearing the different thoughts on each topic pertaining to the class. To this day I have so many diverse friends and I couldn't be happier with my choice.”

In her story, Grace described how she was "terrified" that she was not going to fit in because nobody looked like her. Although she does not say it outright, she obviously means that she did not see enough white people. She uses coded language to describe how she “automatically felt better” when she came back at the beginning of the fall semester, because the school was “so diverse it was amazing.” Because she pointed out

that “all [she] saw were Asians” on her tour, and that nobody looked like her (a white woman), she was clearly not really concerned with actual diversity, which would mean a range of racial and ethnic groups. We can safely assume that she “felt better” because there were more white people—even though she tries to mask this by not saying “white people” directly and saying it was “great meeting people from all over the world.”

Ben also used some politically correct, coded language when discussing issues with immigration. When I asked him what his views were on immigration in the U.S., he responded:

“Um, I feel like it's something tough, because, you know, I do feel like people should be able to move here, but you still have to remember that there are a lot of **dangerous people** that want to, like, harm the US, you know? Like, we have ISIS. We have, like, drug cartels and stuff. So, you know, we do have to be careful, but I do think anybody who wants to come in here should be, but there should still be, like, you know, background checks and stuff.”

The language of “dangerous people” here indicates racialized thinking, although the speaker—Ben in this case—can avoid making explicit racial references. In this country, when people talk about “dangerous people” in conjunction with ISIS and drug cartels, they are referring to brown people: Middle Easterners, specifically Muslims, and Latinxs, typically Mexicans and South Americans. The word “cartel” is actually specific to Latin American drug organizations. People do not typically talk about dangerous *white* people. For instance, it is plausible that drug organizations could come from European countries, but rhetoric surrounding immigration rarely mentions trying to keep out “bad Russian drug dealers.”

Nadia was another student who used indirect, coded language to speak about race. During her interview, I asked her about her experience with interracial relationships.

After disclosing that she has never dated a nonwhite person (and after she said she would marry a person of a different race “Maybe, sure, if I met them, yeah. [laughing]”), I asked her if she thought she might face any issues if she did date someone outside of her race. She responded very tentatively, saying, “Um, maybe I'd say. Probably, I think it would depend ... Like this sounds really bad but like it would depend probably on the race a little bit. I mean, if ... Like I don't know. Like I don't ... Not from my friends or anything but maybe from my pare—Like my dad particularly (laughs).” I asked her to elaborate, and she somewhat reluctantly complied:

“Um, sure. (laughs) So I guess ... Mm, I mean I don't really ... I guess, if I like came home with like, with like an Asian guy. Like my dad might be like, "Oh, like but he's ..." Like he, he would see it maybe more like positively like because of the like stereotype that Asians are smarter or something like that or than like ... I don't even know, like a negative one but like I think it would just like the ... I don't really know how like it would break down but ...”

Nadia talked about “issues” coming from her dad—which already means it has a negative spin—yet she seemingly catches herself and avoids saying something negative about a race that her father might think, or that might belie her beliefs, by focusing on a positive stereotype. Are we really to believe that her father would have concerns because he is thinking, "This Asian guy must be smart!" Most likely, her father has concerns that arise from more negative stereotypes about nonwhites, like those associated with blacks or Latinos. However, Nadia took great care not to mention any negative stereotypes at all, to save face for herself and for her father.

Semantic Moves

As I described previously, the racial climate after the Civil Rights movement necessitated a change in (mainly) whites' ways of openly discussing race. Aside from the shift to political correctness and coded language, whites turned to semantic moves to more safely express their views. In essence, these semantic moves act as "rhetorical shields" allowing whites to save face, because whites can always point back to the safety their "shield" provided. For example, whites often use forms of denial or claims of ignorance, such as "I don't really believe this, but..." or "I don't really know." If called out on racist commentary, they can recall these statements to save face—"Well, I didn't mean that because like I said, I don't really know..." There were two main semantic moves used by respondents in this study: "I'm not racist"/"My best friend is (a racial minority)," and claiming anything but race. I will highlight examples from each in the following paragraphs.

"I'm Not Racist..." and "My Best Friend Is _____"

These phrases are classic forms of semantic moves, meant to offset whatever commentary is made around the phrase that is blatantly racist or could be construed as racist. It gives the user something to fall back on, in order to save face. Below, I profile one white woman—Evelyn—who epitomized the use of this type of semantic moves.

Evelyn was one of the white women involved in this study who completed both the journals and the interview. Evelyn was a part of the upper-middle class, asserting that her family was probably in the "top 15%" of the U.S. During her interview, Evelyn used semantic moves on two separate occasions in order to save face.

The first example occurred when I asked her about her feelings on immigration in the U.S. She attempted to take what she called a “middle of the road” approach, which is basically a form of saying “yes and no,” another semantic move that allows users to appear to examine multiple sides of an issue but then take a stance on one side or another. She starts off by saying that she is for immigration—just not illegal immigration:

“Yeah. I don't really ... honestly I'm all for immigration, it's just like I don't ... I don't agree with illegal immigration. I don't think. I mean I don't know that much about it. Like compared to obviously the people that are dealing with it. But ... I mean obviously ... I don't. It's just like, illegal. I don't go break into places ... it's not like breaking in, I know ... They want a better life and stuff. But still like, they have to do everything else that ... everyone else is doing.”

Here you can already see her using semantic moves to dance around the issue. She does not agree with illegal immigration, but then says “I don't know that much about it.” Interestingly, she seems to know enough to formulate an opinion, which is that no matter what illegal immigrants are dealing with (“They want a better life and stuff”), they still need to do “everything else that ... everyone else is doing.” She ends with another “I don't know” statement, saying, “I don't know. It's just like difficult. So, sorry. Middle of the road again.”

I followed up this commentary by pushing her a little to discuss her thoughts on who should be allowed to immigrate. In response, she said “Everybody, first of all,” but then asked if I was talking specifically about Syrian refugees. I told her I was not asking about any group specifically, and just wanted her thoughts, and she dove into a very slippery account of why, essentially, Syrians should not be allowed into the U.S., something she called a “sticky situation.”

“I don't ... That's just such a ... another sticky situation. Everything's just so sticky. Just because. I mean. I don't even know what to think about it. I ... That's why I'm

just like you know what, I'm not going to get stressed out about it. It's not my job. I'm going to leave it to them. **But I do donate. I do donate money to the Syrian refugees. Yes. So I donated like 20 bucks.** But um. I don't ... It should definitely be everyone in the world allowed to come here, obviously. But um, I think that it's like a little bit ... I think that it's justified for people to be a little bit wary of letting people from the Middle East in at this point just because of all the stuff that's going on. And I know it's like, maybe not ... I mean of course the news magnifies everything, but when it's always blasting in your face, you're going to be a little bit like, oh, like, 'A thousand Syrian refugees are in my town now. Cool.' Like, I probably ... I don't know how I'd feel about that. Honestly, I'd probably not feel good about that to be honest. So ... But I mean. Yeah I guess. I just thought about that ... but it's like, it sucks because you don't know but there's so much going on with that right now. That's it, scary. Scary for me at least. They're so cruel to women and I'm just like, it's really scary. Like a lot of the things they do, you know? Like really, really bad. So.”

Although Evelyn calls the decision to allow Syrian refugees into the U.S. a “sticky situation,” and asserts that she does not “even know what to think about it,” she clearly lands on the side of *not* allowing any Syrians into the country. Her reasons are that it is “justified for people to be a little bit wary of letting people from the Middle East in at this point just because of all the stuff that's going on.” But, in the midst of this anti-Syrian immigration, she throws in, “But I do donate. I do donate money to the Syrian refugees. Yes. So I donated like 20 bucks.” This is Evelyn’s way of saying, “See? I’m not racist. I support the cause.” I am sure all of the Syrian refugees she would deny entry to ease her fears are very appreciative of her \$20 donation.

During another point in her interview, Evelyn uses a similar semantic move, this time regarding her romantic choices. When I asked her to tell me about the people she has been in relationships with or dated in the past, she appeared bothered by the fact that she has only really dated white men. She starts off stuttering and trying to find her words (which is rhetorical incoherence, another style of color-blindness I will discuss in more

detail shortly): “Yeah. Um. Hm, hm, hm. Very ... very different. Like ... Okay. Okay. So, the two guys that I’ve really dated were like blonde hair and blue eyes. But I really ... that’s not a thing just because like I have like talked to and been in serious things with like way different looking people. I just think it was just like that circumstance.” After some more fumbling, she admits that she has dated “mostly, probably, white” men. Following this admission, she very quickly attempts to save face, speaking about someone she is “talking to” now an another person she “dated” that she happened to remember at that time: “This guy is pretty Lebanese. He’s pretty like, pretty exotic for me. And then in high school, um, I had a thing with this black guy. He’s now like a football player at um, NC State. And we had a thing for like a month but then like that just kinda sizzled out. But like, not for any apparent reason. It just kind of did.”

Regarding the “black guy” with whom she “had a thing,” it seems very convenient that she recalled this vague relationship only after she verbally admitted to mostly dating white men. Additionally, the similarly vague relationship she has with a Lebanese man is not actually a real relationship. When I ask her for some clarification on the guy she was currently dating, she responded by saying, “Yeah. We’re not really dating.” It seems as though Evelyn only mentioned him as a way to save face for her romantic choices; she was saying, “By the way, I’m dating a non-white not”—even though, as a Lebanese man, he is still technically white, just not a blond-haired blue-eyed American. Further, she only seemed able to describe this person is what I deem very Trumpian terms: all surface level, with vague adverbs. According to her, he was “very Lebanese,” and his family is “very Lebanese, they moved from Lebanon.” Evelyn was very good at trying to save face by drawing attention to these “counter narratives” to her

racial choices: at the last second during our discussion about her dating partners, she throws in another “thing” she had with a non-white: “But. Oh wait! Okay. I did have another thing with like a mixed guy. Senior year in high school.” This was obviously not very serious as she barely remembered it, and like the other nonwhite relationships, she classified it as a “thing,” not a relationship. At any rate, for Evelyn, these examples served their purpose in positioning her as not racist.

Anything But Race

This rhetorical move is very similar to saying “I am not a racist” or “My best friend is _____,” because it allows the user to shift the focus away from race. By doing so, individuals can maintain their color-blind view of the world around them.

For example, when I asked Nadia if she thought institutions can be described as racist, she replied using this semantic move:

“I would say it was mostly white but I don't think it was racist, in the sense that like ... I think it was just mostly like the white people applied to go there. Um, I don't think they would have like turned down pe- Like they, they don't ... Like I mean they ... But I think there's like a distinction between that and like actively being racist and actively not giving the same opportunities to people, of the same ... Like, you know what I mean, like of the same race. Of different races, sorry.”

You can see Nadia is excusing the racial component of what she is describing, by saying it is because “mostly...white people applied,” not that the school had any practices that excluded people of color, intentionally or otherwise. Nadia is also demonstrating some rhetorical incoherence here (which I will discuss shortly), starting and stopping a lot and somewhat floundering for a response.

Diminutives

Diminutives are another key way that whites can “soften their racial blows” (Bonilla-Silva 2010:66). Again, because of the shift in rhetoric following Civil Right, people rarely draw hard lines in the sand. Whites are less likely to say outright, “I am completely against affirmative action.” Instead, they say, “I am a little against affirmative action.”

All of the whites who used this style in the study used it in an effort to diminish what might be a hardline racial stance into something more palatable. For example, Avery (journaler) wrote about one of her former roommates who was “low key racist,” who would post things online that were not “down right racist, but they were all on the cusp.” Similarly, Ben’s comments regarding the fictitious company’s decision to hire a racial minority over a white person involved a diminutive: “So, I don't know if I- I wouldn't say I agree with that **all the way**, but I can understand them wanting to be more diverse.”

A final example comes from Evelyn. During our interview together, I asked her about why blacks and Latinxs tend to have worse jobs, housing, and income than whites. She responded by using a diminutive:

“Um. Well. Just like. Uh, I don't know. Everything is so annoying. I don't know. So like, first of all, it goes back to being a time. You know, America. Slavery. White people. Whatever. I just feel like ... Uh! I don't know. I just feel like ... Stereotypes. And just white people. Like everyone's like, "Oh." ... Like I feel like **there's always just a little bit of, like, sprinkling of white people having better stuff**. Having better jobs. Everything being better. But like ... and also—So like along with that part, um, it's like, the part about people living in bad neighborhoods and having bad places to grow up. And um, just going to bad schools.”

According to Evelyn, there has just been a “sprinkling of white people having better stuff.” In reality, however, the racial disparities that exist are much more than a mere “sprinkling,” as a predominance of whites have had long-standing benefits in housing, income, and in the work force. Labeling the privileges and benefits whites have using diminutives, however, likely allows Evelyn to feel better as a white person who can be said to have benefited from her racial privilege.

Projection

The intent of projection as a rhetorical strategy is to shift blame and escape guilt and responsibility. Some of the white Millennials used projection as a way to put the onus of racism or discrimination onto somebody else. In other words, if I project onto you, you become the racist, not me. As with the other stylizations of colorblindness, whites were most often the perpetrators of this strategy.

An example comes from Elizabeth, one of the white women who completed the journal portion of the study. Elizabeth wrote about a time when she heard two black men calling each other what she called “racist names:”

“Today I was walking back from class and heard some boys talking behind me. One boy said to the other that he saw a friend. He shouted “Negro” across [the quad] to get his friend’s attention. When I heard this I turned around because I felt as if it was very offensive. Then I saw the two black boys shake hands and call each other racist names, such as black boy, and chocolate. This small interaction lead me to think why it is okay for blacks to call each other racist names, but when whites refer to someone as a “black boy” or call someone “chocolate” it is instantly racist, offensive, and brought to everyone’s attention. I know previous years in history distinctly note that whites are racist towards blacks, leading racist name calling to be unacceptable, however, I strongly feel that if blacks publicly use these names, whites instantly think it is okay and do the same.”

She continues to write about this offensive double-standard, even citing that one of the same black men called one of his white friends “white cactus,” which further offended Elizabeth. As you can see, Elizabeth is arguing that blacks can also be racist, and that whites are not the only racist people, which she further supports by saying that whites only think it is ok to call black people racist names because blacks use those same names among themselves.

Projection also came through for whites when speaking about discrimination *against* whites. Grace, the white journaler who was “terrified” when she first came to her school because she saw only Asians and “no one that looked like her,” wrote about an incident that occurred in her sorority. In this example, Grace uses projection to justify her and her white friends’ negative stereotypes about black men.

“Last week my sorority had a ‘Dated’ which means we all bring a date and go to a nice venue in DC for dinner and dancing. I got set up with at what I thought was a very nice black boy. The night started very nice and he was a complete gentleman but as the night went on he changed and become very mean and disrespectful. My best friend within my sorority was the one who set me up and so her date and my date were super close. It could have been the alcohol that they were drinking that made both of our dates rude but regardless it was very disrespectful. My whole sorority that night noticed that these two African American boys were being rude to us girls and said something. They commented back to my friends by telling them they “smelled bad” or “you need to fix their makeup cause it looks bad”, just overall rude comments. After the night ended me and my best friend and my whole sorority had a bad outlook of African Americans just because of the way they acted and treat us as a group.”

Again, we see justification for judging an entire group of people (black men) off of one interaction (which is even further interesting because, in another journal entry, Grace says that one of her best friends to this day is a black man). Because these two individuals made some rude comments, all black men were the problem—not the women’s negative perceptions.

Rhetorical Incoherence

Although rhetorical incoherence is not an official part of the style of colorblindness, it is still a significant part of how people, mostly whites, discuss racial matters. People in general tend to become less comprehensible when talking about sensitive topics, so it makes sense that whites would demonstrate a level of incoherence when talking about a “taboo” subject like race.

One white student became very incoherent when attempting to discuss her racial identity choice, and how that might apply to others who were not white. When I asked Skylar if she might check an option not currently present on the census for her racial identity, she said she would prefer to check “American.” I asked her to explain that a little more; specifically, I asked if everybody would be able to check this option or not. In response, she became fully incoherent:

“Um. Well I guess there wouldn't be that much more ... I don't know. If you really identified with, cause, I don't really identify with, ‘Oh I'm like half-Irish, like I'm Irish,’ like I think, ‘Oh, I'm American.’ But like, I think, I guess if you really ... I don't know. If you really think that you identify with another country's race, like I guess you should, like I think you should ... Ah! I don't know what I'm saying. I think that like, uh, I have no idea what I am saying, but ... um, I think ideally, most people, at least in my generation would say, ‘Oh, I'm American,’ or, ‘I'm American-Greek,’ like my friend, he's Greek, and all his family's from Greece, and he's like, ‘Oh, I'm Greek, but I'm also American. I'm American-Greek.’ But I guess I think it should be you check off more than one. Or, it could be like, ‘Do you identify as an American?’ and then, ‘Do you identify as another race?’ Just to see, because most people I think would just identify as American. Or, I don't know. Or also, like uh, I don't know. I think it's different for everyone I guess, cause I don't like ... I don't know. I don't like how it's like black, white, and then tons of other things, because you're not just black, white, or something, like, all these other categories, I think. I think that a lot of people do identify as American. I don't know how to explain it, cause ... I don't know. Especially my generation. I don't think people, people like having to identify by like black, or white, or Asian, or Hispanic. I think that divides us, and especially for me, I don't ... I don't know. We're all like one race, essentially, here. I don't know. Cause if you went to

another country and you were like, 'Oh I'm Amer-' ... I actually don't know what I'm saying. I'm sorry. I can't think of words to describe what I'm thinking. Yeah. Sorry."

In the midst of her explanation, Skylar seems to realize that she was caught: she was equating "American" with "white." If everyone were allowed to check "American," the race portion of the census would be pointless. She shifts first to suggesting what the census already allows—checking more than one option—and then moves to saying, "We're all like one race, essentially." Eventually she just gives up, knowing that she is making no sense ("I can't think of words to describe what I'm thinking.").

Ben provided a good example of how some people were very articulate at certain times, but then completely broke down on other topics. Ben was generally very coherent and well-spoken. When I asked him about who he had previously dated, however, he became incoherent for a brief moment, seemingly because he was embarrassed that he really only dated white women.

"Um, well, they were all white girls. Um (laughs), yeah. So I did—I was dating an African American girl briefly. Um, I'm not very picky, but it just happened to be, you know, me dating all, uh, white females. Um, sin—from high school until now."

This is interesting because it was not the topic of dating or interracial relationships at large, because he answered a direct question about interracial marriage very coherently:

"I think it's no big deal, you know? I think love doesn't really, um, have any boundaries. You know, if two people of a different race feel that they love each other, I feel like they should be able to get married. I think it shouldn't matter, but, um, I know, like, there's some place- there's some people that don't agree with that. I don't understand why. I can see maybe it's because it's like, oh, it's not what they're used to seeing, but for- in my opinion, I have no issue with people dating outside their race."

As Ben demonstrates, speaking about the topic of interracial relationships broadly was not an issue; he became uncomfortable when his espoused beliefs were not supported by his actions, and he knew it.

The Style of Color-Blind Racism in Review

As Bonilla-Silva notes, the rhetorical tools that form the style of color-blind racism are used to “restore a color-blind image when whiteness seeps through the discursive cracks” (2010:70). Here “whiteness” can be expanded to mean “dominant white ideology that perpetuates the racial status quo,” which nonwhites can do as well (but as I find, typically do not; see Chapter 5). As Myers and Williamson (2001) write, race talk is often used in private, racially-homogenous spaces, but color-blind racism allows race talk to occur in public, non-homogenous spaces as well. In short, these styles of color-blind racism are ways for whites (and nonwhites who subscribe to color-blind ideology) to maintain the illusion of colorblindness.

Semantic moves like “I’m not a racist, but,” “My best friend is [a racial minority],” or “I’m not a racial minority, so I don’t know” all provide a way of speaking about race but appearing to be nonracial. These are verbal safety nets that allow speakers something to fall back on in case someone points out issues with what is said: “Well, I told you I’m not a racist, so obviously I did not mean it that way.” Speakers can use diminutives to soften the impact of whatever racial commentary they are making (“I don’t agree all the way with the decision to hire a racial minority over a white person.”), or even project racial issues onto racial minorities themselves (“Some people just don’t want to get along with others, they make everything about race.”). Further, many white

Millennials often become nearly incomprehensible when speaking about race, using long pauses, many false starts, stutters, “ums” and wandering off topic. This happens because race is considered such a taboo topic, and it makes these white students very uncomfortable speaking about it, particularly when it implicates them directly.

Additionally, individuals can use the various styles of color-blind racism in combination, in the same way as the frames. This can be seen in Evelyn’s comments about allowing Syrian refugees to come into the U.S.: “I don't even know what to think about it” (semantic move), “but I do donate money to the Syrian refugees” (semantic move), and “I think it's justified for people to be a little bit wary of letting people from the Middle East in because they're so cruel to women and do really bad things” (projection).

Millennials as a generation have been raised within ideological color-blindness, and have been told that race no longer matters. As the data show, many white Millennials are very adept at navigating the treacherous landscape of race in the U.S., and use the various styles (and frames) of color-blind racism to help them steer. But what are the impacts of color-blind racism on whites? If color-blind ideology provides whites a way to navigate around race or even discount race as a meaningful feature of social life, by default that means that race *is* a social reality. Even though whites are the dominant racial group and color-blindness works to uphold their position within the racial status quo, the ideology does not only affect nonwhites. In the proceeding analysis, I outline several ways in which color-blind racism significantly impacts even those individuals who are most adept at using it—white Millennials.

WHITEWASHING RACE: THE EFFECTS OF COLOR-BLIND RACISM ON WHITES

There is a show called *Archer* that I thoroughly enjoy. It is a comedy about a borderline narcissistic spy who works for his overbearing mother, along with several miscreant co-workers. There is a scene in the fifth season where the main character, Sterling Archer, and his mother, Mallory, are interacting with a foreign dictator who has an unbelievably lavish mansion, filled with priceless artifacts like cases of wine that belonged to Benjamin Franklin. While the characters drink this wine, the dictator describes a multi-million dollar piece of art sitting nearby on an easel. He vividly describes all of these colors and shapes on the painting, in a tone one might use to describe a recently recovered Picasso or Matisse. As he is speaking, Archer and his mother stand in the background with their mouths open, incredulous, and as the dictator finishes his description, we see why: “And then, over everything, just white. Just layer, after layer, after layer of pure white, until you can see nothing of the painting below. Not even with an infrared camera.” The painting is finally revealed, and all the audience sees what the dictator had been meticulously describing: a plain white canvas.

Color-blind racial ideology operates much in the same way as the painting the television character comically describes: by painting “layer, after layer, after layer of pure white” over race, until none of the colors that make up the tapestry of America can be seen—or more aptly, until race supposedly does not matter. However, this whitewashing of race does not actually remove race from the picture: it only *appears* to do so. No

matter how many layers of white paint are used, the colors below can still be seen—if only one cares to look.

Even though the dominant ideology attempts to remove race as a meaningful feature, people—even whites—still experience the effects of race every day. In the following sections, I will outline some of these effects as they came through for the participants in my study. First, I look at the discrepancies that exist between white Millennials' beliefs about their “diverse” lives and reality. Second, I discuss how white guilt “colors” white's experiences with race. Lastly, I examine the power of color-blind racism, and how it can impact the ideology of individuals who, for various reasons, we might expect to showcase less usage of color blindness. I do this by profiling two white women: one who has consistent interactions with blacks, and one who demonstrates progressive beliefs.

Living a Color-Blind Life: Discrepancies Between Beliefs and Realities

One of the impacts color-blind racial ideology has on white Millennials appears to be a distortion of actual lived experiences. Some of the white students in this study believed that their lives were much more diverse than they were in reality, while for others, race was such a nonfactor in their ideology that they did not seem to notice that their lives were almost entirely white.

For example, the white students I interviewed often said that they had racial minorities as friends, but upon closer examination, their claims often appear to be over-exaggerations. Only two white students had diverse friend groups (more than one of their

three or so closest friends is a racial minority) at present: Leah and Zahiya (the latter who, if you recall, identifies as “ethnic white,” not as a “typical white person”). The other white Millennials spoke about interacting across race, but almost none of them had close friends currently who were not white, a trend that typically seemed to persist from high school. For instance, Ben told me he had mostly white friends growing up, although he mentioned that he had one best friend who was a black woman for his “first two years in high school.” Interestingly, he never mentions this woman again, either in the interview or in any of his journal entries, which calls into question the significance of the friendship. At present, all of his friends are white males.

Skylar mentioned the racial minority “friends” she had as a way to maintain her color-blind outlook. She did this on two occasions. First, when I asked her to tell me about her closest friends while she was growing up, she admitted that they were all whites. Seemingly self-conscious about this fact, she immediately offered up, “Yeah, but I had like a bunch of friends of different races through high school, but I wouldn't say they were my closest of friends, but...” As you can see, Skylar trails off at the end of her statement, but it served its purpose: she made it known that she did have friends who were not white, even if they were not “close” friends. Skylar did the same thing when I later asked her about her current friends in college. She intimated that that the people she hangs out with the most are white women—but then, apparently hip to what I am asking her, she tacks on that she has two “friends” with whom she studies who are Asian Indian and black. Skylar considers these study-buddies her friends, and they well may be; however, remember that the people she “hangs out with”—something likely much more indicative of friendship—are white.

Outside of friend groups, discrepancies between beliefs and realities appeared with regards to romantic relationships. All of the white students I interviewed¹⁵ said that they supported interracial marriage and were willing to marry someone who was not white, but only three (Leah, Simeon, and Zahiya) had ever seriously dated someone who was nonwhite, and only Leah had dated a nonwhite more than once. Both Ben and Evelyn discussed having dated black people in high school, however these did not appear to be serious, long-term relationships (Ben said he had “dated a black woman briefly,” and Evelyn referred to having a “thing” with a black man for a month, and said she has “never fallen in love with a black guy”). Nadia and Skylar both said they had never dated anyone who was not white, but when I asked them if they had ever had romantic interest in someone who was nonwhite, they both said yes. Interestingly, neither woman could articulate why they had never turned this supposed “interest” into an actual relationship (and if you recall, Nadia spoke about her father potentially having an issue with her dating a nonwhite, depending on the race of that person).

Skylar provides a further example of the incongruent thinking whites demonstrate with regards to cross-racial romantic relationships. When I asked her for her opinion on people marrying outside of their race, she tried to use the fact that her parents married across religion as both support for interracial marriage and as a critique of anyone who might oppose it:

“Oh I don't think that should matter at all. I mean I'm from a family where it's two different religions and my parents are like, "Yeah we don't understand why this person *had* to marry someone ..." Well, some people we know it's like they *have* to marry a Jewish person, and my mom's always like, "I don't understand why they do that." So I don't understand either, 'cause I think it's just whoever you

¹⁵ Only one white student who completed the journals wrote about dating a nonwhite person. Tracey wrote about dating a black man from her senior year of high school through her first year of college.

love, you should pursue, and like ... Love is love, so I think you should just follow your heart. I think that doesn't matter, race, religion, anything, essentially.”

Suggesting that if her parents can marry outside of their religion, other people can marry across race supports Skylar’s color-blind racial ideology. She is effectively reducing the significance of race. Interestingly, however, students like Skylar make these claims, yet very often never date anyone that is not white.

The data from these students support general trends for Millennials. About 85% of Millennials support interracial marriage, with very little variation across racial groups (Pew Research Center 2010). Despite these general expressed attitudes, however, whites are the least likely to intermarry with nonwhites (Passel, Wang, and Taylor 2010). There is obviously a disconnect between beliefs and lived realities.

But why do these trends exist for the white Millennials in this study? What leads to these discrepancies between beliefs and reality? While these students came from predominantly white neighborhoods (about 70% white), there were still opportunities for them to interact across race—many spoke about nonwhite neighbors, or attending schools that were fairly diverse. Additionally, the majority of these students attended a highly racially diverse college, so even if they did not have a lot of access to nonwhites in high school, they certainly did once they began their post-secondary education.

As countless research on higher education has determined, however, merely having physical diversity at colleges is not sufficient enough for students to get the benefits of diverse campuses (Astin 1993; Chang 1999; Gurin et al. 2002; Hurtado 2001; Pascarella et al. 1996), among which are interracial friendships. Additionally, recent research suggests that white students engage in interracial friendships much less than

students of color (Bowman and Park 2014). This may happen in large part because of propinquity (or proximity) via white segregation in school settings, such as with academic programs where minorities are underrepresented (e.g. engineering, except Asians who are overrepresented in this field; see Ross et al 2012), or student organizations and campus cultures that largely cater to white students (Allen 1992; Harper 2009). Zahiya actually spoke to issues of propinquity during our interview, speaking about the racial differences that exist across various programs on campus. When I asked Zahiya if she thought students of different races interact on campus, she said “not really,” citing that different majors can impact the racial groups with whom you interact, as well as the residence halls you live in and the various living and learning programs the campus offers that perpetuate racial achievement gaps.

Research indicates that the number of interracial friendships during high school has the biggest impact on the number of interracial friendships in the first year of college (Stearns, Buchmann, and Bonneau 2009). This happens in part because students generally carry their friendship-forming habits from high school into college, and if they were making homophilous choices in high school, they are likely to do so in college as well. As previously discussed, most of the white Millennials I interviewed had very homogenous friend groups in high school, so it makes some sense why they continue to have homophilous friendships in college.

Friend choices tie logically to why many of these students have not dated across race either. It is hard to develop romantic feelings for nonwhites if your social circles are almost exclusively white. The white Millennials I spoke with did not seem to make this connection, even when I was asking them point blank about the people they have dated or

their romantic interests. More typically, these students saw their choices in dating partners (and friends) as nonracial happenstance—they were not making conscious decisions to only date whites, it just “happened that way.”

This speaks to a broader theme for how these white Millennials rationalized beliefs in their racially diverse lives. For most of these students, they used the naturalization frame of color-blind racism in order to assert that their choices are nonracial. As I discussed earlier, whites were the most likely of all the racial groups in this study to naturalize their dating preferences. This leads whites to people like Ben saying that he just “happened” to date white women, or Evelyn saying that it was just “circumstance” that caused her to “never fall in love with a black guy.” Similarly, white Millennials naturalized their friend groups as well. If you will recall, Nadia asserted that her friend group is all white because she made friends from one of the on campus organizations she joined, that “just so happened” to have mostly white women as members. Nadia did not purposefully choose these friends—even though she spoke about also being in other organizations that were more diverse. By utilizing the language of the dominant racial ideology, color blindness, these white Millennials could boldly declare that they lived very diverse lives, even while being surrounded by almost exclusively whites in every aspect of their social worlds.

White Guilt

Some of the whites in the study expressed feelings of guilt associated with being white. This is consistent with some research that suggests whites may experience feelings of

guilt as they recognize pervasive racism in society (both contemporarily and historically) and realize that they, as white people, systematically benefit from their racial identity (Helms 1990; Row, Bennett, and Atkinson 1994). The guilt that many whites feels actually goes against the ideology of colorblindness, because their guilt is based on their white racial identity. Additionally, white guilt appears to serve as one of the engines or mechanisms for color-blind racism—if race is no longer an important factor, then whites do not have to feel guilty about benefiting from their whiteness. As you will see in the following paragraphs, the guilt these white Millennials felt typically took one of three forms: generalized guilt, semantic guilt (“I feel bad for thinking this, but...”), and a form of projection where being race-conscious is a burden on whites.

Generalized Guilt

Some white students felt a sense of general guilt for being white. This is a form of collective guilt whereby whites feel guilty “by association”—they benefit from whiteness, even if they do not want to (Swim and Miller 1999). For example, when I asked Ben if he felt that whites were discriminated against in today’s society, his reply highlighted his personal feelings of guilt as a white person:

“I wouldn't say institutionally, no, but maybe, you know, I feel—There's a lot of times I feel guilty over being white, you know? I would say that's definitely a thing. You know, I do feel bad that some people didn't have it as good as me, but, you know, that's not something I can control, like, myself. That's kind of just a society thing, you know?”

Ben is clearly experiencing feelings of discomfort at his white identity, because he recognizes that other people (racial minorities) do not “have it as good as me.” He even attempts to make himself feel a little better about it, by saying that it is not something he can control, but it is “just a society thing.” Ben also wrote about feelings of white guilt in

his journal, detailing an incident that involved one of his white male friends. He and his friend were in a car together listening to a music streaming service, “driving through campus and jamming along to the music,” when a song by a popular hip-hop artist, Childish Gambino, came up next in the playlist. Ben notes that the song uses the N-word periodically, and his friend decided to skip the track. Ben did not agree with his friend’s decision:

“When he did this I said to go back because I really like the song. And want to listen to it. He said that we shouldn’t listen to it while driving through campus with the windows down since we are two white guys listening to a song that mentions the N-word a few times. I said I still wanted to listen to it so he went back to it but he turned the volume down low.”

Ben goes on to describe how his friend was demonstrating “white guilt,” and did not want to listen to the song in public because it was “considered part of black culture,” and, because of the use of the N-word, some people might find it offensive that they—two white men—were listening to it. Ben writes that he understands the impulse, and finishes by writing, “Even though we are not the one’s saying it, it is still a little unsettling.” This is an example of more individualized white guilt, where whites feel guilty because they have committed some type of racial offense against minorities (Devine et al 1991). Interestingly, Ben’s friend seemed mostly concerned with being associated with the song in public, which assumes he would be fine if the two white men were in a more private space.

“I Feel Bad For Thinking This, But...”

Some white Millennials used a particular semantic move to offset their racist commentary by suggesting that they felt bad (or guilty) for having particular views about racial

minorities. Since this was a semantic move, however, they effectively stated their negative racial views within this false safety net of guilt.

Abigail, the white woman who recently came out as bisexual and naturalized her racialized dating preferences, used this semantic guilt. In one journal entry, she wrote about her fear of black men:

“I know that I shouldn’t, but I realize I take extra precaution when it comes to walking past black males late at night. For some reason I perceive them to be more aggressive, and to have bad intentions when in reality, I’ve only really every been threatened by white males. Majority of black men I’ve come into contact with have been nothing but respectful and polite to me. Yet, I still pull my purse closer or avoid making eye contact with them as I walk home at night or when I see them at the bars. I might be that I’m so intimidated by their masculinity and strong presence. It could also be that I live in a society that has conditioned me to always have some implicit racism towards black males.”

Although Abigail states that she “knows she shouldn’t,” she *does* have prevailing fears about black men, believing that “for some reason” they have “bad intentions” and are “more aggressive,” even though she has no evidence to support this. In fact, she wrote about how only white males have ever threatened her, and most of the black men she has encountered have been “respectful and polite.” Similar to Ben, Abigail admits that she feels guilty about this, but then tries to shift the blame away from herself at the end (“society...has conditioned me”).

Addison, another white female, used this form of semantic guilt on two separate occasions in her journal. In the first entry, Addison reflected on a time she was riding a bus into Washington, D.C.: “Today when I was on the bus on my way to DC for a project I realized that race was of all ethnicities. I figured that I was going to be surrounded by blacks and Hispanics. I felt bad for thinking this, but it also gave me a little happiness to know that there were people of all races on something most people would stereotype to

be the more pour route.” The fact that Addison felt “bad for thinking” that she was going to be “surrounded by blacks and Hispanics” suggests that she knows her assumption that these groups are automatically a part of the poor class. Further, she distances herself even more from the assumption that she made by saying “most people” would stereotype the bus as the “poor route,” but not herself explicitly.

During another entry, Addison actually owns her actions, although she still uses a form of semantic guilt:

“I realized something today that made me mad at myself. We had a charity kickball tournament and I was so excited for. I am a really competitive person and don’t like losing. We had a team of 12 put together for the past month and I had stacked the team with soccer players, they were all black. I’ve always heard that black people are usually faster. So then 30 minutes before the game start they all backed out. I was so mad and thought to myself, “Of course because they are black.” And then I realized I was stereotyping like everyone else.”

Addison recognizes that she is stereotyping blacks by assuming they would back out of a prior commitment because they are black (which is also a form of cultural racism). She couches her admission within statements of disbelief at herself (she is “mad at herself”), however, and even further, she does not appear to recognize the fact that she was also stereotyping and commodifying blacks by assuming they are “usually faster,” and thus will help her win.

Being Race-Conscious is a Burden

One of my current favorite musicians is a singer named Allen Stone. His latest album includes a track entitled “American Privilege,” in which he sings about the downfalls of the American economic and social system. The song opens with Allen crooning, “Oh it doesn’t seem right that I, I was born white, and my parents don’t fight. Told me they loved me each night.” In the first lines of this song, Allen, a white male, hits you

immediately with the connection between the American system and white privilege, speaking to the sense of guilt that some whites interpret as a *burden*—“It’s not my fault, I was just born white!” A few of the white Millennials in my study expressed this very feeling.

Once again I call upon Abigail for an example, who is a veritable treasure trove of white guilt. In one of her journal entries, she reflected on a conversation she had with one of her white male friends, who asked her how she felt about locks (also known as dread locks, the hairstyle that people like Bob Marley and Stevie Wonder are known for) on white people.

“I paused, as my initial reaction is that I love them, seeing as I myself have wanted dreads for quite some time now, but then I thought about what the politically correct answer would be, one that took cultural appropriation into considerations and what would make me look like a progressive, sensitive person.”

As you can see, Abigail appears to be mainly concerned with *appearing* to be a “progressive, sensitive person,” not actually *being* one. She is also alluding to some guilt she feels as a white person, that she has to think about what she does and says in order to appear progressive. She goes on to write that her friend made a point she agrees with, that the black community should not be able to lay claim to locks as a hairstyle, citing that she understands that locks have “cultural significance” for blacks and that they are “traditionally only for people of color with coarse unruly hair, but so what?” She argues that she should be able to do whatever she wants with her hair, comparing her desires for locks to the plight of transgender individuals: “If transgender people can say ‘it’s my body I have complete control over it and you can just fuck off if it makes you

uncomfortable' why can't I say the same for my hair?" She completes her impassioned entry by saying that, against her personal preference, she will likely not pursue locks:

“Alas, I’ll probably never do it. Because I’m a hyper sensitive meek human being who cares far too much about being politically correct and making a safe environment for everyone to enjoy. Even if that means sacrificing some of my creative expression...because that’s what living the white privilege life is all about. Taking minorities into consideration and tip-toeing around to make sure they’re not being suppressed and that they are being represented. Granted, they are put at a disadvantage for most things, there is a race gap and inequality still. Implicit racism is still a thing you know. BUT that doesn’t mean white women or men don’t have struggles too or have the desire to express themselves freely! But again, I will think all of this and never say it out loud because I’m an ‘inclusive and respectful person.’”

Here you see her guilt making another, more direct appearance. Abigail feels she has to “tip-toe” around racial minorities to “make sure they’re not being suppressed and being represented.” Even though she recognizes that racial minorities have worse experiences as compared to whites (they are disadvantaged for most things because of lingering inequalities), she still believes she is justified in her feelings because white men and women “have struggles too.” To Abigail, and other white Millennials, having to even *consider* the fact that racial minorities are at a disadvantage or that whites need to be sensitive to the position of most racial minorities is a major burden to be borne, a burden for which these whites feel guilty.

Coping with White Guilt

These white students appeared to cope with this guilt they felt (or possibly more aptly, avoided coping with it) in three major ways: by doubling down on colorblindness, feeling sorry for themselves, or projecting their guilt externally. Ben is a good example of how whites who feel guilty about race may work harder to present themselves as “not seeing color.” Ben consistently expressed that things were “not about race”—when he told

stories about friend or acquaintances, he would mention their race, but follow up with “but it had nothing to do with their race;” similarly, he identified as white but said, “I try not to make my race, like, who I am.” By doubling down on the use of color-blind ideology, whites attempt to signal to others that they are not racist, which may help to alleviate (or cover up) their guilt over being white.

Whites may also cope with their guilt by feeling sorry for themselves, which can be seen in the semantic guilt strategy of saying that they know they should not have certain racist thoughts, even as they express these views. Alternatively, whites may project their guilt onto an external source—most often people of color. Both strategies suggest that the guilt is “not my fault”—it is the fault of society, political correctness, or even nonwhites. Thus, you see whites like Abigail saying that society “conditioned” her to have negative stereotypes about blacks or other racial groups, or that she has to sacrifice her personal expression because she has to be sensitive to racial minorities because she has privilege and they do not. These coping mechanisms both serve to shift guilt (or the source of the guilt) away from whites, which in the end results in very little ownership of the guilty feelings.

The Power of Color-Blind Racism

As the dominant racial ideology, color-blind racism is extremely powerful. As previously explained, color-blind racism is not the dominant racial ideology because *everybody* subscribes to it equally; rather, it is dominant because *most* people frame their understanding of race through it. Color-blind racism impacts people to different extents—

even whites. Although most whites subscribe to color-blind racism through subconscious support of the racial status quo (because they systematically benefit from whiteness), individuals may at any time actively resist color blindness. Because of the power of color-blind racism, however, individual whites who desire to actively resist the ideology or who believe they are more antiracist may find themselves bound by color-blind racism in ways they do not imagine.

In order to showcase the power of color-blind racism, I am going to profile two white Millennials. The first, Emma, is an individual who, based on her espoused friendships and experiences, we might expect to demonstrate significantly less subscription to color-blind racial ideology. However, we find quite the opposite to be true. The second, Leah, is more of a progressive white in many ways, but yet and still is influenced by color-blind racism in ways she would likely be surprised to find out.

Emma—“I Have Nothing Against Blacks At All.”

Emma is one of the students who only completed the journal component of the study. At the time of the study, Emma was a fourth-year sociology major, and she self-identified as part of the upper-middle class, writing in her journal that she grew up in the richest county in her state. Emma’s very first journal entry gives some poignant insight into her racial ideology:

“Growing up with a high-middle class background, I learned three things about being white. First, being white gives you more education and employment opportunities. Second, if your white and attractive, you will go far. Third, if you are white, you are bound to get away with more. My parents did not teach me these values because they are not racists and are true Democrats, but those are the values I learned from being white in American culture. For me personally, I have nothing against blacks at all.”

Emma appears to have a higher-than-usual awareness of her racial identity, and how it affords her privileged status in the U.S. In fact, she writes on multiple occasions about the various things she has learned about the significance of race since she has been in college, from structural issues (discrimination in the criminal justice system) to everyday issues of privilege (looking for makeup that matches nonwhite skin colors). However, even in this first entry, you can see color-blind racism creeping in to the edges of Emma's commentary: she defends her parents as "not racists and true Democrats" (as if the two are necessarily correlated, and no Democrats are racist) who did not teach her these "racist" things (i.e. white privilege). Further, Emma has "nothing against blacks at all." This semantic move effectively works to offset anything in the rest of her journal about blacks that might be construed as racist. In fact, she uses this same phrase more than once in her writing. That Emma specifically called attention to her feelings about blacks is also telling, as I will explain.

For the first few years of her college experience, Emma was a decorated athlete on her school's track and field team, competing in the heptathlon. Track and field is one sport that typically has a high percentage of black athletes, and as such Emma was constantly exposed to blacks. Emma wrote often about having black friends, and even cites that her "two best friends" are black. At one point in her journal, she writes about an exchange with her former coach, who asked her who her best friends were at the school:

"He said, 'So who are your best friends here?' I named my best friends, all of whom were black. Coach goes, 'So, you're kind of a black girl inside a white girl's body, aren't you?' with a laugh. I laughed awkwardly and said something like, 'I get along with them the most.'"

By Emma's own admission, she has the most positive interactions with black people, to the point that her best friends are black. By this alone, you would expect that Emma would subscribe to color-blind racism less than her white peers who do not have nonwhite friends, or in the least, that Emma would have consistently positive interactions with blacks and might better understand their experiences as racial minorities. Unfortunately, these expectations assume that, one, Emma is telling the truth about her "black best friends," and two, Emma actually has engaging, meaningful relationships with her black friends. As has been previously discussed, however, many whites have very superficial interactions (if they have any at all) with blacks and other racial minorities. Many of the interactions and thoughts that Emma describes in her journal point to less than deeply meaningful relationships with nonwhites as well as consistent influence from color-blind ideology.

Aside from constantly mentioning her black friends, Emma writes about spending significant time in the company of blacks. For instance, she details attending athlete parties on campus regularly. Because many college sports, particularly those that generate large revenues for the institutions, have high percentages of black athletes (Harper, Williams, and Blackman 2013), it stands to reason that the parties Emma attended would have a decent amount of black athletes in attendance. Her journal corroborates this, in a very interesting way: "I am not sure if it is just me and I am just jumping to conclusions, but when I am in a social scene, the black athletes always talk to me first." The fact that she perceives she is approached by black athletes first confirms that blacks are at these functions. Additionally, this reveals something about the way she thinks blacks perceive her, although she is unclear what this "attention" means.

According to Emma, this same thing happens when she is walking around campus or riding public transportation in D.C.: “I don’t know if it is related to the fact that I am a small white girl, and they’re into that sort of thing, but being from [one of the more demographically white counties outside of D.C.], I never experienced that before.”

Despite obviously being around blacks quite a bit and having so many black friends (“getting along” with them the most), Emma still has trouble interacting with them. We see this at another point in her journal, when Emma uses a semantic move akin to the “I’m not a racist” phrase while writing about her black friends:

“Sometimes when I am with my black friends, I feel like I have to act more black. I find this really weird because people think America is a really white-oriented culture, but when I find myself in a niche environment of black people, I find myself having to orient to their language and behavior. I am not sure if I like it, and sometimes I get sick of acting like a different person. I have nothing against black people; I just have something against not acting like who you truly are.”

Emma is calling specific attention to the fact that the black people she is discussing are her friends, not simply random black people. This is another verbal parachute she can use to save herself in the event that someone calls her out for what she says. Additionally, we see that Emma does not seem to be aware enough to recognize that her black friends likely feel they have to adjust their behavior a majority of the time, given that they are attending a predominantly white school. We also see Emma pull out one of her signature phrases, that she has “nothing against black people.”

Three more examples from Emma’s journal poke even larger holes in her supposedly airtight relationship with blacks as her best friends. These examples suggest that possibly Emma is tokenizing her black friends, such that the two or three she interacts with the most are seen as exceptional blacks, rather than as more representative

of blacks at large. These examples also speak to Emma's true level of comfort when interacting with nonwhite individuals.

In the first example, Emma describes an experience attending a fraternity party. In this case, the party was thrown by one of the black fraternities on campus.

“Last night, I went to a [historically black fraternity's] party. In my college experience. . . . I never experienced anything like that before, and I have been to many parties throughout my three years of being here. With the combination of aggressive and loud music and twerking [popular dance move associated with hip-hop] among the students, I honestly found myself at a loss. I truly did not know how to fit in this black culture. I always admired it, but even though I went to the party with my friend, I found myself texting in the corner and feeling somewhat uncomfortable. After the night was over, I was trying to figure out why I was unable to participate in those party activities and feel “normal” in that setting. I am still not sure why...”

This is very interesting, because Emma writes so often about her "black best friends," yet in this instance she is obviously uncomfortable at a black party, something she has "never experienced before." This story calls into question the reality and depth of her espoused friendships with other blacks: her best friends are black, but in three years of college she has never been to a black party. What Emma details fits with typical narratives of white students who consistently overestimate their friendships with nonwhites, as previously discussed. It seems pretty reasonable to expect that someone who actually has deep, meaningful relationships with black people would not only spend time in their arenas (at least occasionally), but would be much more comfortable in more black dominant spaces—at least to the point that they would not be sitting in the corner not talking to anyone.

In the second example, Emma writes about an experience involving the movie “Straight Outta Compton,” a biopic about the late 80s hip-hop group N.W.A. The second

time she had seen the movie, she was at home with her sister, which she described as a “relaxing environment.” The *first* time she saw the movie, however was in a movie theater “surrounded by all black people.” She writes:

“I am white, and I am interested in this movie—but why was the movie theater dominated by people that were non-white? It made me uncomfortable to be with so many of them not because I am racist, but because this movie highlighted such racial anger/tension between the white police and the black rappers that I found myself looking around anxiously. I know it sounds stupid—but by the end of the movie, I was glad to leave.”

Here, Emma asserts that she was “uncomfortable” being around so many black people, but “not because [she is] racist.” She asserts that it was because the movie “highlighted such racial anger/tension between the white police and the black rappers,” and she “found [herself] looking around anxiously.” Why was she so anxious in this situation? It seems as though Emma was associating herself—a white person—with the white police in the movie, so much so that she developed severe anxiety at being in the theater with so many black people. One guess is that Emma feared for her safety as a white person, assuming that she might be targeted by the black people in the theater based on her race—perhaps because they assumed she was racist like the police in the movie. At least in her reflection, using the phrase “not because I am racist” allows her to save face in the context of her reasoning for being so uncomfortable, and being “glad to leave.”

The third example that paints a clearer picture of Emma’s true relationships with blacks also speaks to how Emma consumes stereotypical narratives about blacks without much critical consideration. This further demonstrates the impact that color-blind racism can have on individuals—when race is removed as a significant factor, racial stereotypes

are not seen as racial at all; rather, they are simply non-racialized “facts” of life. In this entry, Emma writes about a decision to become roommates with one her black friends:

“Today, I signed a lease with one of my best friends on the [volleyball] team here. This girl is so much fun. I love being around her because she is cool and honest. However, I [have] some concerns for next year being her roommate. My concerns are not about her being African American, but it is about the cultural differences. For instance, it involves the type of music she listens to, how she styles her hair (e.g. weaves), and differences in slang. Furthermore, she often talks about girls’ “edges”. I had to ask another one of my friends to see what that meant. Another example is how she runs on “black people time”, meaning she is often late for things. Basically, I just do not want our cultural differences to be an obstacle for our friendship. I hope it all works out.”

Emma asserts that this is not about race (utilizing the semantic move “anything but race”), but rather culture—but then Emma goes on to describe all things that are essentially part of African American culture: music (which, even though she does not specify, it is probably safe to assume is not country), slang, hair weaves, and “black people time.”

Up until now, this girl was “one of her best friends,” with no previous discussion of negatively perceived behavior. But as soon as Emma moves in with her, she is now concerned with stereotypical behavior—or, as Emma explains it, “cultural differences”—to the point that she thinks it might be an obstacle for their friendship.

These are clearly racial narratives that Emma has consumed, that very likely come from pervasive negative stereotypes about blacks. We know that blacks are often viewed as being lazy, anti-intellectual, and having misplaced values. Furthermore, media often portrays blacks a separate, monolithic culture, that includes depicting blacks as people who only listen to hip-hop and other forms of “black” music, and speak with a non-standard English. These narratives are often uncritically consumed, and in Emma’s case,

these scripts led her to believe there were “cultural differences” that were different enough from her own that it might pose a problem.

The previous analysis of Emma’s journal entries demonstrates how the pull of color-blind racism is so strong that it often impacts people without their realization. Emma asserted that she had many black friends; in fact, her *best* friends were black. She interacted on a regular basis with blacks, but even still Emma often used many of the styles of color-blind racism. She expressed very racialized views, but asserted they were not about race, or she attempted to signify that she “had nothing against blacks,” despite saying some very stereotypical (and arguably hurtful) things about them (e.g. they operate on “black people time,” they listen to “aggressive” music, she is generally uncomfortable around large groups of them). Despite these espoused friendships, Emma also did not appear to have a true understanding of what black people face as racial minorities. All of this is not to say that Emma is a racist or is a bad person who lies about her friendship with blacks. What this means is that Emma is simply more entrenched in color-blind racial ideology than even she is aware of, and thus she provides a great example of the power of color-blind racism as the dominant racial ideology in the U.S.

Leah—“I Do Not Believe In Reverse Racism.”

Leah was one of the Millennials who completed both the journals and the interview. Leah is a more progressive and “woke” (socially aware) white woman: she has dated men of various races (and says she now dates “mostly African American men”), has no issues admitting that whites are very privileged in society, speaks knowledgeably about the issues that racial minorities face, and supports programs like affirmative action.

In her journal, Leah often reflected on race in ways that demonstrate that she is learning to be more culturally aware, and is willing to consider her own role in a racialized social system as a white person. For example, in one entry, Leah discusses the ideas of “acting white” and “acting black.” She writes about an acquaintance of one of her friends—a white male—saying that his roommate and his roommate’s father “act and talk ‘very black,’” noting that he afterwards said “that makes me sound racist by I promise I’m not,” to which she “rolls [her] eyes” and asked him what he meant by the comment. This suggests Leah is willing to confront others about racialized comments they make, although she did not write about the outcome of this conversation—she merely notes that he spoke in the presence of all white people, and if a black person was around, “he would have kept his mouth shut.” Leah goes on to write about “acting white”:

“I’ve also heard in songs and even witnessed in person people saying that someone is “acting white”. I’ve also been told I am acting white by people, white people and non white people. In Childish Gambino’s song “Bonfire” he mentions “talking white” and how he thinks that initially negatively affected his rap career. I’ve noticed when people state you are acting white, it usually means you’re acting “basic”, or it can even go as far to mean doing well in school (we learned about how it was proposed that this was why black kids did not want to do well, in fear of being called an “Oreo”). I think it is strange that these terms still stick today, especially when applied to school and intelligence. This gives the impression that white people are inherently smarter than black people, which has been proven again and again to be untrue. It also gives the impression that all black people are “ghetto”, which is again far from true. These terms bother me, more for the sake of the constant and simultaneous empowerment of white society and disempowerment of black society. I think we should stay away from using these terms, even if they are not meant to be malicious.”

In this entry, Leah interrogates the idea of “acting white,” and its implications for people of color, even pulling in some evidence from a popular hip hop artist (Childish Gambino). She also discusses how using a phrase like “acting white” can further white

dominance, even outside of people's intentions. Her use of "ghetto" without any analysis does leave questions about whether or not she understands the coded nature of the word, however the quotation marks she places around it may indicate a level of understanding. Earlier in this same entry, Leah also notes that she has been accused of "acting black" by people when she is doing things they perceive to be stereotypical of blacks, such as "singing/rapping along to music" or dancing, or, when expresses that she likes Hennessey. Unfortunately, she does not interrogate why these assumptions exist or the impact of such language in the same manner as she did for the "acting white" paradigm. That she broke down "acting white" suggests that she could potentially do the same for "acting black," but there is no hard evidence to support this idea.

In another journal entry, Leah demonstrates her understanding of systemic racism, and how blacks and whites fit into this system differentially. She does this through a discussion of *Luke Cage*, a recent television show from Netflix starring a black superhero along with a majority black cast.

"I've been watching this new show Luke Cage on Netflix, and I really like it. However, I've seen some comments online about how some people feel as if the show is portraying "reverse racism" because of its lack of white characters. For one, this is not reverse racism. In fact I do not believe in reverse racism. Racism is a system in which a dominant or superior race benefits off the oppression of others. In society, white males are on top, and white is considered to be the dominant race. Yes, black people can have prejudice toward white people, but racism is more than having prejudice towards another racial group. Racism comes from both individual interactions and from an institutional level. In education, the workforce, and even in the community, white people tend to have the upper hand. Even in television, many shows have a cast of all white actors and actresses, or they may include the "token black character." If anything, shows with predominantly black cast members, or shows with a black lead role should be encouraged. I think this is very important for children, especially black children. Many children find role models from watching television, and there are as of now limited shows with a black lead."

Leah offers a criticism of whites who posit the idea of “reverse racism,” by cogently explaining racism as a system of power in which whites, as the dominant race, “benefit off the oppression of others.” She further breaks down individual prejudices versus institutional discrimination, and then speaks to racial tokenism (shows “may include the ‘token black character’”). Leah finishes by discussing the importance of black role models for black children, and how there is a dearth of television shows with black leads. This analysis demonstrates a certain level of awareness of racial issues in the U.S.

As I will discuss in Chapter 5, Millennials of color often have mixed and even contradictory views that resulted in uneven usage of the frames of color-blind racism that demonstrate they were often bound or influenced by color-blind racism. White students sometimes had these more nuanced views as well, although it happened with much less frequency. Leah, as a more progressive white person that demonstrated she was more culturally aware than nearly all of the white Millennials in this study, was one of these white students who had a somewhat contradictory opinion. For Leah, her usage of color-blind racism came through via abstract liberalism, and some of the styles of color blindness. The examples I discuss below speak to the power of color-blind racism as the dominant racial ideology.

One example of how Leah experienced some ideological influence through abstract liberalism came through when we spoke about the fictitious company hiring a racial minority over a white candidate:

“Um, I mean I think the decision, no matter what should be based on um, the candidate. But like it is like, um, I do think that it's good that [the company] hired the minority, because [it being] 97% [white], that's kind of crazy. But you know, that says something about the company that they should you know, be more open to not um, just hiring white people, but um, but I think they made the right decision.”

Leah thinks that the hiring decision should be based solely on the candidate, and not race, but at the same time she agrees with the decision to hire the individual because of the consideration of their race. Further, Leah did not think that the company's decision discriminated against whites in any way, something that most of the other white Millennials I interviewed tried to speak around in some way (e.g. that it was "technically" discrimination, or they could "understand" why some people might see it that way).

At other points in her interview and journal, Leah also demonstrated the usage of some of the styles of color-blind racism. For example, during her interview, she talked about having a previous boyfriend who used to say things that were "slightly racist," like telling jokes about racial minorities. Additionally, in her journal she wrote about an incident that occurred at her house during Thanksgiving:

"During Thanksgiving, I was able to have some interesting conversations with my family about race and how it affects people today. I first talked with my immediate family about this. My mom and stepdad are very open about race for the most part, and would never discriminate against someone for the color of their skin. However, when it comes to whom I date or more importantly, whom I marry, they are a **little less 'liberal'**. I mentioned the possibility that I may end up dating or marrying a man who is a different race than I am (white). They were accepting of that, my mom mentioned though that the child might have a hard time growing up. This is because I have multiple cousins who are biracial (white and black), and they did have some problems in school when they were younger. I agree that any racial minority will have a different experience growing up than for instance I would, however this should never be a reason to not date or even marry someone."

She goes on to write about how her family members had specific issues if she were to marry a Muslim, citing that "they would never disown me or prevent me from pursuing a relationship with a man who happens to be Muslim, however, they said they would not be particularly happy." She ends her entry by writing, "It frustrates me that they are all

slightly prejudice towards those who identify as Muslim, but I also realize they were born in a different time, and that with each generation, people in this country are becoming more and more open and less prejudice towards racial and ethnic minorities.”

She indicates that her family is a “little less ‘liberal’” and “slightly prejudice” towards Muslims. Aside from diminishing how prejudice her family members are, she is also using softer, more coded language when she calls them “less liberal”—a more apt description would be “more racist” or “more prejudice,” given their opinions. In an effort to save face for her parents, Leah calls upon aspects of color-blind racism.

Even though Leah is a much more progressive white Millennial than most of her peers in this study, she still showcases some influence from color-blind racism. Although she understands that racial minorities experience systemic discrimination in many of America’s institutions, Leah still believes that hiring practices should be based on merit—even while expressing that a company being aware of racial imbalances and addressing them directly is a good thing. Also, while Leah seems comfortable addressing racially insensitive remarks from her white peers, she also attempts to save face for her family by diminishing their own racist remarks. That someone as culturally aware as Leah still uses some of the frames and styles of color-blind racism speaks to the power of color blindness as the dominant racial ideology.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I provided an in-depth overview of the frames and styles of color-blind racism, highlighting the white Millennials in my study and how they subscribed to color-

blind racial ideology. As I discussed at the beginning of the chapter, as an ideology, color-blind racism seeks to maintain the dominance of whites within the American racial hierarchy. But color-blind racism does not sustain itself by being rigid and immovable; rather, it remains durable by being a flexible and pliable structure in which individuals can operate.

Imagine color-blind racial ideology as a house, but instead of thick, static walls, the walls are made of Tetris blocks. For those of you who remember this classic game, Tetris dropped multi-shaped blocks that could be rearranged as needed to form connections. Color-blind racism works in the same way. The “blocks” or frames (abstract liberalism, naturalization, minimization of racism, cultural racism) can be turned and rearranged by individuals into more usable shapes, through the various styles (semantic moves, diminutives, projection), which keeps the house impenetrable.

My data show that white Millennials tend to build in a relatively straightforward manner, constantly putting up the walls around themselves on all sides. This means that the Millennials in my study are using color-blind racism in the same ways that the whites did in Bonilla-Silva’s original study. This is a significant finding: it demonstrates the strength of Bonilla-Silva’s conception of America’s new racial ideology, because nearly all of these students were not even born at the time the original study was conducted.

I also described several impacts that color-blind racism has on white Millennials’ experiences with race. First, many of the white Millennials in my study believed that their lives were much more diverse than they were in reality. The students I interviewed all spoke about having diverse friend groups, even “best friends” who were nonwhites. Upon closer inspection, however, only two white students (one of whom was only ethnically

white) actually appeared to have significant friendships with nonwhites. Similarly, all of the white interviewees expressed support for interracial relationships, but very few had seriously dated anyone who was not white. These white Millennials often naturalized their racial realities, saying that their friend choices or romantic interests were things that “just happened,” and were not the result of conscious decisions. Using colorblindness allowed these students to assert that they lived diverse lives, all while being surrounded by whites in almost every aspect of their social worlds.

Second, these white Millennials often experience feelings of guilt about race—their own race as white in particular. This was usually a form of collective guilt associated with their privileged position as white—which means that even as many whites attempt to disavow race as a meaningful factor in contemporary society, they understand that they likely benefit in some ways *because* of their race...or, that others are disadvantaged because they are racial minorities. These feelings of guilt over their white race are incongruent with a color-blind mentality, however, so these Millennials often couched their guilt in the frames and styles of color-blind racism. For instance, some white Millennials used the semantic move, “I feel bad for thinking this about blacks, but...” Others projected onto racial minorities in an attempt to cover their own guilt, suggesting that as white people they were burdened by having to coddle oversensitive nonwhites, who at a moment’s notice would “pull the race card.”

Finally, I showcased the power of color-blind racism as the dominant ideology, using the cases of two white women: Emma and Leah. Emma had consistent interactions with blacks, even naming several of them her “best friends,” yet she still very clearly subscribed to color-blind racism. Similarly Leah utilized many of the frames and styles of

colorblindness, despite being one of the more progressive white students who had meaningful relationships with people of color and understood the significance of race. These two examples highlight just how powerful color-blind racism is, in that even those whom we might expect to more fully reject its pull often do not.

Part of the reason why these findings emerge is based on the nature of ideology. Ideology is learned socially, and so people socialized in particular societies become very adept at using the particular frames and styles of that ideology. Millennials are the first cohort to be raised from birth in this new color-blind racial ideology, and so they have become very skilled users. White Millennials in particular learn and accept color-blind ideology in unconscious, uncritical ways, which makes sense given that color-blind racism benefits them as the dominant race in America's racial hierarchy. But whites are only part of the picture of the racial picture of America; how do people of color, as non-dominant groups, fit in to this pervasive racial ideology? In the next chapter, I explore how Millennials of color utilize (and reject) colorblindness, looking at each racial minority group in turn: blacks, Asians, Latinxs, and multiracials. I also discuss the implications of living as racialized beings in a "race-less" time.

Chapter 5: Color-Blind Racism and Millennials of Color

INTRODUCTION

Although Bonilla-Silva's work in *Racism Without Racists* speaks mostly to whites, he did address how color-blind racism impacts blacks. Specifically, he found that the black respondents in this study were much less likely than whites to directly use the four frames, but were at times affected by the frames such that they did not develop a wholly oppositional ideology. Additionally, he found that blacks did not use the various styles of color-blind racism in the same ways as whites, largely because blacks are much more comfortable speaking directly about racial issues. Further, while admitting that his work was limited because it did not include individuals from races other than blacks and whites, Bonilla-Silva does discuss the impact of color-blind racism on other racial minorities. He bases his commentary on the belief that the U.S. is steadily becoming a tri-racial system of whites on top, honorary whites in the middle, and collective blacks at the bottom (Bonilla-Silva 2004). Within this new, more complex system, the views of racial minorities are dependent upon their hierarchical location; i.e., their closeness to "whiteness" via things like skin color and cultural practices. Asians typically have views that are closer to whites, blacks are furthest from whites, and Latinxs are somewhere in the middle (Bonilla-Silva and Glover 2004). For support, Bonilla-Silva cites research that suggests Latinxs are less likely to experience housing discrimination if they are perceived

as white than if they are seen as black (Massey and Denton 1987), and that whites are more likely to intermarry with Asians and lighter-skinned Latinxs (Qian and Lichter 2001). Interestingly, in general these trends continue (Iceland, Wineberg, and Hughes 2014; Hanson and Santas 2014; Qian and Lichter 2011¹⁶). Bonilla-Silva ends his discussion of the impact of color-blind racism on people of color by saying that more work needs to be done in order to provide more adequate answers. My work seeks to add empirical data to this end.

In this chapter, I examine the ways in which Millennials of color used the frames and styles of color-blind racism in various ways. Overall, my findings showcase that college Millennials of color are largely not subscribing to color-blind racism in the same wholesale ways as their white counterparts. Because Millennials of color used the styles of color-blind racism so rarely (only six students across all racial minorities), I do not present this analysis in a separate section as in Chapter 4. Instead, I include discussion of the few instances of style usage throughout my analysis of the frames. Following this analysis, I discuss the experiences of Millennials of color as racialized beings in a “raceless” time, exploring how most of these students see race a significant factor in their everyday lives.

I will make one important note about how I analyzed non-white’s usage of color-blind ideology. The frames (and styles), as Bonilla-Silva outlined, are about color-blind racism—racism being the operative word. Color-blind racism, at base, is a method of securing and maintaining the racial status quo, such that whites remain the dominant and privileged group. In order for me to determine that nonwhites were using color-blind

¹⁶ Although, as Qian and Lichter indicate, marriage rates between whites and blacks has also increased between 1980 and 2008. This rise still does not match the overall amounts of whites who intermarry with Asians and Latinxs.

racism's frameworks and stylizations, their usage had to have worked in similar ways: it needed to result in the continuance of white privilege or support whites' racial domination. Again, this is independent of the *intention* of the individual. Many Millennials of color who used various frames of color-blind racism did so even as they actively resisted color-blind racism in other ways. In order to provide a full picture of how this worked, I provide many examples with as much detail as possible. For instance, a major example of this can be seen in my upcoming inquiry into how some Millennials of color may utilize the frame of minimization of racism in an interesting way: as a psychological coping mechanism. These students obviously do not *intend* to perpetuate their own location in our racialized system via usage of the dominant racial ideology, however they do so despite their intentions.

As a reminder, recall that in Chapter 4 I discussed how my research is not an effort to label Millennials as racists, or categorize people as “good” or “bad.” In the same vein, my intention for this chapter is not to label Millennials of color as “just as racist as whites.” Within structural conceptualizations of racism, individual actors and their beliefs are far less important than widespread ideological practices that work to perpetuate a racialized system that privileges whites. As such, Millennials of color may be just as complicit in upholding our current racial ideology as whites, whether they desire to be so or not. As I will show with my data, while it is not a simple answer, what appears to be happening is that *some* Millennials of color are using the various frames and styles of color-blind racism in the same ways as whites, at least *some of the time*—although most are actively contesting racism and the racial order in its many forms.

MILLENNIALS OF COLOR AND COLOR-BLIND RACISM

As previously mentioned, when Bonilla-Silva analyzed blacks' usage of color-blind racism, he concluded that blacks are "slightly color blind." In other words, blacks are often bound by the dominant racial ideology of the U.S., and so it colors their perceptions largely through indirect means. As such, many blacks do not develop ideologies that are completely opposed to color-blindness; rather, their usage of this ideology is more nuanced and often contradictory.

Overall, I find a similar impact of color-blind racism for the college Millennials of color in my study—they are "slightly color blind." Nonwhite Millennials across all racial groups used the frames and styles of color-blind racism at significantly lower rates than their white peers. Table 5.1 and Table 5.2 show frame and style usage by race, and if you focus on Table 5.1, you see that white Millennials represent 43 percent of all instances of the frames of color-blind racism, while Asians represent only 24 percent, blacks 11 percent, Latinxs 5 percent, and multiracial students only 17 percent. Style usage was even more heavily skewed towards whites: white students represent over 80 percent of all instances of the various styles of color-blind racism. As the notes for Table 5.1 and Table 5.2 indicate, these tables highlight usage by race as a percentage of the total usage for each frame or style across all races.

Table 5.3 shows the data a different way: frame usage by race as a percentage of each individual racial group. It is important to note that Table 5.3 must be viewed in context along with Tables 5.1 and 5.2. While Table 5.3 shows similar percentages of each racial group using the various frames of colorblindness, when considered along with

Table 5.1, it is clear that whites were using each frame at much higher rates than their peers of color. In other words, each individual white student who used color-blind racial ideology did so on more occasions and (as described in Chapter 4) in often qualitatively different ways than Millennials of color.

Table 5.1. Instances of Color-Blind Frame Usage by Race

FRAMES	White (n = 23)	Asian (n = 14)	Black (n = 16)	Latinx (n = 9)	Multiracial (n = 8)	TOTAL INSTANCES
Abstract Liberalism	17 (43%)	9 (22%)	4 (10%)	3 (8%)	7 (18%)	40 (100%)
<i>General abstract thinking</i>	2	1	-	-	2	
<i>Equal opportunity</i>	5	2	-	-	-	
<i>Individual choices</i>	1	1	-	-	1	
<i>No government intervention</i>	3	2	2	1	4	
<i>Qualifications</i>	6	3	3	2	-	
Minimization	13 (48%)	9 (33%)	2 (7%)	-	3 (11%)	27 (100%)
<i>Lip service</i>	2	1	-	-	-	
<i>Indirect minimization</i>	3	4	-	-	1	
<i>Direct minimization</i>	7	3	1	-	1	
<i>Pulling the race card</i>	1	2	1	-	1	
Cultural Racism	1 (12%)	2 (25%)	1 (12%)	1 (12%)	3 (38%)	8 (100%)
Naturalization	14 (45%)	5 (16%)	5 (16%)	2 (6%)	5 (16%)	31 (100%)
<i>School/neighborhood segregation</i>	5	2	4	1	3	
<i>Dating preferences</i>	5	1	-	-	1	
<i>Friend group</i>	2	-	-	1	-	
<i>Cross-racial interactions</i>	2	1	1	-	1	
TOTAL INSTANCES	45 (43%)	25 (24%)	12 (11%)	6 (5%)	18 (17%)	106 (100%)

Notes:

1. Percentages shown (in parentheses) represent percentage of total instances for each frame (far right column).
2. Many of these instances count for multiple frames, because frame usage was not pure; participants often used frames in combination. Additionally, the sub-categories are not all encompassing, but represent the major sub-themes.
3. The majority of the instances counted for Millennials of color are actually very nuanced, either being more complex than simple usage or contradictory in some way.

Table 5.2. Instances of Color-Blind Style Usage by Race

STYLES	White (n = 23)	Asian (n = 14)	Black (n = 16)	Latinx (n = 9)	Multiracial (n = 8)	TOTAL INSTANCES
Avoiding Direct Language	5 (100%)	-	-	-	-	5 (100%)
Semantic Moves	10 (77%)	-	1 (8%)	2 (15%)	-	13 (100%)
<i>Anything but race</i>	2	-	1	-	-	
<i>“I’m not a racist” / “My best friend is _____”</i>	4	-	-	1	-	
<i>Yes and No</i>	4	-	-	-	-	
Diminutives	8 (80%)	2 (20%)	-	-	-	10 (100%)
Projection	8 (80%)	1 (10%)	-	-	1 (10%)	10 (100%)
Rhetorical Incoherence	6 (86%)	-	-	-	1 (14%)	7 (100%)
TOTAL INSTANCES	37 (82%)	3 (7%)	1 (2%)	2 (4%)	2 (4%)	45 (100%)

Notes:

1. Percentages shown (in parentheses) represent percentage of total instances for each style (far right column).
2. Style usage was not pure, and thus these numbers are not mutually exclusive.

Table 5.3. Number of Students Using Color-Blind Frames Across Race

FRAMES	White (n = 23)	Asian (n = 14)	Black (n = 16)	Latinx (n = 9)	Multiracial (n = 8)
Abstract Liberalism	8 35%	4 29%	4 25%	3 33%	5 63%
<i>Interviews only</i>	5/7 71%	4/6 67%	4/9 44%	3/6 50%	5/6 83%
Minimization	9 39%	6 43%	1 6%	0 0%	2 25%
<i>Interviews only</i>	4/7 57%	4/6 67%	1/9 11%	None 0%	2/6 33%
Cultural Racism	1 4%	2 14%	1 6%	1 11%	2 25%
<i>Interviews only</i>	1/7 14%	2/6 33%	1/9 11%	1/6 17%	1/6 17%
Naturalization	7 30%	4 29%	6 38%	2 22%	3 38%
<i>Interviews only</i>	4/7 57%	3/6 50%	6/9 67%	2/6 33%	3/6 50%

Notes:

1. Percentages shown represent percentage of racial group (n) who use the frames.
2. The rows labeled “Interviews only” add an additional layer to the table, showcasing the number of students and corresponding percentage of each racial group who used the frames in the interviews.

Looking at Table 5.1 in more detail, it appears as though Asian students were using the frames of color-blind racism much more often than the other students of color, followed closely by multiracial Millennials. Similarly, during my analysis, at times Asian and multicultural students appeared to use the various frames in ways that were very similar to white students, but this is a bit misleading, for two reasons. First, most of the Asian and multicultural Millennials used color-blind racism in somewhat contradictory or more nuanced ways, as was consistent for all Millennials of color. Second, the instances of color-blind racism frame usage were largely driven by two students from each of these

two racial groups: Sarah and Thomas for the Asians, and Taliyah and Djeneba for the multicultural students.

Sarah and Thomas accounted for fifty percent of all comments from Asian students that fit within color-blind racism's frames and styles. If you were to remove Sarah and Thomas from the data, the results for Asian Millennials almost exactly mirror those of blacks—overall Asian Millennial frame usage drops from 24 percent to 11 percent of the entire sample. Some research on racial attitudes supports this outcome; for instance, Lopez and Penttoja (2004) found that Asians' support for affirmative action policies are much more aligned with Latinxs and blacks than with whites. Additionally, Sarah and Thomas are both second-generation Chinese, while the majority of the Asian Millennials were Asian Indians (nine, one of whom was an immigrant), and the remainder included one Pakistani and two Vietnamese students. Chinese Americans are solidly considered to be part of the honorary white group when considering the emergent tri-racial system. Interestingly, Bonilla-Silva (2004) proposes that Asian Indians are part of this group as well, but it is possible that because of their skin color and cultural traits, like the fact that Asian Indian religion has been racialized (see Chapter 3), Asian Indian's place as "honorary white" may be more of a question. As Chinese Americans who are part of the honorary white class, it is not altogether surprising that Thomas and Sarah use colorblindness in more similar ways to their white peers than the other Asian Millennials.

Taliyah and Djeneba drove the data for multicultural students even more than Thomas and Sarah did for Asians. Together, Djeneba and Taliyah represented over 70 percent of all of the instances of color-blind frame usage for multiracial Millennials, and they were the only two multiracial students to use any of the styles. If you take out these

women's data, then overall frame usage for multiracials drops precipitously from 17 percent to 5 percent, mirroring Latinx students exactly.

Looking at the racial identities of these two women, in the same way as for Thomas and Sarah, helps us unpack why this might have occurred. Both Taliyah and Djeneba have black ancestry—Djeneba's father is Malian, and Taliyah's father is African American—but neither women are very connected with their blackness. Taliyah says that she identifies more with her mother's race (Thai) because she grew up with her mother more than her father. Djeneba grew up with both parents, but says that her father moved to the U.S. for college and “adapted to the American culture and more white culture.” Djeneba identifies herself as “American,” instead of picking a racial category—which we also know is something more whites do than other races. Thus, we see the racial identity choices of these two multiracial students may have some impact on their usage of color-blind racial ideology. Taliyah often expresses similar ideas as her Asian peers, and Djeneba often falls in line, at least in part, with her white peers. It is important to note, however, that despite the prevalent use of colorblindness for these women, their usage of color-blind racism is not pure or total. Inconsistencies abound, and more often than not, they demonstrated more nuanced and often contradictory views—perhaps just to different degrees.

Something similar to the cases for Thomas, Sarah, Taliyah, and Djeneba happened with the black Millennials in this study, although not to such a dramatic degree. Overall the black students used color-blind racism at much lower rates than whites, but there was one black Millennial who stood apart from her peers: Delilah, a Jamaican immigrant. While Delilah did not drive the numbers for blacks, per se, she demonstrated

consistent usage of color-blind racism, employing three of the four frames, and she was the only black student to use any of the stylizations of color-blind ideology. To get a sense of her impact on the data for blacks, if you remove her from the analysis, overall incidents of frame usage for blacks drops from 11 percent to 8 percent.

Again, Delilah's racial identity—and particularly her ethnicity as a Caribbean immigrant—gives us insight into why she potentially demonstrated such a strong impact from color-blind racism. Delilah moved to the U.S. from Jamaica when she was seven years old, and has been living in the same Maryland neighborhood since arriving, which is located only a few miles outside of Washington, D.C. Delilah grew up with mostly African and Caribbean friends, so her Caribbean identity was constantly reinforced; as such, her declaration that she is Caribbean and not African American is no surprise. Delilah continued these associations in college: she is involved in mostly Caribbean-related organizations on campus, and the majority of her current friends are from these groups. As described in her journal and in our interview together, Delilah shares many of the same broad experiences as other blacks (and other Millennials of color) in the study, such as various encounters with discrimination or being in classrooms as one of very few racial minorities. What is interesting, however, is that Delilah often interprets these experiences very differently from her black peers, as demonstrated by her consistent usage of the frames of color-blindness.

This is not altogether unexpected, though, considering Delilah is a Caribbean immigrant. Research shows that many immigrant blacks from the Caribbean and Africa often work to actively distance themselves from native-born African Americans, because they wish to avoid the downward mobility that can come with being labeled African

American (Waters 1999). In terms of my sample, however, Delilah was unique in her consistent usage of color-blind racial frameworks. Other immigrant blacks and second-generation blacks (four Caribbeans and four Africans) did not demonstrate the same level of colorblind ideology, and seemed to align more (at least ideologically) with African Americans. Although there were no trends across generation status, Delilah is an example of how the Millennials of color often showcased more complex, sometimes contradictory acceptance of color-blind racism. There were some instances in which Delilah recognized the impact of being a racial minority in the U.S., like when she talked about some of her friends being pulled over by the police for no reason other than their skin color, which demonstrate an active resistance to color-blind racism.

In the following sections, I discuss how the Millennials of color in my study used each of the frames of color-blind racism. As previously discussed, my findings suggest that Millennials of color are “slightly color blind.” they are impacted, often more indirectly, by colorblindness, and as such demonstrate more nuanced, inconsistent, and sometimes contradictory usage of the frames of color-blind racism.

Abstract Liberalism

Hiring Practices

As discussed in Chapter 4, one of the question groups on the interview protocol presented respondents with a scenario in which a fictitious company that was 97% white made a decision to hire a racial minority over a white candidate because they recognized they lacked diversity. I asked respondents multiple questions about their thoughts regarding the company’s decision.

The majority of the Millennials of color had positive reactions to the scenario, typically citing that the company's decision was not only the right one but made up for years of job discrimination against racial minorities, or would help rectify racial imbalances in the job market. For example, Taliyah thought it was "good for the company to show that they are open to racial diversity," and that it was also a "good way for people to get a culture, be exposed to a culture that they, you know, have never been exposed to before."

Additionally, almost none of the Millennials of color believed the company's decision discriminated against whites. Some laughed it off as an incredulous question given the company's racial statistics, like Taliyah ("There's already white people there. It's already 97%, I think [they're] good."), while others pointed to historical discrimination, like Alejandro, the Mexican immigrant ("Well I'd say look at the past 200 years of this country's history and then come back and tell me how you really feel.").

Four Millennials of color outright disagreed with the company's decision: Delilah, the Jamaican immigrant; Thomas and Sarah, the two second-generation Chinese students; and Zara, one of the second-generation Asian Indians. These students utilized abstract liberalism as an argument, citing that either equal opportunity or qualifications should prevail over race. Here is Delilah's response:

"Um, I don't agree with it. I know especially a lot of colleges will do that too. Um, so you can be highly qualified to attend the university but, you won't get accepted because oh they need to fulfill a certain amount of this racial group in their university. And I think that's wrong, I think that if you get the job it should be because you're qualified for it, and you have all the assets for that position. Not because of your race. So I definitely don't agree with that."

As you can see, Delilah invokes the idea that a person's qualifications, not their race, should be the predominating factor. I pushed her a little bit to see if she would continue her usage of abstract liberalism, and she did—calling on a semantic move in the process.

I asked her why she thought the company was 97% white, and here is her response:

“Um, maybe, I'm not sure. Probably depends on the company, um maybe they, I'm not going to say that they're racist and they just wanted white people. But, maybe black people just didn't apply for the job because they d—they weren't qualified to apply, or they don't think that they would've gotten a job. I think that probably m- more white people just chose to apply for those positions.”

Not only does Delilah think race should *not* be a deciding factor in selecting a candidate, but she refuses to admit that race even plays a role in the situation at all. I pushed Delilah a little bit further, asking her if her opinion would change if she knew for sure that both candidates were equally qualified. True to form, she held her ground, suggesting that the company perform a second round of interviews—“maybe have interviews or present them with different scenarios to see how they respond differently”—so the company could purposefully avoid making a decision based on race in any way.

In addition to disagreeing with the idea of hiring a racial minority with race as a final determining factor, Thomas also had very scathing thoughts on affirmative action as a social policy. In his journal, he wrote at length about it:

“In any discussion about race, I think this particular topic is a necessary component that must be examined. The particular legislature that I am referring to is perhaps the most blatant example of racism in the contemporary US government and is known as “Affirmative Action.” From how I understand it, this policy introduces quotas of race for different institutions, such that these institutions must accept a particular number or percentage of students from each race. While that perspective of the law sounds acceptable, what it essentially comes down to is the fact that, in institutions where candidates are assessed by their competency and excellence, the race quotas essentially prevent better applicants from being accepted due to their race.”

As you can see, Thomas has very strong beliefs about affirmative action—although he completely mischaracterizes the policy. Affirmative action does not implement a quota system, but instead works as a policy to improve the opportunities (particularly in employment and education) for historically underrepresented groups. Additionally, to call affirmative action “racist” is to ignore a major aspect of the policy—that white women have been the largest group of benefactors of the policy.

Thomas continues his diatribe about affirmative action in his journal entry by bringing in the impacts of the policy (as he understands it) on Asian Americans in particular:

“The most obvious race affected by this is Asians, in that they compose a large proportion of the most competitive and academically excelling population. As such, these race quotas and limitations mean that Asians must compete with each other for spots into the institutions, whereas less qualified applicants of lesser represented races will have a much higher chance of being accepted. This seems ridiculous, as applicants should be based solely on one’s abilities, not race. After all, we are all American, so why must the government insist on separating us into categories?”

Still fighting within the abstract liberalism frame, Thomas makes an argument that is almost spot-on with what many whites (particularly white men) say about affirmative action—that they, as the more qualified individuals, lose out because other racial groups just happen to be underrepresented. Thomas, like many whites, ignores the fact of historic discrimination against racial minorities in the U.S.—and further, that this discrimination not so long ago was directed just as vehemently against his own ethnic group (and still is for other Asians).

Other Millennials of color had more nuanced views on hiring practices that demonstrated more of an indirect impact by abstract liberalism. Four students—Aisha

and Harper (black), Maya (Asian Indian), and Alejandro—brought up the idea of qualifications, but not in a pure abstract liberal way. Instead of saying that a racial minority should not be hired over a white person because of their race, these students said that it was ok to do so *if* the racial minority was qualified, either equally or more. Aisha, another Caribbean American with parents from Jamaica, provides a good example of these students' thinking:

“I think that it's a progressive decision. . . . Now, if that's the only reason why they were hired over, if the credentials don't match up exactly kind of experience for experience and the white person or Caucasian person did have more experience or did have a better track record over the minority person, but you just hired them because they're minority, I have a problem with that.”

For these students, the decision only makes sense if the minority candidate has the requisite qualifications for the job (although interestingly, Aisha goes on to say that “experiences can be hindered” because of minority status, so that should also be considered). This is indicative of an illuminating line of thinking that went beyond just these few students: when I presented this fictitious scenario to the Millennials, many of them assumed that the racial minority was either unqualified or lesser qualified than the white candidate, although I purposefully did not specify. This speaks to the implicit assumptions many people, including many of these Millennials, hold about minorities and their general “qualifications.” One wonders why questions of qualification would even come up in this scenario, since it is safe to assume that most companies would have already determined that any candidate they are considering hiring would be qualified.

Part of what makes the views of Aisha and Harper (and the three other Millennials who expressed the same idea) more nuanced is that, although they questioned the qualifications of the racial minority candidate, in the end they supported the decision to

hire that person with race as a factor. Additionally, none of these students felt that the decision discriminated against whites in any way.

Only one Latinx student mentioned qualifications over race. Camila, the second-generation Latina with parents from El Salvador and Spain, said that it was “interesting that the reason they hired them was because they were a minority” because “at a job interview, you should be primarily focused on how much experience this person has.” Camila’s response requires a caveat, however, because she framed her thinking as legitimate concern for how that individual would be perceived after they were hired:

“I feel like, at the end of the day, if the real reason they hired you was because of this, I don't know, I feel like the treatment would almost be different. I feel like if they made the comment and it was like in a conference room, people would know. ‘Oh, they were only hired because of this or that.’ Then people would expect them almost to not be as qualified or not as competent as everyone else. Sure, it's helping them but it's almost a disadvantage. It's like people will expect them to not be as good as everyone else.

Camila’s response could be interpreted as a form of indirect projection, since she appears to be “putting the burden” on the victim (refer to Chapter 4 on stylization for more details). I did not believe she was really projecting, however, because of what she said in a following comment. During some of the follow-up questions about this company’s decision, I asked Camila if she thought this represented preferential treatment for racial minorities. Camila said that although some people might say this, she did not think so. She believed some minorities needed an extra leg up because of the barriers they might face, saying, “I feel like it's astounding that they got to where they are with everything that's happening to them. You have to factor in who they are as a person.” Even though Camila thought qualifications should be the major consideration, the impact of race could

not be ignored. As such we see that abstract liberalism has more of an indirect impact on Camila's beliefs.

Neighborhood and School Segregation

The views of Millennials of color on neighborhood and school segregation were not at all monolithic. Some believed the government was complicit in segregation, others thought it was a more natural occurrence, and some specifically implicated whites in segregated communities and schools. Regardless of the mechanisms, several Millennials of color (nine) used the abstract liberalism frame to account for segregation, by way of saying that the government should not intervene in issues of segregation: two Asians (Sarah and Thomas), two blacks (Jameson and Aisha), one Latino (Fernando), and four multiracial students (Djeneba, Regina, Kennedy, and Taliyah). While these students were common in their belief that the government should not intervene, some of them had very nuanced or contradictory views, which demonstrates that color-blind racism had more of an indirect affect on people of color than whites.

For instance, Jameson, one of the black students with no immigrant parents, believed school segregation was a race driven phenomenon; often the result of "white flight," or the phenomenon of whites leaving neighborhoods once racial minorities begin moving in. Clearly this was an issue of racial discrimination, but yet and still, Jameson asserted that anything the government should not intervene because anything it did would be ineffective: "It's difficult for the government to really do anything about that, because you can't really force people to go to school in another school area, or something like that. Like, they'll find another way."

Similarly, some Millennials of color held stock in the idea of little to no governmental intervention in issues of segregation while simultaneously suggested that *some* intervention was reasonable—typically for a different issue, such as hiring practices. Fernando, a Latino immigrant from Bolivia, was one of these students. He never outright stated that the government should not intervene, but he did draw a parallel between neighborhood segregation and school diversity, suggesting that it was more about people’s “mindset,” and that it was “not something that policy can do to change.” Interestingly, however, when he was asked specifically about what could be done to make *schools* more diverse, he spoke in support of government action: “I think there are cases where affirmative action policies need to be implemented, and I think even just before that, programs like FAFSA and um, the government's role in just like giving financial aid to people, not necessarily of color but just anybody that had just like a lack of resources, um, help to go to a school.” This suggests he is obviously ok with some governmental intervention, which other Millennials expressed in similar ways on different topics. Perhaps this indicates that having the government tell people where to live hits just a little too close to home—literally.

Delilah provides another example of how many of the Millennials of color demonstrated contradictory acceptance of color-blind racism across the various frames. As I mentioned before, Delilah consistently used colorblindness, but somewhat surprisingly she did not use abstract liberalism with regards to neighborhood or school segregation. Delilah thought money was the foremost contributing factor for segregation, both in schools and in neighborhoods. She believed a major reason why colleges were

mostly white is because they were too expensive for people of color, and she had similar thoughts for neighborhoods, citing:

“And also I think um, a lot of the neighborhoods that are mostly white are more developed, and also more expensive, and so people like black people wouldn't be able to afford it as much. So they would go to another neighborhood that's more affordable, but not, might not be as improved as the white neighborhood.”

Although Delilah did not seem to think the government was at fault for residential or school segregation, she did think that the government could help reduce residential segregation by giving funding to underdeveloped neighborhoods so that more people would want to move in. Her views were in line with the about one-third of the Millennials of color I interviewed (12) who expressed that the government should make an effort to counteract segregation, whether or not they believed the government was explicitly at fault.

Minimization Of Racism

Nearly every Millennial of color in this study recognized the continuing significance of race in their lives and in the lives of racial minorities, although blacks and Latinxs were more likely to speak about racial discrimination and racism than their Asian peers (but Asians *did* speak about these things too). The Millennials of color spoke about racial issues they have faced themselves, such as being followed around stores, feeling the pressures of representing their entire race, or hearing negative comments about their racial groups, as well as global racial concerns like negative interactions with the police.

As a result, relatively few Millennials of color utilized the minimization of racism frame (9 of 47). What is interesting, however, is which Millennials of color did use this frame: Delilah was the sole black student, Taliyah and Djeneba were the only multiracial students, and all of the Asian students but one who used the frame could be classified as “honorary whites” in the growing tri-racial system (Sarah and Thomas, the two Chinese students; and Zara, Naveen, Aubrey, and Ishita, four Asian Indians; Aiden, a second-generation Vietnamese student, was the only non-“honorary white”). None of the Latinx students used minimization of racism. Additionally, the degree to which these students used minimization of racism varied, demonstrating the subtleties of the impact of color-blind racism. Delilah, Taliyah, and Djeneba all exhibited very contradictory usage of this particular frame, simultaneously recognizing the significance of race and minimizing it. Conversely, the Asian Millennials who minimized the significance of race did so in very similar ways to their white peers—in other words, their views were far less nuanced or “slightly color blind” than the other Millennials of color. In order to provide a scope of what this looked like, I give examples from several of these students.

Delilah discussed some of the same experiences her black peers listed—except Delilah was the only black Millennial to *also* actively minimize racism and discrimination. What is interesting, however, is that Delilah’s usage of the minimization of racism frame was consistently inconsistent. In other words, she demonstrated very contradictory thoughts regarding the significance of race in her life and in the lives of other people of color. This is a perfect example of why color-blind racism is the dominant racial ideology. As Bonilla-Silva points out in *Racism Without Racists*, “an ideology is not dominant because it affects all actors in a social system in the *same* way and to the

same degree. Instead, an ideology is dominant if *most* members (dominant and subordinate) of a social system have to accommodate their views vis-à-vis that ideology” (2010:152, italics in original). Delilah is clearly indirectly impacted by color-blind racism, insomuch as she does not believe in the significance of racism in the same ways as the majority of her black peers. Below, I will walk you through the ideological back and forth Delilah exhibited using the minimization of racism frame.

One of the questions during the interview asked about racial minorities and their experiences with discrimination, which was read as follows: “Studies show that a large percentage of racial minorities say that they experience a lot of discrimination in their daily lives. Other people say that this is not the case. What do you think?” Delilah responded by invoking the “pulling the race card” idea:

“I think it's half and half, because a lot of people that say that, they probably do. But sometimes some people just blame everything on racism, like, "Oh I didn't get the job, they were just racist." Stuff like that, so because some people know that racism occurs they just see every bad thing that happens to them as people being racist towards them. Even though it might not be the case. You just not, you just might not be qualified for it. But because the person who interviewed you was white you just think, "Oh I'm black so that's why I didn't get hired." So, I think it's half true and half not.”

Even though she asserted that it was “half true and half not,” Delilah obviously believed that some people blamed things on race that had nothing to do with race. I followed this question up by asking Delilah how significant she thought discrimination is for people in contemporary times, and she responded using a form of direct minimization, citing that racism and discrimination are no longer as significant as they were in the past because they have been outlawed by legislation, and “you can act a certain way against people,

but at the end of the day you can't just outright just discriminate against people because of their race or their ethnicity. You have to follow the law.”

At other times in her interview, Delilah spoke in direct contradiction to these clear ideas that racism and discrimination are no longer significant factors in people’s lives. One example is when I asked Delilah whether or not the fact that Barack Obama was elected president of the U.S. meant that race and racism no longer matter. Delilah was adamant that they *do* matter, and that race and racism are legitimate reasons for the position of people of color. She mentioned that “there was still a lot of uproar about having this black president,” and noted that people of color still have numerous “limitations and restrictions” that prevent them from being successful, outside of personal choices. Further, Delilah also thought that being white was an advantage, saying that whites have “a lot of privilege over blacks, Hispanics, or everyone else,” even if they do not realize it. This is a clear indication that race matters to Delilah in certain ways.

Finally, when I asked Delilah whether or not institutions can be described as racist, she gave a response in which she somewhat contradicted herself.

“I think [institutions] can [be described as racist]. Um, especially now, with all these police situations going on, I think definitely that happens a lot. The health system I think, well I'm not sure if it's mostly because of race but a lot of people get denied health care. And um, being seen by doctors because I guess because they can't afford it, so I'm not really sure if that's racism in itself, or they might see you and say, "Oh no you won't be able to pay," so ... But I'm not sure if that actually happens. I think definitely it *can* happen a lot. Especially, people think that racism ended a long time ago, which makes no sense, because [it's] definitely still around, it's just not as um, outwardly shown as before. Because there are laws and things like that, that help to control that. But, I think it's still very prevalent today, in all the areas of society.”

As you can see, Delilah goes back and forth on the importance of racism. She states that, yes, institutions can be described as racist, but she is unsure “if it’s mostly because of

race,” and she is not sure if discrimination in the health care system “actually happens” (but “definitely it *can* happen”). She finishes by saying that it is essentially foolish that people think racism no longer exists, because it does—although there are laws that help control it.

At best, Delilah is conflicted about the significance of racism, and on several occasions uses the minimization of racism frame to diminish its prevalence. She also seems to be unclear on the role it plays in her own life, as she answers a direct question about whether or not she has experienced discrimination on the basis of her race with “no,” despite saying that she has experienced the “shopping while nonwhite” phenomenon earlier in the interview. Again, however, it is important to note that Delilah was the only black Millennial in the study to minimize racism in this way.

Similar to Delilah, Djeneba and Taliyah both consistently minimized the significance of racism in very *inconsistent* ways. As you will see below, Djeneba and Taliyah spoke about various types of racial discrimination that occurs, or agreed that there are situations in which race is a pivotal factor, but at other times they clearly downplay racism and discrimination and other issues of race, in their lives and in the lives of others.

Djeneba often spoke about racism and discrimination as abstract concepts, things that happen, but typically not in her social world. In other words, she gave a certain level of lip service to discrimination, but then tried to put a positive spin on many of her comments, which only further served to minimize its significance for people of color. For instance, she said that years ago she would have said race was something that would eventually “just disappear,” but that after the recent election of Donald Trump to the

presidency there is no denying that race still matters a lot. Yet when I followed up by asking if race had ever impacted her life in a significant way, she replied, “For me, uh, I don't know, I feel very privileged because I've never personally had to experience anything um negative with race. I think that I've gotten some cool opportunities um to be able to discuss race.” So, yes, race matters, but no, not to her. Interestingly, she went on to describe how her teachers in high school “rooted for [her]” as a representative of the school, apparently in part because of her race:

“I think they liked that I was trying to represent our school. I was running for president and all that stuff and I think it was cool for them to have a minority wanting to be super involved because a lot, I definitely say a lot, although my school was very diverse, a lot of the minorities, not to generalize, um, but they were just less motivated and a lot of them were definitely less involved.”

While Djeneba does not specify the races of these teachers, it is clear there is some form of tokenization occurring, although she does not appear to recognize it. Further, Djeneba exhibits some of the cultural racism frame, suggesting that, while she is trying “not to generalize,” many of the racial minorities at her school were “less motivated” and “less involved.”

Another example of Djeneba’s back and forth between giving lip service to discrimination but also minimizing its significance occurred when I asked her whether or not people of color experience racism and discrimination in their daily lives. Instead of saying definitively that people of color *do* experience discrimination, she attempted to qualify their experiences, saying that it “depends on where you are.” She says that her and her friends have not experienced discrimination because they “grew up in a very diverse area” where “if you grew up racist, that’s a huge deal,” citing that people could be expelled from school or face other “big consequences” for racism. At other places,

however, this was not the case: “I know people that are going to schools in southern areas, my friend goes to [a school in the south] and stuff and he's like ‘Yeah, I see it all the time but no one does anything about it.’ It's like, it's almost so normalized that you—reporting it or complaining about it, it really, to them it's just like not as big of a deal at all.” Djeneba goes on to say more about the existence of racism and its relation to her life personally:

“So, like personally, I can't say that I have ever experienced or experience it on a daily basis, but there, yeah, it definitely exists and it's definitely out there and you know, like you see the um uh, people that are Muslim getting um you know all these racial slurs and people talking about their appearance and things like that. That's just, that exists enough out there and I think everybody can see that things like that happen every day. So I think it's kind of ridiculous to say it doesn't exist or that people don't experience it. Yeah, no, not everybody experiences it, which is good. I hope that not everyone would experience it, but definitely there are people in different areas like other countries of the world that experience it every day or more often and it's not taken as seriously in other places as it is here.”

As you can see, Djeneba also uses a semantic move, saying that she “can’t say that I have ever experienced or experience it on a daily basis,” although she tacks on that discrimination does exist and it is “out there”—somewhere. What is particularly interesting is that Djeneba has no issues admitting that racism and discrimination happen outside of her social world (in other regions of the U.S., or even globally), but asserts that it does not happen around her simply because where she grew up was diverse. I wonder if other racial minorities from the same neighborhoods and schools she grew up in would say the same things.

Finally, looking at Djeneba’s comments throughout the interview and her journal, it becomes clear that she consistently minimized the impact of race in her own life, particularly when it came to negative racial experiences. When I asked Djeneba if she has

ever experienced discrimination on the basis of her race, she became visibly uncomfortable, demonstrating an unusual level of rhetorical incoherence:

“Um, no. I don't, like nothing negative. Um, hopefully never will, but um, yeah, I still haven't but um, I've definitely like seen it before um and I've definitely, I feel like I've gotten like some opportunities like because I was a minority um, like I'm not sure- like I don't know if I would have gotten into [college] like yeah. I don't go out of here and be like I can't, I'll never know, you know like how would you ever know and like that. Um, yeah, so I guess that's like still racial discrimination.”

This makes sense on some levels, because Djeneba continually tried to avoid labeling herself as different because of her race—remember, she identified as “American” instead of a particular race. Admitting that she might receive special treatment because of her race was clearly stressful.

Taliyah also used the minimization of racism frame on multiple occasions, but would at other times speak about race and racism as important factors in the lives of people of color. She believed that there was racial discrimination and injustice in the criminal justice system (“I feel like there's a negative stigma with minorities. . . .something that's culturally embedded and they just, because they're not white, then they're probably doing something wrong.”), but also believed that social class, not race, is the more significant factor in people's lives, even though she connects the two (“I mean I think race doesn't matter as much any more as it used to. . . .but typically the people that are the most, you know, impoverished are minorities.”).

Taliyah also minimized the significance of race through use of the “pulling the race card” paradigm, invoking this narrative multiple times in her interview and also in her journal. According to Taliyah, “there are people who almost don't want to be happy, they don't want it to be a good experience dealing with someone else whose, you know,

not the same race as them.” She evoked this narrative regarding two different stories she told: first, about a group of black women who called a restaurant manager racist in response to bad service; and second, about an incident in which a former boyfriend told her he had witnessed a racially-motivated incident where one of his friends was kicked out of a bar. During the interview, interestingly, Taliyah also spoke of “pulling the race card” in terms of her own father. I asked her to talk about the ways in which her parents may have influenced her racial identity, and she started off by saying that her mother raised her to believe that “race never [mattered].” Her father, on the other hand, was a different story, which she explained by saying, “I’m not really close to my dad, so he didn’t really have much of an impact. But I’ve noticed now, he’s one of those people that if he doesn’t get his way, he thinks it’s racially driven.” Here she is clearly minimizing the impact of race in her father’s life, reducing any legitimate feelings he might have to a tantrum. This also potentially helps explain a lot of Taliyah’s views on race—she identifies more with her mother’s race, never discussing herself in terms of being black, and teeters back and forth constantly between recognizing the struggles of racial minorities and minimizing the impact of race in their lives. Taliyah very clearly suggests that people of color pull the race card unnecessarily, and is in essence projecting onto minorities. Additionally, she said that whites often bear the burden of this unfounded card-pulling, because they do not want to be called racist. Not once in any of the examples Taliyah gave did she offer that the racial minorities in the scenarios had even a *possibility* of being correct in asserting that race played a role in their experiences.

As I mentioned before, the Asian students who used the minimization of racism frame did not exhibit any contradictory views like the Millennials of color I just

discussed. Instead, the Asian Millennials used this frame in very similar ways to their white peers.

One example of indirect minimization comes from Zara. When I asked her to tell me what she has heard about the Black Lives Matter movement, she dove into a fence-straddling explanation:

“So like, um, of course there's been like a lot of unjust killings of, a lot of, especially black teenagers. A lot of black teenage boys. And um, sometimes they—a lot of the times, they weren't in the wrong. Even if it was a small crime, they definitely did not deserve death. And it's because the officer rushed and made assumptions, and I feel like, I feel bad for the police officer. Their job is to protect and to serve the country and like the people that are living here. They might have thought that this person was causing harm to another person, but, you know, it's just, they weren't. **And color could've probably played a significant role in the way that they perceived danger**, and that's not ok.”

Zara is expressing support for the victims of police killings and the police themselves. Her comment that “color could've probably played a significant role” in the way the police perceived danger in various confrontations minimizes the role that race did play. We know that police (and others) are significantly influenced by race when dealing with civilians, particularly when it comes to perceptions of individuals holding weapons or innocuous objects (Eberhardt et al 2004). Also interesting, Zara finishes her comments on the Black Lives Matter movement by saying that she is sure police are “not racist people,” but rather “scared people,” further minimizing the influence of race in these situations.

Similarly, Thomas used direct minimization (and diminutives) when discussing the same movement. When I asked him about his thoughts on the debate surrounding Black Lives Matter (e.g. some people saying instead that “all lives matter”), he spoke about blacks, saying, “You see that maybe that they're **a little more disadvantaged or**

like treated worse, but then as soon as you start trying to like elevate and address that, suddenly the prospective becomes that you're trying to elevate a group and then everyone else doesn't really matter.“ Research consistently demonstrates that blacks are more than just “a little” disadvantaged or treated worse than whites by the police (Najdowski, Bottoms, and Goff 2015; Alexander 2012; Brunson and Miller 2006; Lundman and Kaufman 2003; Bass 2001), yet Thomas minimizes blacks’ experiences with law enforcement by using a diminutive.

Minimization did not just come up in the interviews. Multiple Asian students who only completed the journal component of the study exhibited usage of the minimization of racism frame. Aubrey, one of the Millennials with immigrant parents from India, invoked the frame in her journal, writing that she does “think that racism still exists amongst some people, but only a very small amount (I hope).” Although Aubrey is discussing the existence of racism, she minimizes it, saying she “hopes” that racism only exists among “some people” in “a very small amount,” and she accepts that it is “still possible” for racism to exist: not a very strong belief in racism’s significance. In another example from the journalers, Aiden, one of the students with Vietnamese parents, wrote an entry in his journal that is a classic example of accusing people of pulling the race card.

“Although I do believe that race still plays a role in many aspects of our lives I do acknowledge the fact that race is sometimes used a crutch to justify lack of performance or a cause of blame. I believe that sometimes people will blame their race for a reason they do not achieve something when the truth behind their failure was their own performance. There are without a doubt still situations where race plays a role in the lives of people but this isn’t always the case. For example, if a person of color gets pulled over for speeding while going 85 mph in a 55 mph zone, they cannot blame that on their race. They clearly broke the law. However, sometimes people will still blame this situation on their race and I believe that is wrong.”

This is clearly minimization, and Aiden's chosen example to prove his point is lacking. While there are undoubtedly people who "blame everything on race," like in this fictitious scenario of a minority speeding, the unquestionable majority of examples people give about discrimination in their own lives are nowhere near this trivial. I also find Aiden's story even more entertaining because not only did exactly *zero* racial minorities in my study bring up a scenario even close to this as an example of discrimination they faced, one student brought up this exact situation...but she was *white*. Emma wrote in her journal about a time when she was given a ticket by a black police officer, and Emma asserted that she only received the ticket because she was white: "The only time I got a ticket was when it was a black woman police officer. I was pissed that she gave me a ticket and gave me attitude, and I hypothesize she gave me a ticket because I was a white suburban privileged girl."

Naturalization

There was fairly even usage of the naturalization frame across all of the Millennials of color, although Latinx students used this frame less than their other racial minority peers. Similar to the black participants in Bonilla-Silva's study, the majority of these students (two Asians, four blacks, one Latino, and three multiculturals) used colorblindness to naturalize issues of segregation, as well as cross-racial interactions: people of different races typically like to live together or congregate together because it is comfortable and "natural" for them to want to be around "similar" people.

Delilah provides a good example of this usage that epitomizes what the others said. When speaking about whether or not people of different races interact on her campus, she said they typically do not:

“I think we're just used to people of our own race so we separate ourselves. Like if you go walk into a cafeteria you're gonna sit... and you, if you don't know anyone you're most likely going to go sit where most black people are than you would sit with a white person or Hispanic or... So I think in that situation we just separate ourselves. Based on familia- familiarity.”

Delilah used very similar language about why neighborhoods are often filled with same-race people, saying it is “about being comfortable.” Recall that Delilah was one of the black students who did believe that the government could do something to assist with making neighborhoods more diverse. This highlights that her views were a little more nuanced than most whites, and this speaks to the trend of color-blind racism having different effects on Millennials of color. Some of these students acknowledged that race played a role in certain phenomena (e.g. school segregation), but then still tried to explain other phenomena as natural (e.g. residential segregation).

Another student who used the naturalization frame to naturalize cross-racial interactions was Fernando, the immigrant from Bolivia. He thought people on his campus interacted across race less outside of class because of interests that are shared through their culture:

“And I think because people share that culture, they're more—more likely to spend time together. So I don't think it's like bad at all, I think people just like relate to one another, and they want to spend time with people who like doing the same things, and a lot of times that has to do with race and ethnicity.”

You can see that Fernando invokes the naturalization frame by saying that people group themselves together based on shared culture and interests, and because of that “they're. . .

..more likely to spend time together.” He is also very direct in saying that this has to do with race and ethnicity “a lot of times,” which is much different from how white students typically used this frame. Fernando used some of the same language when discussing neighborhood segregation later in the interview, saying, “I don't mind it [segregated neighborhoods] as much if like, people are of the same culture, um, you're gonna like and identify with similar values and you have similar interests, **it's just natural you're gonna spend more time together.**” Notably, however, Fernando lived a pretty diverse life, interacting with many different types of people and participating in several different types of student organizations. This was typically not the case for white students who claimed segregation was a “natural” occurrence.

Taliyah used the naturalization frame on more than one occasion during her interview, naturalizing issues like cross-racial interactions and segregation, for both schools and neighborhoods. Before I showcase her examples, I will point out a very relevant part of her background: Taliyah is a senior sociology major. Her major is particularly important here, so keep that in mind.

When I asked her to weigh in on segregated schools, she claimed that it was “just the makeup of the community. . . . I don't think its anyone's fault, it's just the makeup of where the school's located.” Her comments highlight another danger of this frame—saying that schools are segregated because it is “just the makeup of the community” and that it is nobody's fault takes the onus off of the social structure that is racialized and thus systematically benefits certain groups—i.e. whites. Demographers and other social scientists know that neighborhoods do not just magically end up segregated—broader social structures work to limit individual's access to certain neighborhoods, and a major

factor for this access is race (Massey and Denton 1993; Massey and Lundy 2001; Squires and Kubrin 2005; Iceland and Wilkes 2006; Roscigno, Karafin, and Tester 2009; Woldoff 2011; Sampson 2012). As such, single-race neighborhoods are systematically created by active, not natural, processes. Schools, particularly public schools, then follow suit, since they draw from the neighborhoods in which they are located. Additionally, individuals with more resources—typically whites—disproportionately have the ability to send their children to private and charter schools, which may remove them from a school they would otherwise attend in their district. These limitations on school choice further perpetuate school segregation. What is interesting, and also showcases the complexities of Taliyah’s usage of color-blind ideology, is that when I asked her about college segregation, she spoke about differential resources, saying, “a lot of white families kind of have the resources, and some minority families have the resources and that’s why they can go off [to college] and some people just don’t and that’s why I think that’s why we still see a lot of white, predominantly white campuses.” She did, however, go right back to abstract liberalism when I asked what could be done to make schools more diverse, citing that people should be brought in to more impoverished high schools to speak with students to let them know that “you can make a better life for yourself, as long as you put in the [work], you can do it.”

I pointed out that Taliyah is a sociology major, and now I will discuss why this is relevant. As a sociology major—a *senior* sociology major—it seems reasonable that Taliyah would have encountered at least *some* material on social processes that impact segregation and other social issues. At the very least, she should have been exposed to sociological notions that things do not just “happen.” However, we see that this is either

not the case, or Taliyah simply does not believe some of the foundational ideas she studied. It is also possible that Taliyah is not very invested in her major discipline, and there is some interesting evidence that may point this possibility. When I asked Taliyah about neighborhood segregation, she began speaking about the preferences of whites and blacks in choosing neighborhoods. For those of you more familiar with social science literature on that subject, read her words and see if anything comes to mind (and do not worry, I will explain it for those less familiar):

“Um, I forgot what exactly I heard...but it's like a white person wouldn't—like if they were looking at houses, they wouldn't want to live in an area where there's a lot of black people. Or a black person wouldn't want to live in an area where there's a bunch of white people. Just because, I think they're scared, to you know, live in a diverse community. Again, just because it's not your culture, it's not, you know, you're not being surrounded by people that know the same things that you know, and that have been through the same things that you have. And so, I think it's all just being scared and a comfort, a comfortability that they're looking for.”

This is eerily similar to research done by Farley and colleagues (1978) on the neighborhood preferences of blacks and whites. Unfortunately, if this is indeed the study she was thinking about, she completely missed both the point of the findings and the actual findings themselves. In this study, Farley and colleagues found that whites in the Detroit area were highly resistant to even minimal levels of integration with blacks, while blacks clearly preferred more neighborhoods with more even mixes of blacks and whites.¹⁷ I will certainly point out that I could be wrong in my assumption that this is what Taliyah was thinking about, but again, I point out that she is a sociology major, and it is not altogether unreasonable that she might have been exposed to this study, even if

¹⁷ Further, subsequent studies have been done that incorporate other racial groups (Latinxs and Asians) and their preferences (see Farley et al 1993, 1997; Zubrinsky and Bobo 1996; Charles 2001). While the results are more complex than I will discuss here, in general, whites have the strongest preferences for same-race neighbors of all groups.

she never read it in detail. I often talk about the findings of this study in the sociology introduction courses that I have taught. Regardless, however, if she had been exposed to this particular study and misremembered it or she never heard of it, as a sociology major, it stands to reason that she would at least be able to articulate that something like segregation is based on more than just the “natural” preferences of people, with no sociostructural implications whatsoever.

Only two Millennials of color used naturalization to explain their dating choices: Djeneba and Maya, one of the second-generation Asian Indians. This was not typical at all for Millennials of color, as they were much more likely to state racially-conscious choices regarding who they dated. Again, this was mainly the purview of white students, who were much more likely to naturalize romantic decisions:

As with all of the interviewees, I asked Djeneba to tell me about the people she has dated since high school up until this point. She admitted that they were all whites, but naturalized her decisions:

“Uh yeah, definitely like primarily white, um, I don't really know why but um that's just kind of how it happened. Um, in high school I guess um yeah, I guess just like a lot of my friends were white like I said then um even some guys like lived in my neighborhood, they were white and I just, I'm kind of lazy so like the convenience of meeting people and stuff was just easier, so um that's how that happened in high school. In college, um, kind of started out the same freshman year and then this year like right now, um, like semi seeing someone who's like black. My first black person, boyfriend I guess. Yeah, I don't really know why, it's just like how it happened so.”

This is interesting, because she asserted that she had friends and interacted a lot with people from a very racially diverse neighborhood that was “super close” to her own. Despite this, she claims she never dated a nonwhite until college because of “convenience.”

Maya has also dated all white men, and naturalized this by saying that she was “not pulled towards people who maybe are Indian, or could be like, ‘Oh, my parents are immigrants too.’” According to Maya, her dating choices were because of a similarity of beliefs, and the fact that she grew up around all white people. Race was not a factor, particular her race as Asian, because that was not a meaningful identity to her growing up: “it's just that's not a connection for me.”

Cultural Racism

As I discussed in Chapter 4, the cultural racism frame came through in my data in one main way: through the guise of the “cycle of poverty” argument. Those students who invoked this argument within the frame of cultural racism did so by suggesting the cycle of poverty impacted certain racial groups’ mindsets or values. Other students did bring up the cycle of poverty, but instead described it as a social structure that continues to disenfranchise racial minorities, relegating them to generation and generation of poverty no matter how hard they attempt to gain socioeconomic ground. Because these arguments did not focus on internal factors for racial minorities (they’re work ethic, loose family structures, misplaced values, etc.), they did not fall under the auspices of cultural racism.

For instance, Jayden, one of the native-born African Americans without immigrant parents, spoke about how wealth is intergenerational. He gave an example, stating:

“So if your great grandparents started off in poverty, and then passed that on to your parents, and then now you're in this situation, um, where you're still trying to

make ends meet. And you're trying to better yourself. But then, you're met with institutional situations that are not in your benefit. It can be pretty hard to, you know, get ahead.”

Jayden focuses on “institutional situations” that work against individuals, even if they are “trying to better [themselves].” Unlike the previously discussed Millennials, Jayden does not talk about individuals or groups being the harbingers of their own demise. Eight other Millennials of color discussed the cycle of poverty in terms similar to Jayden, thus not invoking cultural racism: three Asians (Maya, Sanjay, and Thomas), two Latinxs (Fernando and Julieta, a second-generation Salvadoran), one multicultural (Taliyah), and two additional blacks (Jameson and Cheyenne, the second-generation Liberian).

Some of the Millennials of color invoked the cycle of poverty in such a way that only one or two words shifted the nature of their argument, making it cultural racism. For example, Djeneba explained the general cycle of poverty concept well, but she started off her description by saying that it was “the mindset that people have,” shifting her argument from one on structure to one that blames individual racial groups. Mason, one of the multiracial journalers with a white father and Chinese American mother, wrote about how he was learning about the “external factors that affect minority students’ education” in one of his sociology courses. He writes, “I know it can’t be confined to one factor but education isn’t a huge priority in some communities. This may be caused by parenting styles or the education system not being what students need and therefore deter them away from education because they are frustrated with the system.” Mason is clearly using the cultural racism frame here, as he speaks about minorities’ priorities and parenting styles.

Zara used cultural racism in a much more direct, classic way. When I asked Zara about why blacks and Latinxs tend to have worse housing, income, and jobs than whites, she launched into a passionate speech about the differences in black and Latinxs' upbringing as compared to that of Asians and whites (and Africans). It is a longer quote, but extremely insightful:

“I think it's also a lot about the upbringing. I think Indian families, white families, they put a lot on their kids, especially education wise. Not all of them but a good, I feel like stereotypically, majority wise they do. They're like, "You have to do well in school. You have to maintain this certain GPA. You have to get into this college," and there's a lot of competition between them whereas Latinos and African Americans I feel like, because their parents maybe weren't doing super well in school, they feel hypocritical implying that their kid has to do super well in school. So they're like, "You do the best you can." Which is a nice thing. But let's be realistic: they have to do better than their best. You have to be the best. I think because of that, it starts creating this generation after generation where it's like you stay in the same level, you don't grow and I think that has to start with the parents. You have to tell your kids you have to do well in school. Don't come home with a C-. Come home with a B+ and maybe it's they have to be more strict with that, because I've seen white families are a little bit more strict with that, definitely Asians are and I feel like a lot of African families are too but a lot of African American and a lot of black families and a lot of Hispanic, Latino families aren't. I think applying to [my university], a lot of the people that got in from my school were white, a lot of Asians. A lot of the African American Latinos either, a lot of them went to community college or didn't go to college at all and I think it's going back to the upbringing. They have different goals in their mind. They're okay with community college. White people, Asian people, they're brought up with the mindset you need to go to an established university. A lot of white people I know it's like, "Your dad went to this university. Your grandfather went to this university. Therefore you must go to this university." A lot of Asian families, it's like, "This girl got into this school. You need to top her so you need to go to this school." Where as I feel like in a lot of other cultures it's just do the best you can. It's okay. You'll get by in life.”

What is interesting is that, unprompted, she groups Asians with whites when comparing blacks and Latinxs. Further, she distinguishes between African Americans and other blacks (“I've seen white families are a little bit more strict with that, definitely Asians are and I feel like a lot of African families are too but a lot of African American. . . .families

aren't.”). She unabashedly asserts that African Americans and Latinos do not push their children to succeed in school because they “weren’t doing super well in school” themselves, and would feel “hypocritical” making their kids do well. She also believes that many African Americans and Latinxs were “okay with community college” or not going to college at all, because of their “upbringing,” which is wholly different from Asians and whites. To Zara, at least in terms of educational achievement, African Americans and Latinxs do not have it all together—their own cultures and priorities are not in the right place.

Finally, two Millennials of color—Julieta and Charlotte, one of the black students without immigrant parents—did frame some of their comments in a way that followed the model of cultural racism, while speaking specifically about their own racial groups at large. This is an example of how cultural explanations sometimes bounded the way students discuss race-related issues. In other words, cultural racism had an impact on their thinking, but they were not completely beholden to it. In these women’s cases, the usage of this frame appears to be more of a critique of their own racial groups. However, as I discussed earlier, *intent* does not necessarily remove the detrimental effects of the cultural racism frame. I will present one example, from Julieta, because it represents both students well. I will leave it up to you as the reader to determine whether or not you would consider it to fit in the cultural racism frame.

In her journal, Julieta intimated that she believed Latinx parents do not encourage higher education enough for their children. In one of her journal entries, she wrote about Latinxs and college attendance. She started off her entry by writing:

“In the Latino community, it is pretty common for parents to help pay for their kids’ college education as much as they can. And so, if they can’t afford college

tuition they tend to tell their kids to get jobs and figure it out for themselves, or some extreme parents tell their kids to just give up on college. It's unfortunate, but it happens."

She then goes on to write about a conversation she had one day with three Latina high school students regarding college. Two were rising seniors in high school, and one of them had just graduated and was going to attend a local community college in the fall. Julieta wrote about how she encouraged the women to work hard, and to not let issues like tuition costs keep them from applying to the colleges they wanted to attend. She ended her entry by turning her attention to the role of Latinx parents:

"Latino parents have to realize that higher education is KEY. They have to encourage their kids to continue their education after high school. If it's community college, great! If it's a four year university, great! But Latino students should not get discouraged because of money and parents issues, if what they really want to do is out there."

This argument suggests that there is something wrong with the beliefs and priorities of Latinx parents, and that they need to shift their thinking so that they prioritize education. During her interview, Julieta touched on a similar point, referring to the mindset of Latinxs:

"I believe that sometimes this kind of mentality occurs in the new generations of the Latino community. They grow seeing the American lifestyle and it is all sparkly and shining, acquired by lots of wealth and they want that too. So, they give less effort into an education, and more into jobs and paid positions to reach that shiny goal. However, I also think that sometimes Latino parents contribute to desire of a job instead of an internship."

These examples alone do showcase cultural racism to a certain extent. However, during another part of her interview, Julieta talks very coherently about the cycle of poverty, focusing on the social structures that exist, blocking opportunities for racial minorities. It

is obvious that Julieta believes in structural impediments to upward mobility, but at the same time, she expresses views about Latinxs that could be seen as culturally racist.

In Review: Millennials of Color and the Frames & Styles of Colorblindness

In the preceding sections, I showcased how the Millennials of color in my study utilized the four frames and various styles of color-blind racism. Whereas I found that color-blind racism is central in whites' formations of their racial ideology, the Millennials of color demonstrated more nuanced usage of the frames of color-blind racism, at times using them to explain certain racial phenomena, and at other times actively rejecting a color-blind ideology. To put it more succinctly, borrowing from Bonilla-Silva's label for the blacks in his study, Millennials of color appeared to be "slightly colorblind." Additionally, the Millennials of color were much less likely to use the styles of color-blind racism, in most cases because people of color tend to be more direct when it comes to speaking about race. This likely happens because people of color have "skin in the game;" they experience race in very significant ways (or understand how some people *can* experience race in significant ways), and so are less bothered mentioning race or their views about racial issues. For example, most of the white Millennials who never dated across race became visibly uncomfortable and quite incoherent when this fact was revealed, whereas students of color openly discussed very racialized dating preferences with no qualms. Furthermore, the Millennials of color who used the styles of colorblindness typically did so in qualitatively different ways than their white peers: most often they were talking about *other* people using these moves, and if they did so

themselves they were not attempting to save face. For example, Camila used the semantic move “I am not a racist...” but not in an effort to *excuse* her racist behavior: she was actually *recognizing* it. In her journal, she wrote about a situation in which she assumed the interim director at a courthouse where she worked was the janitor. After explaining what happened, she writes:

“And, I want to call myself out. It wasn’t solely because he was dressed casually it was because of his race. It was probably a combination of the two. And let me clarify, I’m not like a racist. But, it’s just. I’ve been raised in a social setting where the majority of people that are ‘in charge’ are typically white. And I feel bad about it.”

As you can see, Camila was actually admitting that what she did *could* be construed as racist, and she owned up to it. Instances where Millennials of color used styles like semantic moves typically took this form.

These findings have some empirical support, particularly if we follow Bonilla-Silva’s line of thinking regarding how the various racial groups fit into America’s growing tri-racial hierarchy of white, honorary white, and collective black (Bonilla-Silva 2004; Bonilla-Silva and Glover 2004). Overall the black students in this study, as part of the collective black group, showcased more nuanced usage of color-blind racism. Their usage was often presented as somewhat contradictory, so they might express that school segregation is largely the fault of discriminatory whites (“Majority black schools exist because of white flight.”), but at the same time assert that residential segregation is natural (“People just like to be around other people like them, it’s something all races do.”). Black Millennials typically were quick to acknowledge that race was a significant issue, but their thinking was bounded by color-blind racism such that they at times explained away some racial phenomena. This is quite different from the white

Millennials in this study, which we would expect given that whites are on top of the racial hierarchy, while blacks are still a part of the bottom.

Many Asians are often given the status of honorary white; take for instance the “model minority” myth. This obviously does not apply to all Asians equally—some ethnic groups are not seen in such a “white” light, for instance Vietnamese or Filipinos. The majority of the Asians in my study, however, were either Chinese or Asian Indian, groups that Bonilla-Silva does label as part of the honorary white group that serves as a buffer between whites and collective blacks in the tri-racial hierarchy. Additionally, I will remind you that *all* of the Asian students in this study were either immigrants or second-generation Americans, meaning they or their parents immigrated to the U.S. Immigrants typically figure out the racial dynamics of America very quickly, and understand, among other things, that blackness is often associated with downward mobility (Waters 1999; Portes and Rumbaut 2006). Thus you have people like Isabella, whose Vietnamese parents moved their family away from a predominantly black neighborhood near Oakland, California, because her “family wanted to associate with being white more than being black.” What Isabella wrote in her journal highlights that some immigrants who come to America may actively work to avoid associating with the hierarchical bottom of collective blacks. Acceptance of color-blind racism was not perfect for the Asian Millennials in my study, however, as many of these students use the frames and styles in contradictory or inconsistent ways. This suggests that no matter where these students fall in the tri-racial system, they have experiences as people of color that impact their usage of color-blind racism.

Similar to their Asian counterparts, Latinxs location in the proposed tri-racial hierarchy of the U.S. is a bit more nuanced and varied, just like their usage of color-blind racism. In general, light-skinned Latinxs (e.g. most Cubans, some Mexicans, and some South Americans) are considered honorary white, while dark-skinned Latinxs (Dominicans, some Puerto Ricans, some Central Americans) are subsumed into collective black. Perhaps more importantly, whether Latinxs are considered to be closer to whites or blacks (ideologically, etc.) often depends on countries of origin and the places to which they immigrate in the U.S., as emerging literature suggests (Peña, forthcoming). Similar to the Asian Millennials, all of the Latinxs in my study were either immigrants or second-generation Americans, and the majority came from Central American or Caribbean countries. While nearly all of the Latinxs in my study could be described as lighter skinned,¹⁸ many of these Latinx Millennials' parents had resettled in places that were heavily populated by other racial minorities, including sizeable populations of blacks—thus, the students grew up amidst large groups of black peers. This appeared to push these students to a closer ideological alignment with blacks, in which case their usage of color-blind racial frames makes sense: their experiences often underscore the importance of race in their lives.

The multiracial Millennials' usage of color-blind racism was also more nuanced and contradictory than their white counterparts, which coincides with their position in the tri-racial hierarchy. Here the racial identity of the multiracial students really comes into play—how they chose to identify placed them in different locations along the continuum of white, honorary white, and collective black. For instance, many of the multiracial

¹⁸ My assessment is based purely on my own interpretation of skin color, and so is imperfect. I was able to observe seven of the nine Latinx students: six via interview and one via his video journal.

Millennials in this study had black heritage, and, if they did not outright identify with blacks, they were ideologically aligned more closely to blacks than they were to whites (in terms of color-blind racism). However, just as the racial identities of these students did not fall along clear-cut lines, neither did their acceptance or rejection of color-blind racial ideology. Interestingly, one of the multiracial students demonstrated how the bounding of color-blind racism can work in myriad ways. Djeneba, who is half black and half white, was one of the Millennials of color who identified herself as “American,” similar to many whites, and who ideologically aligned with whites on many issues. Djeneba used several of the frames of color-blind racism in exact same ways as whites students did, but at times had ideological contradictions that pushed her in the opposite direction, to be more in line with other Millennials of color. For instance, Djeneba asserted that segregated neighborhoods were the result of individual choices and that the government should not do anything to impede on these choices (abstract liberalism), and believed that racial minorities often had a mindset that kept them from succeeding in school (cultural racism). However, Djeneba also insisted that the fictitious company made the right choice in hiring the racial minority because racial minorities are not given enough opportunities as compared to whites.

Another reason why these findings for Millennials of color emerge is the nature of ideology itself. As I have described, people are constantly socialized into particular ideologies, and Millennials are the first generation to be raised from birth in colorblindness. While whites generally learn and internalize color-blind ideology in largely uncritical ways, as members of the dominant racial group, Millennials of color have a much more tenuous relationship with color-blind racial ideology. They breathe in

the invisible fumes of colorblindness, the same as their white counterparts: race no longer matters (at least not as much as it did in the past), if you work hard you will succeed no matter what your race, treating people differently because of their race is a thing of the past. But unlike their white counterparts, Millennials of color often receive contradictory messaging directly tied to their racial identities: people question their authenticity as Americans, they experience constant microaggressions based on their race, immigration laws only seem to apply to black and brown bodies, racial minorities are all but absent from positions of power at all levels—all of which says that race *does* matter. How do you reconcile these contradictions? You end up landing somewhere in the middle, at times accepting and perpetuating the dominant racial ideology, and at other times rejecting it.

In the previous chapter, I outlined the ways in which color-blind racism affects whites. I discussed how the white Millennials in my study often believed their lives were much more diverse than they were in reality, that they experienced guilt because of their race, and that the pull of color-blind racism was more powerful than many would believe. In the remainder of this chapter, I continue looking at Millennials of color in a similar manner. I examine their experiences with race on day-to-day basis, particularly in light of the pervasive ideology of colorblindness.

ON BEING RACED IN A RACE-LESS TIME: HOW MILLENNIALS OF COLOR EXPERIENCE RACE IN THE MIDST OF COLORBLINDNESS

As I detailed in Chapter 4, the white Millennials in my study demonstrated that many whites believe that their “diverse” lives give credence to the fact that race is little more than a passé background feature of modern society. Racism and discrimination may exist on some level, but they are not significant barriers in the lives of people of color. They know this because they are not “racist” themselves: they do not “see” race, nor do they discriminate personally against anyone because of race, and they have tons of “friends” who are racial minorities. In reality, they grew up in majority white spaces, have almost exclusively white social circles with a handful of racial tokens, and utilize the color-blind racism to structure their opinions about the world around them. This is largely a result of the privilege associated with being a part of the dominant race: whites do not have to consider issues of race or their own racial identities in the same ways that people of color must do on a daily basis.

People of color in America do not have racial privilege, however, and as such cannot fully escape the pull of race, even if they desire to do so. Despite many whites (and others who accept color-blind ideology) preaching post-racialism, Millennials of color continue to demonstrate that race matters in their lives. In the following sections, I examine how the Millennials of color in my study experienced race in the midst of a dominant racial ideology of colorblindness. First, I look at the diversity in the lives of Millennials of color as compared to their white counterparts, and how these racial minorities are making intentionally race-driven choices. Second, I discuss the significance of race for Millennials of color, and propose a possibly novel way in which these students use minimization as a coping mechanism. Lastly, I demonstrate how many

of the Millennials of color in this study experienced racial awakenings that clued them in to the often-harsh realities of being a racial minority.

Living a Color-Full Life: The Diverse Lives of Millennials of Color

In terms of the Millennials of color in this study, race generally appears to be a significant factor in their lives, whether or not they are sometimes impacted by color-blind racism. In Chapter 4, I detailed how for the white Millennials, there were often discrepancies between their espoused beliefs and actual realities. They believe they are living diverse lives, interacting often with people of color, largely because they “do not see color.” In actuality, however, they are often socially isolated, with almost exclusively white circles. This is not the case for Millennials of color.

Looking specifically at the Millennials of color that I interviewed, overall they grew up in neighborhoods that were much more racially diverse than their white counterparts. Only nine students reported living in areas that were as predominantly white (70 percent or more) as the white interviewees (three each of blacks, Asians, and multiracials), and of these students, two moved to these predominantly white areas only once they were in high school. Even though these neighborhoods mirrored the settings most whites were in, the impact was different for the students of color because they were not racially isolating (i.e., only the same race as the student). Only one Millennial of color said that they lived in an area where the majority racial group was their own—Jayden, who grew up in an all-black neighborhood.

Not only did the Millennials of color typically live in more racially diverse places, they also reported interracial friendships and relationships that were substantiated as more significant (i.e., they more than merely coworkers, and were people students regularly hung out with) than those reported by their white peers. I interpreted these as more significant relationships because of how the students of color spoke about them; for example, they were more likely to list actual names of individuals, or did not tack on people of different races as an apparent afterthought. These cross-racial interactions were reported for both high school and at present in college. A small number of Millennials of color did appear to have almost exclusively same-race friend groups: two blacks, two Latinxs, and one multiracial student. For nearly all of these students, however, this was something that changed between high school and now, so was not as complete as the white Millennials.

For instance, Alejandro spoke about having exclusively Mexican friends growing up, but this makes sense because he lived in Mexico until he was in high school, when he moved from one border town to another on the U.S. side, where nearly everyone was still Mexican. Now, in college, Alejandro's friend group is much more diverse, with close friends who are black, white, and Latinx. Other students with solely same-race friends appeared to make conscious choices to change their social group to include more same-race peers, because they did not have the opportunity to do so in high school or they are taking time to get more in touch with their racial identity. For instance, Gianna (who identifies herself generally as a black woman even though she is also half Filipina) spoke about assimilating to her exclusively white friends during high school, to the point that she was unbothered when they would use racial slurs around her. Once she got to college,

however, she had a revelation that she was not ok with being so disconnected from her racial identity, and as a result now has mostly black friends. Only one of these Millennials had the same pattern of same-race friendships between high school and college: Delilah. Delilah had pretty much exclusively Caribbean and African friends, and maintains the same types of friends to this day.

That the Millennials of color in this study are interacting more across race than their white peers is not surprising. First, as previously mentioned, only one student of color lived in a neighborhood where the predominating race was their own (at least to the degree this occurred for whites). This is in part based on simple mathematics: these Millennials of color often had far fewer same-race peers available to them than whites, which increases the likelihood that they will interact across race. This same phenomenon occurs at predominantly white institutions, where the student body typically lacks large numbers of racial minorities; thus, Millennials of color do have more opportunity for interracial relationships (Chang, Astin, and Kim 2004; Saenz 2010; Saenz, Ngai, and Hurtado 2007). As an example, even if Millennials of color have same-race roommates, their residence halls are unlikely to be completely racially homogenous. Similarly, even if their friend groups are composed of only same-race peers, they are still likely to be one of few racial minorities in their classrooms.

All of the Millennials of color I interviewed supported interracial marriage, the same way as did their white counterparts. Unlike their white peers, however, nearly all of these students had dated people outside of their race before, and most of them on multiple occasions. Only four Millennials of color have solely dated same-race individuals: Alejandro, Delilah, Harper, and Jayden. Unlike the white Millennials who only dated

other whites, each of these students was *very* direct about the conscious choices they were making for dating partners, and their reasons were all tied to their racial and ethnic identities. Alejandro actually said that, while he has only seriously dated Mexican women, he had attempted to date a few white women in the past, but “it just didn’t work out for other reasons.” When I asked him his thoughts on interracial marriage, these “reasons” emerged:

“Um, for me, I think that I'm always just expected to marry someone else who's Mexican. Uh, just because my family is very close, and if someone is from another race might not speak the language, might not understand sort of our traditions, I feel like there'd be a conflict there. Obviously if I love someone, I'm not gonna let that get in the way. But it's definitely a factor. Just because our family's just one huge extended family.”

He went on to speak about one of his uncles who married a white woman. Even though she could speak Spanish very well, Alejandro said that there is a noticeable difference in how well their children speak Spanish—to the point that some of his cousins are visibly bothered by the fact that they cannot speak Spanish fluently enough to communicate effectively with family members, especially elders, who do not speak English. Concern for his future children’s language mastery is a major driver for Alejandro’s dating preferences.

“So yeah, I mean I've thought of that, what would happen to my kids if married someone who wasn't Mexican? Are they gonna speak Spanish? Speaking Spanish has been an incredible, I mean, it's opened so many doors, especially since coming to [school here]. So I would want my children to be able to have that skill. Speak with my dad, who doesn’t really speak much English. My mother, you know she speaks English, but just little things like that. So I've always expected to marry someone who's Mexican. Or speaks Spanish, is from sort of that Latin America, or Mexico.”

Harper and Jayden both had reasons for dating only blacks that were similar in caliber to Alejandro's desires for cultural connectedness through language. Harper said she was not "quite down with a swirl" (dating a white person), citing that if she dated someone white, "he or she would have to be really, really woke, really hip, and down for the cause." Also, quite directly, Harper said she was simply just not attracted to white men. Out of curiosity, I asked her about other races who were not white or black, and she said that she had the impression that most people dated within their race, and she was protecting herself from potential rejection. Jayden said that he has had "intimate relations" with people outside of his race, but when it comes to serious relationships, he sticks with blacks because he wants someone he can "relate to. . . .in as many regards as possible." Delilah did not specify precisely why she has only pursued relationships with other black people, but it makes sense if you think about her social circles: she has always had all black friends, and is involved in almost exclusively black organizations. It is hard to develop feelings (romantic or otherwise) for people with whom you do not regularly interact.

Several Millennials of color (13, including the four I just discussed) had reservations about dating outside of their race, but they were very direct in addressing why they felt this way. Interestingly, none of them said definitively that they would not marry outside of their race—they just did not see it happening. Half of these students were black, and the reasons for their hesitation were similar to Jayden and Harper: they wanted partners who could understand their experiences as black. Three of the students with reservations about interracial dating—Ishita, Sanjay, and Zara, all Asian Indians—spoke about potential pushback from their families for not marrying a fellow Indian.

Sanjay spoke about this in terms of religious implications, citing that some of his extended family would be upset if the person he married were not a Hindu (but remember, Sanjay has been dating a black woman for years). Finally, Sarah expressed very similar hesitations as Alejandro, regarding culture and language for her future children, particularly if she married someone who was not Chinese at all:

“But, I do want them to learn about their culture and stuff even though it's, like, half of them, but it's still going to be hard. So I guess I'm just kind of scared if I were to marry someone outside of my race. Would my children not be Asian American anymore? Or would they not even be Asian, or would they just be fully American? Or, how would they communicate with my parents and my other family members that might only speak Chinese? So, I guess that's what I was kind of nervous about, yeah.”

Sarah also talked other uncertainties regarding an interracial marriage, wondering if she would put her children in Chinese school like she was, whether she would even speak to them in Chinese, and if her husband would have to learn Chinese too. Her ties to culture through language were clearly a significant factor in whether or not she would marry outside of her race. It is also important to remember, however, that Sarah had been dating a black-white biracial man for the past six years.

(Un)Naturalized Decisions—Racial Intentionality for Millennials of Color

Recall that some of the Millennials of color used the naturalization frame to explain some social phenomena like residential segregation or people's overall race-based choices (e.g. friend groups). Clearly color-blind racial ideology has an impact on some of these racial minorities. However, as the analysis I just provided further demonstrates that color-blind racism has a much different impact on Millennials of color. While they are impacted by

color blind ideology, and it often bounds their interpretation of racial matters, some of the ways in which they live their lives speak to just how significant race often is in these Millennials' lives.

Unlike the white Millennials in this study, Millennials of color explicitly discussed making *intentional* race-based choices themselves. The above discussion of the dating choices of many of these students speaks directly to this: many Millennials of color were quite direct in illuminating how race plays an important role in romantic relationships. In a similar manner, many of these students spoke or wrote about joining certain student organizations or seeking out friends of similar races and ethnicities on purpose, in an effort to find like-minded people, stronger connections to their racial and ethnic groups—or safe harbor from the sea of race-related dissonance in which they swim that includes things like microaggressions and outright discrimination.

For example, Jayden, who grew up in an all-black neighborhood, started attending predominantly white institutions in middle school, and said, “I was always trying to gravitate to whatever black kids I could find.” At the time, Jayden was completely unpracticed at interacting with whites, and it took him some time to adjust. Now, in college, he asserts that when he hangs out with friends, “51% of the time [it] is with black people, and 49% of the time it's with people that are not black.” He has also made a point to connect to as many different cultural groups as possible, amassing an impressive list of affiliations that include three black student groups, one Latinx group, and even a Brazillian organization. He has also become fluent in Spanish, and then conversational in Portuguese, and French, and is now learning Italian. For Jayden, learning about all of these different cultures is now part of who he is as a person.

Patti was another student who spoke about making intentional, race-based choices, in terms of the cocurricular activities she joined. Patti, a second-generation student with Dominican mother and Mexican father, is a member of multiple student government organizations, which she joined because she wanted to address issues of diversity and inclusion at her school:

“Um, I ran for [student government] because, as a Latina woman, you know, first generation, this school is right on diversity but not to me. Um, as a double minority I, I don't see the diversity everyone else is talking about. Um, and that's something I hope to change.”

In addition to student government, Patti is also a member of an on campus coalition of over 40 different student groups that works to address the needs of marginalized students on campus. During her sophomore year, she also became a member of a historically black sorority, where she has access to other Latina and black women.

The intentional, race-related decisions Millennials of color are making are not surprising. When race is a salient characteristic and a particular racial group is outnumbered (i.e., what happens to a lot of racial minorities on predominantly white campuses), same-race solidarity increases (Quillian and Campbell 2003). The white Millennials did not report this at all (except two of the second-generation whites, Zahiya and Nadia, and Nadia did not talk about *current* efforts in seeking out other Armenians, only efforts prior to college). This obviously speaks to the importance of social context, as all of these students were enrolled in schools that are predominantly white. These choices would likely not occur in the same way if the racial makeup of the people around them was significantly different (e.g., if the black students were enrolled at a historically black school).

The choice to make intentional race-based decisions about friend groups (and dating partners) directly contradicts the idea that people “naturally” gravitate towards people of the same race. Many people of color do not naturally end up with other people of their race; they do so intentionally (even if subconsciously) at least in part because they are minorities—there are much fewer of them than whites, and even less if you stratify them into their respective races. Thus, we see that Millennials of color were rarely using naturalization in the exact same ways as their white counterparts.

Millennials of Color and the Significance of Race

All in all, Millennials of color do not minimize the significance of racism or discrimination. Nearly all of the Millennials of color (43/49, plus Zahiya, the Turkish woman) expressed that race impacts their lives, whether as subtle microaggressions or more overt racism and discrimination, and most easily recalled several personal experiences. Many Millennials also spoke or wrote about how race impacts people they know or racial minorities in general. For instance, seven students (four blacks, two Latinxs, and one Asian) mentioned the “shopping while nonwhite” phenomenon either happening to them personally or to someone they knew. Additionally, twelve Millennials of color reported negative, race-related encounters with police, either their own experience or that of a close friend. This too spanned all racial groups (and two white students also talked about their racial minority friends experiencing issues with police). Perhaps unsurprisingly, five of these students—all black—spoke specifically about fear

of the police and potential encounters that might result in their lives being taken by officers. Anastasia, a Ghanaian immigrant who came to the U.S. at age ten, provides a very heart-wrenching example in one of her journal entries: “I’ve never had any experiences with the police and neither have my friends, perhaps because we don’t drive yet. However, with what’s going on in the United States today, it is very nerve-racking to think about me or anyone I know having an experience with the police. ‘Driving while black’ is a really terrifying phenomenon to me. It’s really scary to think that maybe the next time my friends or I get stopped by the police would be our last.” Jameson wrote about his feelings regarding the police in a journal entry as well, and what he writes perfectly encompasses my own feelings as a black male, and those of many of my black male friends and colleagues:

“Honestly, I can’t think of the last time I interacted with the police. What I can tell you, though, is the feeling I get whenever I see the police approach me or my friends. The cold, butterflies in the stomach. The dry mouth and sweaty palms. All those feelings that I get when I see the police although I haven’t done anything wrong. I feel like this feeling that I encounter is very different from that my white friends face. I feel like they have the comfort and capability of approaching the police with confidence—a sort of confidence that honestly scares me. I can not demand anything let alone ask anything from the police—or at least I feel that way.”

What Jameson, Anastasia, and other Millennials of color discuss in terms of a fear or worry about interactions with police speaks to a broader theme of the data that is supported by countless other studies: there are significant psychological costs associated with racism and discrimination, whether they are based on actual experiences, perceptions of experiences, or apprehension about experiences that might occur (Nadal et al 2014; Schmitt et al 2014; Williams and Mohammed 2013; Lee and Ahn 2011; Hwang and Goto 2008; Williams and Williams-Morris 2000). I could fill pages with examples

from the Millennials of color in this study, as most of the students detailed multiple encounters with real or perceived racism and discrimination. Instead, I will point out a few examples that showcase the breadth of the psychological impact race had on these Millennials.

Alejandro wrote about his desire to attend law school, and how he feels “a pressing sense of needing to work harder to prove that I’m just as competent as the next guy,” because people may hold him to lower standards since he is a racial minority. Rashida, a Pakistani woman who immigrated to the U.S. just before she turned one year old, but went back to live in Pakistan from primary school until high school, wrote about the angst she and her fellow Muslim friends often feel given the current climate in the U.S. regarding Muslims and terrorism:

“Whenever there is a terrorist incident in the U.S., I know a lot of my other south Asian friends and I clench our hearts and hope to God that the perpetrator isn’t a Muslim. This is because of the potential backlash we receive after. It is embarrassing going to work the next day or in my case humanitarian classes where we are asked to discuss the incident and it always ends in a heated response about my religion promoting violence and Muslims being terrorists.”

Gianna, one of the biracial black and Filipina Millennials, wrote in her journal about an incident involving her older brother. Like Gianna, her brother presented physically like a black male. He played golf for his university, and during a tournament in Alabama where he did especially well, an older white man spoke with him after he was finished playing, expressing surprise that he had played so well, asking him how he learned to play since he did not go to school, if he had free lessons in order to afford playing the sport, and if he accepted donations. Her brother had been aghast at the assumptions, explaining that his parents paid for his equipment and lessons, like everybody else on his team. Gianna

reflected on this, saying that racial incidents like that “really takes a toll on you as a person and your identity.”

Multiple students spoke about the burden of being expected to “educate” their white peers on all things race-related. Isabella, a second-generation Vietnamese student, wrote about this idea very clearly in her journal:

“I believe that it is true how black people and minorities are burdened with talking about race all the time and even feel compelled to teach their white peers about issues of race. Many of my friends who are people of color are agitated by their seeming obligation to educate others when they do not believe it is their duty.”

Finally, Charlotte (black, no immigrant parents) wrote often about real feelings that she as a black person *had* to think about race all the time, much more often than whites. This was obviously a major psychological burden for her, as she described having to think about her race when she walked into a room, or feeling like she was not able to fully be herself in her own residence hall room—her *home* space—because her white roommates did not understand why she was doing things like wrapping her hair at night. Charlotte, who at the time of this study was only 19-years old, also wrote an entire journal entry about concern for any future children:

“When I think about race I think about having children, and what my children would have to go through in America because they would be black. I don’t think it is right that certain races have to even question their right and choice to have a child because the color of their skin, and they already know it would be a disadvantage for them. **I am terrified about what they would have to face**, and I almost feel like I would be wrong to bring them into this world knowing how they would be looked at. I know some people may think I am crazy for even questioning having kids over them being black, but them being black is the first thing this society will not only see, but judge. How do you look at your newborn baby boy and be happy knowing they’re almost guaranteed to go to jail some day, or your baby girl and be happy knowing that she will be discriminated against if she wears her natural hair. Those are worries I feel like white people do not have to go through and that’s a part of white privilege that is not talked about often. The ability to have a child and know they will be set up in life.”

Looking at all of these examples (again, only a small portion of everything students shared), you can easily imagine the psychological burden that race ends up being for these individuals. Alejandro feels he has to work harder just so comes out even with other people. Rashida, as a Muslim, is taking on the global burden for the activities of a miniscule minority. Isabella (and others) feels pressure to educate non-minority peers about race. Charlotte, at only 19, feels “terrified” about what future children will have to face as black people. What these experiences have in common is that for each of these Millennials, they are expending actual emotional and psychological energy thinking about these things, which is energy they could otherwise be spending on something else—focusing on their studies, for one, which is certainly not the least of things but is of obvious importance as college students. White students do not have these same extra burdens, and so are free to spend their psychological energy on what should be more important activities. Again, the psychological cost of racism and discrimination is not limited to actual “confirmed” incidents, either—Millennials of color can expend just as much energy thinking about *perceived* experiences. At least seven students explicitly expressed that they often wonder whether or not something that happened to them was motivated by race or not. Whether or not the event in actuality *was* race-related does not change the amount of psychological energy required to raise the internal question, which is being considered at the expense of that energy being used in other ways.

One of the students who best illustrates the awareness of this psychological burden people of color often have is Kennedy. If you recall, Kennedy is one of the multiracial students who identifies mainly as a black woman. In one journal entry,

Kennedy reflected on experiences she has regularly with people making negative comments about blacks and other racial minorities. While somewhat humorous, Kennedy's words highlight the cost of racism and discrimination that she and other racial minorities face all too often:

“I left behind the days of thawing racist ass turkeys long ago. When my racist ass neighbor cussed about his ex wife talking about niggers being around his daughter, my tolerance for racist ass white people cup was filled and it ain't gone down. I got cross-tolerance. Honestly I am fed tf [“the fuck”] up. With white people like that, with hoteps, with bamma rappers coming out the woodwork in an ignorance Olympics to see who can claim the crown of doing-the-most-est. I got 2 exams, 2 presentations, a website and paper all due next week and I am soooooooooo done and tired. I'm Tired. Tide. TIDEEEEEE. Don't come to me with no ridiculous problematic shyt because you will leave disappointed. Leave me alone.”

Minimization as a Psychological Coping Mechanism?

Even though a majority of the Millennials of color did express experiences with racism and discrimination that showcase a level of the significance of race in their lives, one interesting finding did emerge that potentially speaks to how the minimization of racism frame impacts how some Millennials of color think about discrimination. Nine students, all racial and ethnic minorities, used minimization in a way that appeared to be some type of psychological coping mechanism in response to racist incidents or in reference to the role discrimination played in their own lives.

Most of these nine students minimized the racism or discrimination they experienced in response to me asking them if race has ever impacted their lives in a significant way. They responded in ways that suggest they do not think very clearly racist incidents are “no big deal,” or are not significant. Take Delilah: in her interview, when I

asked her to give me an example of racism in contemporary America, she mentioned the “shopping while nonwhite” phenomenon, and that it had happened to her before. But when I later asked her if race had impacted her life significantly in any way, she responded by saying:

“Um, no not mine specifically. It's always like minor things. Like what I was saying before about the uh walking into the store. But, all those things just made me aware that I'm living, I'm still living in a racist society. But there hasn't been anything that just sparked any problems.”

This response indicates that Delilah thinks being followed around a store simply because of her race is only a “minor thing,” and that “living in a racist society” does not “spark any problems.” Mason, the journaler with mixed-race heritage, minimized the significance of race in his life by writing about an incident involving a racial slur:

“I know this may sound really weird but in high school some of my friends would call me “chink” or refer to something as “chinky” and for some reason that didn't bother me. It only bothered me when people I was not a fan of or didn't know started to use it.”

Mason went on to explain how a new student to his school heard some of his friends using this language towards him, and decided to do so as well. Mason let it slide a few times, but then after multiple incidents he decided to “put him in his place.” Again however, his only concern was that the student was not a close friend yet, not that it was a racial slur being used by a white person: “Most of my friends who used that word toward me were white and this new kid was white too, so **it was nothing about race**, just didn't appreciate the use of it since we didn't know each other like that.” Thomas spoke about almost the exact same thing, saying that during middle school people called him chink. Thomas framed this as almost a positive occurrence, though, and as something that is

now insignificant: “But, yeah, otherwise **I feel like that kind of helped build my character**. You know, you go past it and kind of those things don't matter anymore.”

While Mason and Thomas attempt to brush off being called a racial slur as not a big deal (and even helpful, in Thomas' case), most people would probably agree that this is a pretty significant thing to deal with in your life. These students, however, indicate that blatant racism (racial slurs) and powerful microaggressions (shopping while nonwhite, the question “where are you from?”) are not significant. One possible reason is that they are protecting themselves from the psychological trauma of accepting the gravity of these racial incidents. Lessening the racial blows, or spinning the events in a positive light like Thomas, is psychologically self-serving.

Jameson appeared to use a version of this psychological coping to help bolster himself against discrimination he was sure to face as a black man. In response to a question about people using President Obama as a reason to say race no longer matters, and race and racism can no longer be used as excuses for a lack of success in society, Jameson responded by saying:

“I'd say that it matters more than ever, but I will say I don't think it can be used as an excuse. I don't really like the idea of excuses, because, you know, everybody ... You might face some kind of discrimination, but you can make it out. That being said, you definitely should acknowledge that racism and let, you know ... Generally, just personally, you should just do what you can to push forward, but I don't believe in just letting that be your reason for not being able to be successful.”

Taking a hard line against using racism as an excuse is a way of giving yourself credit for *not* cracking under the pressure of racism, for succeeding in spite of negative experiences with race. It is interesting that Jameson takes this stance, because he clearly believes that racism and discrimination are still significant factors in racial minorities' lives, as

indicated by him saying that race and racism “matter more than ever.” Additionally, when I followed this question up with one asking if he thought race has ever impacted his life significantly, he responded: “Yeah, yeah, for sure. I mean, it's made me who I am. I mean, it's who I am, and it's made me who I am today. A lot of times I faced difficulties. I'm a very competitive person, so if somebody is going to tell me that I can't or shouldn't do something, I'm going to do my best to prove them wrong, and that's often times the case.” Jameson clearly uses competition as a way to gird himself against the racism and discrimination he faces throughout his life.

One other student showcased a very interesting form of psychological coping through minimization. Charlotte was in a long-term relationship with a white man. She spoke about their relationship quite a bit during her interview, and wrote about it many times in her journal. It was obvious that, although she clearly loved her boyfriend, she struggled with issues that came up as a result of his race.

In one of her journal entries, Charlotte wrote about one struggle she faces because she is in an interracial relationship with a white man.

“Something I struggle with is if all white people are racist, or if some can actually not be racist. I guess this question seems to bother me more now that I am dating a white person, love a white person, and may someday have children with a white person. **I like to think he's not racist** of course since I am with him and I am black. **He has never said anything even mildly racist towards me**, and yet I still have to wonder because he is white and his outlook on life is so different than mine.”

Here Charlotte engages in some psychological justification here, indicating that she likes to “think he's not racist” because she is dating him. She also says that he has never said anything “even mildly racist” to her. I found this to be very interesting, because in

another journal entry, Charlotte describes a situation that I can only interpret as this very thing: her boyfriend saying something racist to her:

“So... me and [my boyfriend] were going to the convenience store the other day and the guy behind the counter was Middle Eastern. [My boyfriend] has his own personal views towards Middle Easterners ever since he was in the military. I guess he said the military made him see anyone from that part of the country as more of a threat. The guy pissed him off and so when we were walking home he called the guy a sand nigger. Now being black me and him have already discussed the word nigger, and I told him if he ever said that word around me we would be over. I know he would never talk about a black person so disrespectfully anyways, but he really did not see a problem with using the word sand nigger and felt it was not racist. To me it was beyond racist, but it did show me that different people see those kind of things differently, and that how people grow up really does change a person’s view on what racism is, or who you can be racist towards.”

Now, while one can argue that perhaps her boyfriend was not saying anything racist *about* her, I do not think it can be denied that what he said was racist, and was said in conversation to her. Further, although “sand nigger” is a racial slur typically directed at Middle Easterners, it is based on the American racial slur “nigger,” which is most definitely used in reference to blacks—of which Charlotte is one. Despite this, and her claim that if her boyfriend ever said the word nigger around her they “would be over,” we see that Charlotte’s assertion is false. By the end of her entry, it almost appears as though Charlotte has adopted her boyfriend’s mindset: that “sand nigger” is both not racist and altogether different from a regular “nigger.” This kind of mental gymnastics is almost assuredly a way for Charlotte to justify her relationship with this person that she chose, and by doing so, she is minimizing race.

These students are clearly using minimization in some way, and it seems as though they are using it as a method of psychological coping. Minimizing the significance of race can help you reduce the impact of racism and discrimination, because

you simply tell yourself it is not that meaningful. Beyond this interpretation, however, there is another possibility: these students may be minimizing the significance of race in their lives in an effort to avoid being labeled as “race card pullers.” Jameson’s comments specifically come to mind. He asserted that he did like “excuses,” and that using race as an excuse was unacceptable. He also labeled himself a competitive person, which means that he measures himself against others. Making excuses for poor performance is likely frowned upon by people who like competition, no matter how legitimate the excuse might be. Race could be seen as just another excuse. Further, it is not far-fetched to say that race might be an excuse people—particularly white people who cannot use the excuse—might want to avoid at all costs. This makes sense within a “color-blind” or “post-racial” society, in which whites would often be called anything but “racist.” People of color, particularly those who deal regularly with whites in competitive settings (e.g. school or work), are sure to be aware that many whites are standing on the wings waiting to accuse them of pulling the race card unfairly. These people of color likely do everything they can to avoid being labeled in this manner, including minimizing their own experiences with racism and discrimination.

Racial Awakenings: Taking the Race Pill

One of my favorite movies from my youth was *The Matrix*, a movie about a future in which machines have taken over the world and enslaved humanity for use as energy sources by plugging them into an elaborate simulation of reality. The movie’s protagonist, Neo (Keanu Reeves), a computer hacker, is awoken to reality by Morpheus

(Lawrence Fishburne), and engages in a fight resist and defeat the ruling machines. I remember being awed at the cinematography and the story line of the movie as a teenager, and leaving the theatre excitedly joking with my friends about what it would be like if our world was really all an illusion, and we could be “awoken” to reality.

In one of the pivotal moments of the movie, Neo finds himself opposite Morpheus. Morpheus presents Neo with a choice, between a red pill and a blue pill, the former of which will awaken Neo to the truth of his world, and the latter of which will return Neo to the ignorant bliss of his false reality. As expected, Neo takes the red pill, and finds himself in a world from which he can never return.

The Millennials of color in this study often spoke or wrote about specific incidents that disavowed them of prior beliefs that their race did not matter, or that simply made them more cognizant of race in ways that could no longer be ignored or written off as insignificant. These “racial awakenings”—moments in the lives of racial minorities where they are clued into the often-harsh realities of being nonwhite—were akin to the moment in *The Matrix* where Neo chooses between the red and blue pills, except that these students typically do not have the same ability to choose. Instead, they are force-fed this *race pill*, and as a result their worlds are changed right before their eyes. The racial awakenings that students discussed came either in the form of race being pointed out by others (somebody taking on the role of Morpheus) or by a situation highlighting race for the individual. I will highlight a few examples from different Millennials.

Isabella (second-generation Vietnamese) wrote about a time when she was a child and her race was made very clear to her. Growing up, Isabella knew that she was somehow

different from other people, but she did not know it was because of her race—until, that is, a peer pointed it out:

“Because I grew up in mostly white spaces, I have often noticed that I am left out, that I am different, but did not attribute race as the primary factor. One distinct time when I did realize being a racial anomaly was when a white, female classmate that bullied me growing up directly said to me that I’m ugly because my eyes were small and squinty, my nose was large, my hair was flat, and my face was round. I didn’t know that these traits of mine were undesirable or not beautiful, until I started to notice that everyone else around me had large eyes with double eyelids and long eyelashes, with small, thin, pointy noses, high cheekbones and slim faces. I didn’t know that I was so different until then.”

As you can see, Isabella recognized the fact that something set her apart from her mostly-white peers, but until one of her classmates, a bully, called her ugly because of her facial features and hair, she did not know it was racial. After this incident, however, you can be sure that Isabella was very conscious of her position as an Asian among white people.

Harper (black, one immigrant parent) wrote about a time when her mother dropped some harsh racial knowledge on her, clueing her in to the importance of her race as a black person. She was on the way to a friend’s bar mitzvah in middle school, and before she got out of the car, her mother stopped her.

“My mother drove me to the synagogue, but before she let me out she said, ‘[Harper],’ in that way that let me know she had something on her mind. She looked me in my eyes and told me something along the lines of this: ‘Chances are you’ll be the only black girl in there. I just want to let you know that before you go. I am happy that you have your friends and you feel comfortable to attend this party. I have gone to my fair share of bat mitzvahs in my day so I know how they are. You’ll have fun. But remember this: these people (white people) are not all they are cracked up to be. Don’t trust them. Because they will not hesitate to show you who they are. They believe they are better than us and even if [your friends] don’t show it—know that. Don’t be surprised if when things get shaky in your friendship they say something rude or insensitive. Its how they are. They might be your friends, but you will always be different from them. Now go have fun and call me when it’s over.’”

This incident, where Harper's mother clearly gave her a fully-loaded race pill, had far-reaching impacts on Harper as a black person. After she recounted this story, Harper went on to reflect on it, outlining the discussion's significance:

“I can't even put into words how I felt. It was like my whole world was turned upside down. Like I had been lied to all my life. I was so afraid to go in after that. I looked at them all different after that. Hypersensitive to anything that seemed had a racist undertone. This did not go away for some time. And it is not gone today. It's just something I assimilate to my awareness when dealing with whites. To be honest I am thankful for what my mom told me.”

Harper saying, “it was like my whole world was turned upside down,” illustrates how she had never seen things this way before. Harper's mother's words were a clear message that, sure, it was fine that she had white friends, but her beliefs that race did not matter were not accurate. Her short diatribe is also classically Du Boisian, as she effectively teaches Harper double-consciousness.¹⁹ Harper's other journal entries illustrated that this particular memory helped prepare her for her future life as a person of color, who would undoubtedly face discrimination. Harper wrote many entries about very racially-driven events that continued to occur in her life.

Olivia, a second-generation Ghanaian woman, provides an example of racial awakenings that can occur based on *experiences* or *situations*, as opposed to specific people bringing race to the forefront. In her journal, Olivia wrote about her feelings when the final ruling came down for George Zimmerman regarding the killing of black teen Trayvon Martin. In 2012, Zimmerman, a mixed-race individual with white and Latino heritage, shot and killed Martin in his home neighborhood in Sanford, Florida. Zimmerman claimed that, when confronted, Martin attacked him, and taking advantage

¹⁹ W. E. B. Du Bois posited the theory of double consciousness in 1902, saying that blacks had to understand themselves as black people as well as understand what whites were thinking about them as black people, thus having two separate but connected consciousnesses.

of Florida's "stand your ground" policies, Zimmerman fatally shot him. The incident went viral when sound footage of the killing was released to the public, and sparked protests around the country. The ensuing court case against Zimmerman for the death of Martin was a very socially polarizing event, very similar to the O.J. Simpson murder trial in the 1990s. Olivia was in high school when the case against Zimmerman was finally adjudicated, and she reflects on this as a time when race became strikingly salient for her:

"It wasn't really until the Trayvon Martin case in 2012 that I realized there was an issue with black people and the police, and also that the people in my town were very close-minded about it. I just remember Twitter blowing up during the hearing when George Zimmerman was acquitted. I saw people I went to school with tweet things like "Good" and "Justice is served." It was really unbelievable at the time; I remember being surprised that people didn't see this as an injustice, a sentiment I see too often these days."

Since Olivia grew up and went to school with mostly white peers, the acquittal of George Zimmerman, a white male, for what many believed to be the murder of a young black male for an unjustifiable reason, highlighted the differences in how she felt as compared to the white people in her circles. This experience forever changed how Olivia saw herself as a black person, and as a racialized being.

While nearly every student in this study who intimated that they had a type of racial awakening was a person of color, this experience is not limited to racial minorities. One white student in this study—Will, a first-year who was still trying to figure out what he wanted to study—described an experience that could be labeled as a type of racial awakening, and in this case, it was sparked by some of the material he was covering in his sociology course. In his class, he had just finished a unit on racism, and had been assigned a video on Picca and Feagin's *Two-Faced Racism* and an article racial

costuming (Mueller, Dirks, and Picca 2007). Based on what he wrote in his journal, you can see he took this as a type of racial awakening:

“After watching the video by Leslie Picca and after reading the article on "Unmasking Racism," it seems as if a light bulb has gone off in my head. . . . Overall, I have many black friends and acquaintances, and love them to death. I never viewed myself as being a racist but I definitely have had some times of where I was guilty of back-stage racism. I always thought saying those jokes or keeping my opinions close to me were harmless, but that was when I was uninformed. I now understand how I need to stand up when I hear or see something that isn't right and I need to be conscious of how I act when people of race are around and even when they are not around.”

After reading and watching about novel (to him) conceptions of racism, Will asserts that he has been awoken (“a light bulb has gone off in my head”). He reflects that, although he never considered himself to be a racist, he had said things in the past that are in fact racist. Since Will has seen the proverbial light, he now believes that he needs to “stand up when I hear or see something that isn't right” and that he needs to change his behavior even when people of different races are not around. Although this seems very genuine, it would be interesting to see if this is a change that sticks (or a true change at all). Since he just had this “awakening” while writing the journals for this study, it is safe to assume that he was engaged in the behavior he now sees as problematic quite recently. In fact, his other journal entries suggest that he *still* has a ways to go in changing how he understands and deals with race. For instance, he often used the semantic move “some of my best friends are black,” which you see echoed in this very entry. Additionally, in a later entry, Will spoke about the Black Lives Matter movement, arguing in so many words that “all lives matter,” a minimization of racism. Finally, with regards to comparing Will's racial awakening to his racial minority peers', it is important to note that Will's moment came during college, as a result of a course that specifically highlighted racist practices of

white students. All of the other racial minorities in this study indicated that their racial awakenings happened much earlier in their adolescence. Because whites are the privileged racial group, it is very likely that many will not have race brought to their attention until much later in their lives—perhaps when enrolled in a college course that brings up race.

Will's experience with his racial awakening could be viewed as an instance in which he was awoken, only to go back to sleep. In other words, Will was differentially impacted by his own racial awakening—it possibly did not have the same significance as it did for other racial minorities who had similar experiences. My data demonstrate this idea through the example of another racial minority, whom I will use to bring the Matrix reference back full circle.

At one point in *The Matrix*, another of the individuals who has been awoken by Morpheus, Cypher (Joe Pantoliano), decides that he has had enough of the real world, and wants to be put back to “sleep” and his memory wiped so he can live in ignorant bliss in the Matrix. In a similar way, some people have racially awakening experiences, but seemingly prefer to continue living in “ignorance” of the realities of race, or to be “put back to sleep.” In other words, even in the face of obviously racial events, these individuals still try to write off the significance of race.

Djeneba provides a potential example of this phenomenon. During our interview together, she told me a story about seeing discrimination in person with some friends. During high school, Djeneba and some of her white friends were hanging out at a local McDonald's, and they witnessed police officers being called to remove what appeared to be a homeless man from the premises. After the officers made the man leave, they turned

their attention to a black man who had been sitting near the homeless man. Djeneba mentioned that this black man had come in right after her and her friends, and was simply sitting and eating his food, but the police forcibly removed him:

“We were just, we just saw them be super disrespectful to a homeless person, but I guess if he had been there for a whi—They gotta whatever. But then the fact that they just like kicked this guy out for literally just being black, that was like our fir—that was our first experience ever seeing something like that happen and it was in [the county right next to ours], so it wasn't like we were far away from home, you know. I think it, just again that thing of like, you know, things like that exist and happen, but we never really experience them being in our little bubble that we're in because we're just so used to people being accepting of different people and people not trying to be just like discriminate against others. We're used to that. We're used to people supporting each other and then to see it, I think at least for them was just so shocking that it just like really really brought out a lot of emotions. We talk about that experience sometimes. We say we can't believe that happened, because it does happen and we just, yeah.”

As you can see, Djeneba spoke about this incident as the “first experience” she and her friends had seeing discrimination at play. It was significant enough that it “brought out a lot of emotions” and her friend group still talks about what happened to this day. This incident would certainly count as a racial awakening, however Djeneba does not seem to take it as such. Recall that Djeneba consistently used the various frames of color-blind racism and even some of the styles. Although Djeneba has experiences that clearly point to race, she generally rejects the idea that events are racially motivated. For instance, at another point in her interview, she alludes to a clear microaggression against her—“When I was younger, people weren't trying to be disrespectful or anything, [but] sometimes they would just ask if I was adopted or something, and I was like, ‘No. My mom's just white.’”—but she does not see it as inherently negative or a racially-motivated occurrence. In fact, she makes excuses for these people, saying that they

simply “aren’t used to seeing. . . [mixed race children] yet.” Clearly, racial awakenings do not impact every person in the same ways.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, provided in-depth analysis of the ways in which Millennials of color use the frames and styles of color-blind racism, and are impacted by colorblindness as the dominant ideology. Overall, while the Millennials of color in my study did use color-blind racism, their usage was much more fractured than their white counterparts. Very often Millennials of color used the frames of color-blind racism in contradictory ways, citing the importance of race in their lives and in the lives of other racial minorities, but on occasion minimizing racism or naturalizing racial matters.

There were no noticeable differences in acceptance of color-blind ideology between the various racial groups. Asians and multiracial students appeared to use color-blind racism at greater rates than blacks and Latinxs, however this is misleading given that two students from each group almost completely drove the numbers (refer back to Table 5.1). Thomas and Sarah, the two Chinese American students, accounted for half of all of the Asian Millennials’ usage of the frames of color-blind racism, while Taliyah and Djeneba accounted for nearly 70 percent of all usage by multiracial Millennials. Looking at the data without these students illustrates that Millennials of color across the board are using color-blind racism in similar ways. Additionally, while generation level can really

only be effectively evaluated within race for the black and multiracial Millennials (all of the Latinx and Asian students were second-generation or immigrants), no differences emerged between individuals who were immigrants, children of immigrants, or had one or no immigrant parents.

These findings also coincide somewhat with Bonilla-Silva's postulation of a developing tri-racial hierarchy in America. The Millennials in this study are spread between collective blacks and honorary whites, in imperfect ways that speak to their outward appearance and self-identification. As such, their racial ideologies are closer or further to those of whites based on their location in this hierarchy. As honorary whites, some of the Asian students, in particular Thomas, Sarah, along with a few of the Asian Indians like Zara, exhibit much stronger acceptance of color-blind racism, consistently writing off race as a significant social fact. At the same time, however, these students at times demonstrated that they understood the opposite, that race impacted their lives in meaningful ways. For the Latinx students, their position in the tri-racial hierarchy was seemingly impacted more by the fact that they grew up in areas replete with racial minorities, especially blacks. Thus, even though they might be outwardly classified as honorary whites, they fell in line ideologically with collective blacks. Multiracials typically aligned themselves with one or more of their composite races. For instance, many of the multiracial students who had black parents used color-blind racism in the same ways as blacks, in large part because they identified mostly as black themselves. Other multiracial students, like Djeneba, identified herself racially very similar to white students, and as a result her ideology more closely mirrored her white counterparts.

In this chapter, I also explored the experiences Millennials of color have on being racialized beings in a “race-less” time. First, while the white Millennials in my study seemed to believe that they were leading more diverse lives than was the case in reality, most of the Millennials of color actually lived very diverse lives. The majority of them grew up in racially diverse neighborhoods and attended racially diverse schools. The Millennials of color also had more significant relationships with people of different races from themselves, and were not prone to pointing out “white” friends (or friends of other races) as a way to signal that they were not racist. Like their white peers, these students supported interracial relationships, but unlike whites, they also had actual experience dating people of different races. Additionally, while Millennials of color sometimes naturalized social phenomena like segregation, they also expressed making intentional race-based choices, for things like friend groups, dating preferences, or organizational membership. The reasons for these race-based choices spoke to the importance of race in many of these students’ lives. They sought out people of similar races and ethnicities on purpose, often to find like-minded people or make stronger connections to their racial identities. For many of the students, their race-based choices were a way to provide themselves safe spaces amidst all of the microaggressions and racial discrimination they faced on a daily basis. This mirrors literature that shows that students of color on predominantly white campuses for whom race is a salient characteristic often seek same-race solidarity (Quillian and Campbell 2003).

Second, the Millennials of color in my study overwhelmingly do not minimize the significance or racism or discrimination in their lives or the lives of others. Almost all of these racial minorities spoke about multiple personal experiences with negative race-

related incidents. These experiences exact a significant psychological toll on these students, which they openly discussed in terms of a fear of police, the need to work harder than others, assumptions of poverty from whites, and the burden of having to think about race constantly and even teach whites about race. An interesting finding that potentially emerged from this is that some Millennials of color appear to use the frame of minimization of racism as a psychological coping mechanism. They experience clear acts of discrimination, like being called racial slurs or being followed around stores, yet write them off as “nothing” or “minor things.” Aside from helping to relieve the psychological angst one feels from admitting that racism impacts his or her life, this minimization of racism is also a way to potentially avoid being labeled as “race card pullers.” People of color understand that whites see them as using race as an “excuse,” so some of these Millennials of color may be heading this label off before it happens.

Finally, many of the racial minority Millennials talked or wrote about racial awakenings that happened in their lives, or experiences that clued them in to the often harsh realities of being a racial minority. Some of these occurred because people around the students pointed out the significance of race, while others happened when the students themselves experienced race on their own. While this appeared to be something that tends to happen to racial minorities, it can happen to whites as well, as demonstrated by Will, who through a class assignment, came to realize that he had been passively participating in racist actions with his friends. Unfortunately, this experience did not seem to have the same level of impact with Will as did the experiences of the Millennials of color—in other places in his journal, Will used color-blind racism in ways that suggest he does not have a complete handle on just how much race matters. Similarly, racial awakenings did

not always fully “awaken” even racial minorities. Djeneba spoke about a racial awakening during her interview, but still used the frames and styles of color-blind racism at many other points.

Similar to whites, these findings emerge in part because of the very nature of ideology. As the dominant racial ideology, color-blind racism does not perfectly or completely encompass everyone under its purview, because it does not have to: instead, almost everyone, Millennials of color included, must formulate their thoughts within the framework color-blind racism provides. Because racial minorities experience race very differently from their white counterparts, however, particularly as subordinated members of the social hierarchy, color shines through in ways it typically does not for whites. As such, racial minorities may naturalize certain aspects of their social lives, or at times play down race as meaningful, but by and large they reject color-blind racial ideology by speaking to the continuing significance of race in their lives.

In the following and final chapter, I conclude my examination of color-blind racism in college Millennials. I provide an overview of the major findings of my research, and address the significant limitations of my methodology as related to my results. I also discuss future directions for my own research, as well as research on Millennials and racial ideology in general.

Chapter 6: Final Thoughts and Conclusion

INTRODUCTION

With this research, I set out to answer one overarching research question: in what ways do the racial identities of college Millennials impact their utilization or rejection of color-blind racial ideology? I was particularly interested in understanding the impacts of colorblindness on Millennials of color, specifically blacks (including ethnic blacks), Latinxs, and Asians. With this goal in mind, I undertook an update and extension of classic work on color-blind racism done by Bonilla-Silva in the late 90s. I combined personal journals with in-depth interviews, interviewing about half of the students who completed the journals. Through a non-representative, disproportionate sampling method, I recruited a sample that included 23 white, 17 black, 9 Latinx, 14 Asian, and 8 multiracial students from the greater Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. The students were all enrolled in one of four four-year within close geographic proximity to D.C. I used narrative analysis as a guiding approach, in order to keep the participants' stories as central to understanding the meaning they make of their personal experiences with race and racial identity. I used a combined iterative and grounded theory analytic strategy to identify themes in the data. First, I uncovered how these Millennials were making sense of their own racial identities, as well as the concepts of race and ethnicity broadly. Second, I found that white college Millennials are utilizing color-blind racism in the same

ways that Bonilla-Silva found in his original study. Finally, I found that college Millennials of color are much less beholden to color-blind racism, using it much less frequently than whites and in very nuanced, often contradictory ways.

In this final chapter, I review these key findings. I then discuss the limitations of my research regarding the research design, and then turn to the significance of my findings and their implications for theory and practice. Finally, I conclude with an overview of suggestions for future directions regarding research on color-blind ideology.

KEY FINDINGS

In Chapter 3, I presented data on the racial and ethnic identities of college Millennials. These Millennials' definitions of and lived experiences with race demonstrate the slipperiness of race and ethnicity, and that racial and ethnic categories are very subjectively determined. One of the ways this came through most clearly was in the confusion the students expressed regarding the Latinx/Hispanic label, and why it was not considered in the same way as other racial designations, a confusion the Latinx students shared themselves.

Overall, I found that the white Millennials are not connected to their racial or ethnic identities in meaningful ways, many suggesting that being white means a lack of culture or a lack of the racial cohesion other groups share. The one exception was Zahiya, the second-generation Turkish woman, who is racialized differently than her white peers because she is Middle-Eastern. Millennials of color, on the other hand, almost across the board were much more connected to their racial and ethnic identities, in very strong,

meaningful ways. Whereas whites had significant trouble speaking about what it meant to be white, the Millennials of color easily (and often passionately) discussed various foods, languages, holidays, and other cultural traditions that made up their racial and ethnic identities. For instance, some of the Asian and Latinx students drew connections between their race and their religion, citing religious beliefs and practices as part of their cultural heritage. Conversely, the white students who brought up religion used it as a stand-in for their race. This speaks to one of the differential impacts of color-blind ideology: Christianity has been racialized as normative and white such that the connection is invisible almost inseparable, while other religions are racialized in the same ways as racial minorities: non-normative and nonwhite.

Using social identity theory as the theoretical base, I outlined how social interaction is a crucial factor in how these students make decisions about their own racial identities. Parental influence was very important in the racial identification of these Millennials: the Millennials with strong connections to their racial and ethnic identities spoke about how their parents actively cultivated their identities, through instilling a sense of racial pride, intentionally teaching them native languages or about their racial heritage, or making decisions that impacted the friendships they developed, such as where families would live and what schools the children would attend. Overall, the white Millennials did not describe parental influence in this manner, while nearly all of the Millennials of color did.

Additionally, interactions with peers at large also had significant impacts on racial identity, particularly for the Millennials of color. The racial minority students frequently demonstrated the ways in which socially-ascribed race very often overshadows self-

identification, as these students spoke and wrote about pressure they felt to identify in specific ways that came from others. Skin color was a major factor in social ascription, with Millennials from black, Latinx, Asian, and multiracial groups describing experiences where their skin color played a key role in how other people perceived them. Blackness was expressed as a defining characteristic for the black students: many of them identified as black in part because other people saw them as black. Further, multiracial students were often expected to identify with only one race, and the significance of black blood came through again for them as well: those multiracial students who had black heritage were often expected to identify as black.

I also found that many of the Millennials of color had experiences with racial authenticity. People often questioned whether or not they were “authentic” members of their racial groups, typically based on pervasive stereotypes that exist about racial minorities. Finally, many of the Millennials of color routinely had their legitimacy as Americans questioned, most often in the form of the ostensibly innocent question, “Where are you from?” White students did not report issues with either authenticity or legitimacy as Americans, which speaks to the power of white privilege they experience as part of the dominant racial group.

In Chapter 4, I answered part of my research question, turning my attention to white Millennials. Going into this research, I expected that white college Millennials would use color-blind racism in ways that largely mirrored Bonilla-Silva’s original framing. Overall, I found this to be confirmed. The white Millennials in my study overwhelmingly used the various frames and styles of color-blind racism in the same ways that the white participants did in Bonilla-Silva’s study two decades ago. These

students used abstract liberalism to explain away racial phenomena, citing “American” ideals like individual choices and meritocracy, suggesting that people have equal opportunity to succeed and that race should not be a factor in things like hiring decisions. White Millennials naturalized racial matters as non-racial by suggesting things like neighborhood and school segregation are the result of the natural tendencies of people to want to be around others like themselves. They called on the same framework to explain why they never dated outside of their race or had almost completely white social circles. These white students also minimized the significance of race in contemporary society, while at the same time giving a certain level of lip service to discrimination. For instance, some students said that racism still occurs occasionally, but Obama’s ascent to the White House demonstrates how little it matters. Only one white student used the cultural racism frame, in the guise of the “cycle of poverty” argument. Additionally, the white students in this study were by far the main group that used the different styles of color-blind racism. They were prone to avoiding direct language when speaking about race, often used various semantic moves to save face (“I’m not a racist,” or “My best friend is a racial minority!”), softened their racial blows by using diminutives (“Blacks are just a little bit lazier than most...”), projected the blame for racism and discrimination onto minorities (“They’re the racist ones!”), and many became much more incoherent than typical when answering questions about race.

I also discussed the effects of color-blind racism on whites in Chapter 4. A major effect of colorblindness appears to be that white students experience a distortion between their perceived and actual lives: they believe that they live very diverse existences, with a plethora of nonwhite friends and cross-racial interactions. In actuality, however, most of

them have almost exclusively white circles: they over exaggerated their friendships with people of color, were involved in predominantly white organizations, and did not date outside of their race. Another impact is that the white Millennials often expressed feelings of guilt associated with their white identities. At times this was a more generalized guilt because they recognized on some level that they benefited from whiteness in ways racial minorities could not, while at other times it was more of a semantic guilt (“I feel bad for thinking this negative thing about minorities, but...”) or a belief that being race-conscious was a burden for white people (“I have to tip-toe around race, or I might insult an over-sensitive minority.”). Finally, I showcased the power that color-blind racism has as the dominant racial ideology. Some of the white Millennials expressed views that were more progressive or socially aware (e.g. support for affirmative action-like programs, they had significant interracial friendships, they acknowledge white privilege), but even still were influenced heavily by colorblindness, to the point that they still used the frames and styles fairly consistently.

In Chapter 5 I sought to explore the ways in which college Millennials of color utilized or rejected color-blind ideology. Overall, I found that Millennials of color use the frames of color-blind racism at much lower rates than their white counterparts, and their usage of the various styles of colorblindness was nearly nonexistent. In short, I found them to be “slightly color blind,” as Bonilla-Silva described the blacks in his original work. When Millennials of color did use colorblindness, they exhibited a much more tenuous attachment to the ideology through more nuance and even contradictions in thought. For instance, these students might naturalize issues like neighborhood segregation in the same ways as whites (“People like to be around others of the same race

for comfort.”), but at the same time might believe that whites are complicit in school segregation (“Whites won’t send their children to schools with lot of minorities.”). Millennials of color by and large did not use the styles of color-blind racism because they were much more likely to be very direct when speaking about racial issues, which makes sense given they have “skin in the game” as racial minorities. Overall, the individual racial groups demonstrated very similar usage of color-blind racism, particularly once I accounted for the fact that five students really drove the numbers for their groups: Sarah and Thomas for the Asians, Taliyah and Djeneba for the multiculturals, and Delilah for the blacks.

As multiple racial groups are involved, my expectations regarding what I might find were more nuanced. In general, I expected that the black students would demonstrate the same “slightly color blind” racial ideology that Bonilla-Silva found; that ethnic black students would follow similar patterns as their African American peers; that Latinx and Asian Millennials would reflect color-blind racial ideology in line with their position in the emerging tri-racial system of white, honorary white, and collective black; and that the nature of college as a classed experience in which people of color have increased interactions with whites could lead to either less acceptance of colorblindness (because of more experiences with discrimination) or ideologies that reflect their white relationships. I found strong support for my expectations regarding blacks, ethnic blacks, and Latinxs and Asians. Both blacks and ethnic blacks demonstrated similar usage of color-blind racism (the only outlier being Delilah, the Jamaican immigrant). Nearly all of the Latinx students would be racialized more closely to or as a part of the collective black group, despite the fact that they were all more fair-skinned. This is likely because of personal

characteristics (e.g. Alejandro, as a Mexican immigrant with a recognizable accent) or the fact that either they or their parents relocated to areas with sizeable black populations, which has an influence on how Latinxs identify racially (Zhou and Lee 2007). As a result, the Latinxs' views were more in line with their black peers rather than whites. The Asian students followed a similar pattern, although it was more nuanced. The two students responsible for half of the incidents of color-blind racism were Sarah and Thomas: as Chinese Americans, they are more likely considered part of the honorary white class, and as such their views are more closely aligned with whites. The rest of the Asians were closer to their black and Latinx peers, likely because their skin color and other cultural features racialized them in similar ways to the Latinx students—closer to or as part of collective blacks. Overall, I did not find much support for social class as a meaningful factor: all of the students, regardless of class background, used color-blind racism in similar ways.

In the latter half of Chapter 5, I explored how Millennials of color experience race in the midst of colorblindness. In general, these students led much more diverse lives than their white peers: they lived in more diverse neighborhoods growing up, they had meaningful relationships with people of different races, and backed up their claims of support for interracial marriage by having actually dated people from other races. Additionally, in the cases of those Millennials of color who reported not dating across race, they were much more upfront about the reasons why than white students, citing race directly as a significant factor in their decisions. Further, while the students of color at times naturalized various racial phenomena, they also spoke about making intentional, race-based choices, such as joining culturally-specific student organizations or seeking

out same-race friends. All in all, the Millennials of color recognized the continuing significance of race in their lives, citing experiences with racial profiling, microaggressions, and the psychological burden that race often represented. Some students even appeared to use minimization of racism as a psychological coping mechanism, possibly in an effort to reduce the stress they felt from constant racial affronts. Finally, many of the Millennials of color described specific event in their lives that served as racial awakenings: moments when they were clued into the often-harsh realities of being a person of color.

LIMITATIONS

As with any research, there are limitations to my study. Despite the limitations I will discuss, I do believe my research demonstrates significant implications for studies on race. In particular, I see my research as a compelling entry into understanding the racial identities and racial ideologies of college Millennials, and how their racial identities impact their usage or rejection of this new ideology.

Foremost among my limitations is generalizability, to which I make no claims. First, I sampled students from one region (the mid-Atlantic), and within that region, only from the greater D.C. metro area. The story of racial ideology and racism in the U.S. often has a slightly different shade depending on what geographic region of the U.S. in which someone resides. Historically, the South has been much different from the Northeast, and issues in the Southwest and on the West Coast have had different timbres as well. New research suggests that racial categories and meanings may vary within

nations (Peña, forthcoming); this means that the ordering of races via the emerging tri-racial system, for instance, may be different in one part of the country versus another. As such, my findings involving students enrolled in schools in the same area of the country, with a large majority being raised in the Maryland-D.C.-Virginia area, cannot be generalized to other parts of America. Second, I only involved current college students. The whole of Millennials as a generation includes individuals who are not college students (or college graduates), as well as older people up to their mid-thirties. Thus my results cannot be generalized to non-college graduates or older Millennials, who may have strikingly different views. While I see this as unlikely (Bonilla-Silva's work included college students and older adults, both college educated and non-college educated, and he found similar findings across all groups), I do recognize it is possible.

Third, my sample size is not particularly large, in comparison to some studies, especially once I categorized participants according to race. While my numbers work well for an exploratory study (which my research was intended to be), having a greater number of students from each racial group would undoubtedly bolster my findings. Further, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, I did not include any individuals who are Native or Indigenous Americans. The racial realities of the geographic area from which I garnered participants worked against my desires in this regard, but future research should definitely include Native and Indigenous peoples.

Additionally, having a larger sample size would allow me to better assess the impact of social class on my findings. As I discussed in previous chapters, social class did not emerge as a major factor in Millennials' usage of color-blind racism, but a larger sample might alter the results. However, the fact that social class was not salient for these

students is not altogether unsurprising; for instance, the recent presidential election results demonstrate that social class does not matter in the ways we might have thought, given the amount of affluent whites who voted for Trump. Further, many of the students in my study have similar social class backgrounds, which lessens the salience of social class as a meaningful identity. Even for those with more varied social class backgrounds (e.g. working class students), the fact that they are enrolled in more selective institutions means that they are on par in many ways with higher class peers, and are in the process of moving up in social class themselves via their college education. Yet and still, the importance of social class might have emerged in a larger sample.

My sample is not perfectly representative, because I utilized a disproportionate, non-representative sampling method. Given that I wanted roughly equal numbers of all of the racial groups, however, this was a necessary concession. Additionally, there is possible selection bias in terms of the students who opted in to my study. It is conceivable that students who are very comfortable talking about race would be more likely to participate. I do not believe this occurred at a high rate, however, because many students still demonstrated hesitance and discomfort speaking about certain racial issues.

There are also some limitations related to my study design. As stated, part of my intent was to do an update and extension of work done by Bonilla-Silva; however, I changed his methodology in some significant ways. Bonilla-Silva used pre-constructed social surveys (the 1998 Detroit Area Study and the 1997 Survey of Social Attitudes of College Students) and interviews, whereas I combined personal journals with interviewing. I also modified his original interview protocol by cutting or combining several questions, altering the wording of some questions, as well as adding new

questions related to racial identity. While these modifications better served my purposes, they do mean my study is not as directly comparable to Bonilla-Silva's work as it could be had I not changed anything.

The changes I made also had implications for the type of findings I generated. The social surveys benefited from a standardization of responses across respondents regarding their social attitudes, which could then be correlated directly to the interviewees. The journals I use did not allow for any standardization across participants, although I feel what I lost in standardization I gained in insight of my participants' inner thoughts. Additionally, Bonilla-Silva's interview protocol was longer than my own, which gave him more space to catch potential usage of color-blind racism, for instance by asking similar questions more than once. This is an important feature, particularly for the styles of colorblindness: they are used and negotiated verbally, in situ. I was able to capture much of this verbal styling in my interviews, but a longer protocol would have allowed for more data to analyze.

Finally, it would have been ideal to be able to compare the racial identities of these Millennials with those of their parents, and how this impacted their usage or rejection of color-blind ideology. Unfortunately, however, I did not collect any information from the students' parents. While I did speak with interviewees about how their parents identify (and participants indicated where their parents were born), that information does not constitute a primary source, as these were merely the students' brief reflections on how their parents may or may not identify racially. We do know, however, that nationality and generation level impact racial identity, and that parents can influence their children's connection to racial and ethnic identification through a variety of means,

as I described in Chapter 3. As I have outlined throughout this research, racial identity then does have impacts on acceptance or rejection of color-blind racial ideology, so it stands to reason that parents' racial identities may have some bearing on the subsequent interpretation of colorblindness of their children. Future research should work to incorporate parental identities in more direct, meaningful ways.

SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPLICATIONS

Despite limitations, my research provides many significant contributions to, and implications for, color-blind racial ideology and racial identity. First, my research speaks to the strength of Bonilla-Silva's conceptualization of the frames (and styles) of color-blind racism. My data demonstrate that white college Millennials are still using colorblindness in the same ways that Bonilla-Silva found two decades ago. This is significant precisely because of the time difference: most of the Millennials in my study were not even *born* when Bonilla-Silva did his initial investigation. Additionally, people of color are still impacted by color-blind racism, even if they do not develop either complete acceptance of it or full opposition to it.

Second, I bring people of color into the conversation about color-blind ideology in ways that has not been done before. Most existing research on the ways in which people subscribe to and utilize color-blind ideology focuses on whites or blacks (for examples see Manning, Hartman, and Gerteis 2015; Todd, Spanierman, and Aber 2010; Tynes and Markoe 2010; Barr and Neville 2008; and all of Bonilla-Silva's work to date). Two note-worthy exceptions are research done by Vasquez (2014) on the effects of

intermarriage between Latinxs and non-Hispanic whites, and Lee and Ho (2016) that looks at how color-blind discourse impacts Asian American sexual politics, but neither of these works focus on how Latinxs or Asians utilize colorblindness in the ideological sense. As such, my research represents a significant contribution by way of including Latinxs, Asians, and multiracial students in research on color-blind ideology. Further, my intentional consideration of racial identity and its impacts on color-blind ideology are also new. For example, this allowed me to consider blackness in ways previously unconsidered, looking at ethnic blacks as compared to African Americans, as well as how multiracial individuals with black heritage experience race and racial ideology. This is important because existing research on colorblindness does not consider the full complexities of racial and ethnic identity. In other words, America is not simply black and white; neither is racial ideology. Any complete understanding of American racial ideology must consider the spectrum of race and ethnicity, and my work sets scholarship down this path.

Recent scholarship has called for researchers to approach studies of colorblindness with more nuance, to go beyond simply understanding whether or not people accept or reject the existence of racism and to explore the ways in which people hold contradictory views about racial matters (Doane 2014). My work takes this approach, in particular for Millennials of color. In Chapter 5 I showcased the fact that minorities across racial groups exhibited quite nuanced, often contradictory usage of color-blind racism, which speaks to the fluidity of ideology. I do recognize that I did not focus as much on the fluidity of racial ideology for whites as I did for the students of color. This was intentional, because scholarship very clearly speaks to colorblindness in

whites whereas it is lacking for racial minorities, but also supported by my data. As I described in Chapter 4, some of the white students did demonstrate some nuance in their utilization of color-blind racism, for instance Emma and Leah, the two white women I profiled. However, it is very clear that white Millennials overall showcase far less nuance than their racial minority peers. Their usage of color-blind racism was much more consistent. Furthermore, while several students exhibited racial attitudes that appear to be accepting of people of color overall (“I hang out with people of different races all the time.”) and supportive of the impact race has on their lives (“Yes, black lives matter!”), how much can it be said that these statements *truly* indicate “simultaneous and contradictory” positions regarding race in America, as Doane suggests, if these students have all white friends, only date white people, and speak about racial matters using colorblindness? My data suggest color-blind racism still shapes the lives and ideologies of whites in very significant ways, possibly disallowing as much nuance as occurs for people of color.

My research also has implications for understanding racial ideology within the emerging tri-racial system in the U.S. Although it is uncertain what racial system the U.S. will eventually settle into, it is very clear that the historical bi-racial system of black and white is no longer viable. Given the significance of the bi-racial system for so many years, it makes sense that the tri-racial system would in some ways be based on the black-white racial binary, keeping white as the dominant racial group, collective blacks as the hierarchical bottom, and honorary whites as a buffer group between the two. As this new tri-racial system emerges, racial groups are figuring out how to navigate it, and are finding their place within it (or perhaps more aptly, being *placed* within it).

My data suggest that the intersection of racial identity and racial ideology within this emerging system may be just as complex as identification itself in the system. For instance, Sarah and Thomas, as Chinese Americans, are more likely to be allowed access to the honorary white group, and their usage of color-blind racism was very much in line with this position. However, Bonilla-Silva and Glover (2004) posit that Asian Indians will also be subsumed into the honorary white category, but the Asian Indian students in my study demonstrated far more nuanced and contradictory acceptance and usage of colorblindness. This is likely because of the interplay between things like skin color and cultural markers that make position in the tri-racial system more uncertain. Additionally, as research on Latin American countries (the basis for the theorization of a tri-racial system) shows, placement within a racial hierarchy is not necessarily a good predictor of racial attitudes (Sue 2009). Delilah, the immigrant from Jamaica, is a good example of this from my data. She identifies as black and would be classified as part of the collective black group; yet and still, her racial ideology is much more nuanced and “colorblind” despite her identification with black people.

My data point to obvious questions about how racial identity might impact ideology if this tri-racial system continues to gain ground. Inevitably, racial minorities will attempt to “better” their position within the system, to either enter the dominant white group or at least the upper echelon of honorary whites. This may involve shifting their ideology to internalize colorblindness in the same ways as whites. However, people’s ascribed racial identities will likely continue to be barriers, as we see with Maya, the Asian Indian who does not connect with her Asian identity and is quite fully

“assimilated” into white culture, but still has her authenticity as American questioned regularly.

My research has implications for racial identity and racial categories in the U.S. more broadly. As the Millennials in my study demonstrate, the current racial categories that the U.S. uses, particularly via institutions like the Census Bureau, simply do not work as intended. These students described how they constantly push back against the categories, by questioning them (“I’m unsure why Latino/Hispanic is a separate category.”) or conditionally accepting them (“I check white because my skin is white, but I’m not white.”). While entities like the Census Bureau are attempting to address these issues, for instance by revamping the categories available, social convention is still behind. Additionally, academic scholarship is behind the proverbial eight ball, with scholars only fairly recently beginning to address the inadequacies of current racial classifications.

My research clearly demonstrates that race still matter very much in contemporary American society, and that the ideals of colorblindness only further exacerbate racial issues. When I teach about race, I always present my students with a challenge: if any of them can tell me about a problem that can be solved by ignoring it, I will give them an automatic A in the course. Invariably they cannot, because problems do not work that way; they do not resolve themselves without attention. The problem of race in society is no different, yet color-blind ideology effectively proposes that if we ignore race, if I do not “see” color, then race as a social problem will simply melt away into nonexistence. My data, in tandem with other scholarship on race and color-blind ideology, showcases otherwise. Racial discrimination and racism are still powerful

problems, and attempting to speak around race or suggest that it does not matter in favor of color-blind arguments only further perpetuates the racist systems we have that support white dominance and the subordination of racial minorities.

My work also has practical implications, particularly for professors, instructors, and other student affairs professionals in higher education. Teaching race as traditional immutable, distinct categories is not helpful, especially for students whose lived experiences are far more complex. Many courses still focus on a black-white racial binary, instead of taking more nuanced, complete approaches to understanding race that account not only for multiple races, but distinctions within racial categories, as well as multiracial identities. Instructors should work to create classroom spaces that allow students to explore the fullness of their racial and ethnic identities, beyond the limitations of pure classifications, and especially outside of only black and white. For instance, while blackness is still very central to existing racism and discrimination, it may be more useful to teach more broadly to an emerging collective black group as it stands in relation to whites and honorary whites—even if that specific language is not used. My work points to this need.

Further, college personnel need to be aware of the implications for colorblindness as the dominant racial ideology. While it seems innocuous and even idealistically helpful, color-blind ideology further perpetuates white privilege and dominance while marginalizing people of color. College personnel must be aware of the issues that people of color face, both on macro levels and micro levels, and how the use of colorblindness (even their own) compounds their negative experiences on college campuses. For instance, how can colleges respond to racial incidents on campus in ways that both

facilitate inclusion and acknowledge the damage done to marginalized populations? What can be done to eliminate microaggressions stemming from color-blind perspectives inside and outside of classrooms that have detrimental psychological impacts on students of color? As my work suggests, understanding the pernicious nature of color-blind ideology as well as how it is manifested are initial steps in eliminating it altogether. Intentional training on colorblindness for college personnel is one way to address this concern.

Lastly, I believe that instructors and administrators should work to create spaces in which students (and even other college personnel) can explore issues of race and identity. Many of the interviews I conducted, with all races, ended by the student thanking me for giving them the opportunity to engage with race in such a meaningful way, and for several students, this was the first time they had done so. Given that race is such a taboo topic in contemporary society (a fact which colorblindness only further exacerbates), most people, in particular whites, simply do not feel they have the space to think and talk about racial matters or engage with their racial identities in meaningful ways. As this is the case, the proverbial bar is set very low, and even simple conversations could have tremendous impact. One example of a way to create these spaces for students comes directly from my research: instructors could have students keep journals in class about race, and then use these reflections as points of discussion. As race is such a pervasive social phenomenon, it can be tied very easily to almost any subject matter, making such an application potentially limitless.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH

In conclusion, I provide some suggestions for the direction of future research. First, future research should truly incorporate all racial groups, including Native Americans and Indigenous People. As I stated in Chapter 1, my intention was to include these groups, but the realities of the region from which I drew my sample proved too difficult to overcome (at least for this initial study). Additionally, there exists much more variance within Latinx and Asian communities that should be explored; future research should be intentional about including participants who represent differentially racialized groups (e.g. Dominicans and Puerto Ricans vs. Cubans and Argentinians; Loatians and Cambodians vs. Japanese and Koreans).

Second, future research should seek to be more generalizable. A larger, more representative sample should be employed, in an effort to make the findings generalizable beyond simply the included participants. Part of this includes conducting research in different geographic regions within the U.S. Race is different around the country because of sociocultural norms and histories regarding race, and a true assessment of color-blind racial ideology needs to take multiple places into account.

Speaking to my contributions regarding research that explores the nuances of colorblindness, future research should do more to uncover the nuances that exist specifically for people of color and their racial ideologies. Existing research does showcase the fluidity of color-blind ideology (Burke 2012; Picower 2009; Stoll 2014; Warikoo and de Novais 2015), but it is about whites. While my research does add to the literature, it is only one study, and our understanding would benefit significantly from additional works.

While an investigation of Millennials proved to be very insightful, particularly given the centrality of Millennials in contemporary society as young adults, future research should investigate the racial ideology of the newest generation, those behind Millennials. How are current children and youth making sense of race, both their position in a racialized society and their beliefs about the centrality of race, particularly given the ever-more pervasive claims of post-racialism or colorblindness? As America's racial system is evolving, how will this impact racial identity and racial ideology for the children of Millennials?

Finally, I do not simply suggest future directions for research without taking the onus of these suggestions upon myself as well. I plan to write a book and several articles from this research, which will involve additional work to further increase the impact of my contributions. To this end, I intend to extend this study to different geographic areas of the U.S. in order to capture regional differences in racial identity and racial ideology. I also intend to recruit Native American and Indigenous People, in order to bring them into the analysis. These efforts on my part will help to create more generalizable findings on racial identity and racial ideology.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

SECTION A: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

[5 Questions]

I want to start by getting a better sense of who you are. We'll start with questions more about your past, and move to the present. First, tell me a little about yourself, like year in school, major, where you're from.

A1. Can you very briefly describe where you grew up? Was it rural, suburban, inner city, big or small town, etc.?

*Name of city/town and state where Rs spent formative years

→ Can you remember the zip code of the place where you grew up?

A2. What kind of people lived in your neighborhood—middle class, wealthy, black or white?

→ PROBE for racial and ethnic makeup

→ Racially mixed neighborhood, PROBE for explicit racial makeup (e.g. “What would you say were the approximate percentages of each race in your neighborhood?”)

A3. Did you interact (“socialize”) with your neighbors?

→ If YES: In what ways? (What did you do with them?)

→If living in a racially mixed neighborhood: Do you interact with neighbors of different races?

→If NO: Why not?

A4. Tell me a little bit about your 3 closest friends growing up. Were they school friends, neighborhood friends, or both?

→PROBE for class and racial background of friends

How often did you see this/these friends?

A5. Do you speak any languages other than English?

If yes: what languages? How did you learn them?

SECTION B: RACIAL/ETHNIC IDENTITY

[7 Questions]

Now let's talk a little about your race and ethnicity. Here is a copy of the U.S. Census' race and ethnicity demographics section. (Give Rs a copy of the U.S. Census form.)

B1. What would you check and why?

B1a. Would you choose something not on this list? What? Why or why not?

B2. What do you think about these choices?

B3. What does it mean to identify as [the race/ethnicity of R] to you?

(Are there specific things you do, or is it something that just *is*?)

What do you do or what experiences have you had that let you know you are a part of that identity?

B4. Does your choice of how to identify match how other people perceive you?

If no: What impact does this have on you?

B5. Do your parents identify in the same way as you?

If no: Why not?

B5a. In what ways do you think your parents influenced your racial/ethnic identity?

SECTION C: SCHOOL INFORMATION

[4 Questions]

C1. Are you involved in any extracurricular activities on campus? (Clubs, orgs, teams, etc.)

Push for description of activities

Racial makeup of organizations/groups

If no, why not?

Why did you get involved in this activity?

C2. Do you have any roommates or live/lived with anyone at all right now?

If yes: Tell me about these people—who are they? (push for race)

How did you come to live together (voluntary/involuntary)?

If voluntary: Why did you choose them to live with?

What was it like to live with these people?

→ PROBE for GRAD STUDENTS: What's the class and racial makeup of where you live (percentages)? Why did you choose this area to live now?

C3. Who do you hang out with most now?

→ PROBE: Push for race/ethnicity.

→ PROBE: Push for frequency and type of activities—What do you do with these people? (looking for extra curriculars, etc.)

C4. What do you think about the racial diversity at your school? (Is it diverse or not?)

→ PROBE: Do people of different races interact with one another on this campus? In what ways?

If not: why don't they?

SECTION D: ROMANTIC LIFE

[2 Questions]

Now I want to talk briefly about your romantic life, in a general sense.

D1. Without entering into details, can you talk to me about the people you've dated from high school until today? (Make sure they talk about anyone they are currently dating.)

* Check for race

If different race than R, ask:

Did you have any problems because of the race of your (girlfriend/boyfriend/significant others)?

If no different race is mentioned, ask:

Did you ever have any romantic interest in a person of a different race?

→PROBE: "And why is that?"

D2. People have mixed feelings about marrying out of their race. What is your view on this delicate matter? (Push for explanation.)

→PROBE, "and why is that?"

If Rs "for" or "yes and no," ask:

Would you yourself consider (or have considered) marrying someone from a different race?

SECTION E: OVERALL VIEWS ON MINORITIES

[5 Questions]

Now I want to ask you some general questions about race more broadly.

E1. How do you define the ideas of race and ethnicity? (“If you had to explain to a Martian what race is all about...”) (*This question attempts to get a sense of how people define or understand race/ethnicity.*)

E2. Where, if at all, have you interacted the most with people of other races and ethnicities, and what have those interactions been like?

E3. Do you think people of *other* races and ethnicities have had the same experiences as you (positive or negative) with race relations?

→PROBE: why or why not?

E4. Some research suggests that people of color are expected to make up the majority (over 50%) of the population of the U.S. within the next 50 years. How do you feel about that?

E5. What is your view on immigration in the U.S.?

→PROBES: Should the U.S. stop or limit immigration? Why or why not?

Who should be allowed to immigrate?

SECTION F: RACISM AND LIFE CHANCES

[8 Questions]

F1. How would you define “racism”?

→Can you give me an example of racism in contemporary society?

F2. Can institutions (education, employment, criminal justice, health care, housing, immigration) be described as racist?

→PROBE for why or why not; examples

F3. Some people believe that the election of President Obama signals that we are now in a society where “race doesn’t matter,” or that race/racism can no longer be used as an “excuse” for lack of success in society. Do you agree with this idea that race and racism do not matter any more?

→PROBE for why or why not

→PROBE: Has race ever impacted your life in a significant way?

F4. Studies show that a large percentage of racial minorities say that they experience a lot of discrimination in their daily lives. Other people say that this is not the case. What do you think?

*Subtle discrimination in stores, renting apartments, etc.

→PROBE to get their opinion on the significance of discrimination.

→PROBE: Have you ever experienced discrimination on the basis of your race or ethnicity? Give me an example.

F5. On average, blacks and Latinos have worse jobs, income, and housing than whites.

Why do you think this is the case? (Encourage respondent to explain his/her views.)

F6. Do you think that being white is an advantage or a disadvantage in contemporary America? (Push for explanation.)

F7. Do you think that whites are discriminated against in any way in today's society?

→ PROBE: If yes, can you tell me in what ways?

→ PROBE: If no, can you tell me why you have this opinion?

I'm going to describe a situation to you, and I want to get your reaction.

Imagine a company that is looking to fill a new position. For the particular position they are seeking to fill, they have narrowed down the choices to two people: one a racial minority, the other white. In the end, the company chose to hire the racial minority, because the company is 97% white, and recognizes that it does not have enough minorities working for them.

F8. What do you think about this decision? (For, against, or for & against)

Push for explanation.

If the Rs asks whether or not the two candidates were equal in qualifications,

walk them through both situations (they were equal, and they weren't equal).

*If Rs is **against** the decision, ask:*

Why do you think that the company was 97% white?

*If Rs is **for & against** the decision, ask:*

What do you say to those who think that this is “preferential treatment”?

Why do you think that the company was 97% white?

*If Rs is **for** decision, ask:*

What do you say to those who think that this company’s decision discriminates against whites (“preferential treatment to blacks”)?

SECTION G: GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION AND MINORITIES

[5 Questions]

Now let’s talk about your views on the ROLE of the government.

G1. Even though segregation in schools was outlawed by the government in 1954 (Brown vs. Board of Education Supreme Court decision), schools still remain very highly segregated in this country. In your opinion, is this the government’s fault, or a particular race’s fault (whites, blacks, etc.)?

G2. Many of the U.S.’ colleges and universities are still overwhelmingly white (they have a majority of white students). Why do you think this is the case?

G2a. What should be done to make schools more racially and ethnically diverse?

G3. America has lots of all one-race neighborhoods (“residential segregation”). What do you think about this situation?

G3a. Do you think that the government should do something about this situation?

IF Rs believes this is a problem, ASK:

What do you think can be done to increase the mixing of the races in neighborhoods (“residential integration”)?

SECTION H: CRIME QUESTIONS

[4 Questions]

Now I want to ask you a few questions related to crime in the U.S.

H1. Do you believe that racial minorities are more likely than whites to be involved in crime? Why? (Push for specific races, differences in types of crime by race.)

H2. Blacks and Latinos are disproportionately stopped by the police, arrested, and put in jail more than whites. Why do you think this is the case? (Encourage respondent to explain his/her views.)

H3. Tell me about what you know of or have heard about the #BlackLivesMatter movement.

If R gives information: Where do you get most of your information about #BlackLivesMatter from? (Social media, friends, etc.)

If R doesn't know: In response to the recent, very public deaths of black men at the hands of police, like Michael Brown in Ferguson, Eric Garner in New York, Walter Scott in South Carolina, and Freddie Gray in Baltimore, the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter was created as part of a large scale social movement and critique of the U.S. criminal justice system.

H3a. People's responses to this movement have varied, from full support regardless of race to condemning the movement, saying instead that #AllLivesMatter, some even suggesting that saying #BlackLivesMatter means that other lives do not. What do you think about this debate?

SECTION I: LAST QUESTION

This is the last question.

I1. If you were the president of the U.S., what would you do to eliminate racial inequality and ease racial tensions?

Is there anything else that you want to add?

Thanks very much for your collaboration!

APPENDIX B: POSSIBLE 2020 RACE/HISPANIC QUESTION FOR ONLINE RESPONDENTS

Which categories describe Person 1?
Select all boxes that apply. Note, you may select more than one group. [\(Help\)](#)

White
For example, German, Irish, English, Italian, Polish, French, etc.

Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin
For example, Mexican or Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Salvadoran, Dominican, Colombian, etc.

Black or African Am.
For example, African American, Jamaican, Haitian, Nigerian, Ethiopian, Somalian, etc.

Asian
For example, Chinese, Filipino, Asian Indian, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese, etc.

American Indian or Alaska Native
For example, Navajo Nation, Blackfeet Tribe, Mayan, Aztec, Native Village of Barrow Inupiat Traditional Government, Nome Eskimo Community, etc.

Middle Eastern or North African
For example, Lebanese, Iranian, Egyptian, Syrian, Moroccan, Algerian, etc.

Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
For example, Native Hawaiian, Samoan, Chamorro, Tongan, Fijian, Marshallese, etc.

Some other race, ethnicity, or origin

Credit: U.S. Census Bureau

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