College Experiences that Generated Racial Dissonance:
Reflections from Cisgender White Women in Graduate
Preparation Programs

Claire Robbins

COLLEGE EXPERIENCES THAT GENERATED RACIAL DISSONANCE: REFLECTIONS FROM CISGENDER WHITE WOMEN IN GRADUATE PREPARATION PROGRAMS

Claire Robbins
Virginia Tech

This study examined the role of college experiences in generating dissonance among cisgender White women enrolled in master's degree programs in higher education and student affairs (HESA). Using the methodology of grounded theory for social justice (Charmaz, 2005), data analysis revealed that seven of 11 participants experienced racial dissonance in college. Of the college experiences that generated racial dissonance, six occurred in co-curricular contexts, while four were primarily in academic settings. Findings affirm the importance of facilitating racial dissonance among White college students as a way to advance intercultural maturity and other college outcomes essential for sustaining diverse democracies. Implications and recommendations are offered for student affairs practice and research.

Please direct inquires about this manuscript to: Claire Robbins, robbinsc@vt.edu

Intercultural knowledge, competence, and maturity are increasingly recognized as college student learning outcomes that are critical for addressing twenty-first century challenges (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005; Perez, Shim, King, & Baxter Magolda, 2015; Kuh, 2008). Students who achieve these outcomes typically do so by developing an enhanced "ability to entertain multiple perspectives in multiple contexts," or "cultural frames" (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005, p. 576). This developmental capacity relies in part on exploring one's multiple social identities, including racial identity. Racial identity exploration can lead to the development of intercultural maturity when individuals encounter and resolve racial dissonance, or the sense of disequilibrium that results from the inability to accommodate new experiences into their existing framework for making meaning of racial interactions (Helms, 2008).

College experiences that generate racial dissonance open doors for students to explore their social identities, which may facilitate intercultural knowledge, competence, and maturity. Although these intercultural outcomes are important for all college graduates (Kuh, 2008), they are essential for those who enter the student affairs profession, where social justice and inclusion is one of ten core professional competency areas (ACPA & NASPA, 2015). Authors (2016) explored the process of negotiating racial dissonance among White women in higher education and student affairs (HESA) graduate preparation programs, and Author (2016) examined HESA graduate program experiences that generated racial dissonance among White women. However, few studies have examined college experiences that generated racial dissonance among White women entering the student affairs profession. This gap in the literature is significant given that the racial and ethnic diversity of the college-going population continues to increase, yet White women are overrepresented among student affairs professionals (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008).

White women also constitute approximately one-third of the United States (U.S.) college-going population, representing 30% of 12-month enrollment at all Title IV institutions during the 2011-2012 school year (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Yet, little is known about White women's experiences with racial dissonance in college.

Understanding White women's college experiences with racial dissonance is important for research and practice because of the links between social identity exploration, intercultural outcomes, and student affairs professional competencies. Although some recent studies have explored racial dissonance among undergraduates (e.g., Pizzolato, Nguyen, Johnston, & Wang, 2012), this topic is still relatively unexplored among graduate students. Moreover, most studies include only current undergraduate students as participants and thus do not address the longer-term influences of dissonance-generating experiences in college. In addition, co-curricular learning contexts are critical for many desirable college outcomes (Kuh, 2008), and student affairs educators often report the influential role of co-curricular experiences in shaping their career paths (e.g., Smith, 2014). Yet, few scholars have explored how student affairs educators' undergraduate experiences influenced their racial identity or intercultural maturity development.

These gaps in the literature illustrate the need for the current study, which explored the role of college experiences in generating dissonance among cisgender White women enrolled in master's degree programs in higher education and student affairs (HESA). Two research questions guided this study:

1. What undergraduate academic experiences generated racial dissonance among cisgender White women currently enrolled in HESA master's degree programs?

2. What undergraduate co-curricular experiences generated racial dissonance among cisgender White women currently enrolled in HESA master's de-

gree programs?

To convey and contextualize findings from this study, this article reviews literature related to intercultural maturity, racial and privileged identities, and the role of dissonance in development. The conceptual framework for this study was Jones and Abes's (2013) analysis of educational contexts that foster students' critical understanding of multiple social identities. Key findings indicate that the White women in this study did not necessarily experience racial dissonance in college. However, among those who did report dissonance, several academic and co-curricular experiences were influential. The article concludes with implications for practice and research.

Intercultural Maturity, Racial and Privileged Identities, and the Role of Dissonance

King and Baxter Magolda's (2005) model of intercultural maturity described the holistic development of intercultural competence among college students. The model used the lens of maturity, defined as self-authorship in the cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal domains of development. Using overarching themes from theories associated with each domain, King and Baxter Magolda outlined a developmental trajectory for intercultural maturity. Social identity exploration, including racial identity, appeared in the model as a characteristic of intermediate intrapersonal development. In a refined version of the intercultural maturity model, Perez et al. (2015) found that in the transition from initial to intermediate intrapersonal development, college students experienced tensions between external and internal definitions of identity. King and Baxter Magolda (2005) emphasized the role of dissonance in the identity exploration process, noting that "as learners struggle through the confusion that comes with realizing that all knowledge is not certain…[the] particulars of race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation are intertwined in this confusion and exploration" (p. 582). Exploring one's social identities reveals tensions between internal and external definitions, leading students to experience a sense of disequilibrium often described as cognitive dissonance.

Cognitive dissonance is a cornerstone of developmental theories, including racial identity development (Authors, 2016; Watt, 2015). Watt (2007) summarized Festinger's (1957/1962, in Watt, 2007) definition of cognitive dissonance as "the tension one feels when holding at the same time two incompatible cognitions" (p. 118). Relating cognitive dissonance to racial identity, Helms (2008) defined racial dissonance as the moment at which one's cognitive schema for making meaning of racial interactions ceases to make sense or breaks a moral standard. In the context of White identity development, racial dissonance emerges in response to "a catastrophic event or a series of personal encounters that the person can no longer ignore" (Helms, 2008, p. 32). For example, after taking an African American studies course, a White college student might notice racist jokes at parties after never having noticed them before.

White individuals often become anxious when encountering racial dissonance and respond with information-processing strategies that favor repression and avoidance (Helms, 1995; Watt, 2007, 2015). For instance, the White student who overheard a racist joke might tell herself, "they're just saying that because they're drunk…they didn't mean anything by it." Watt (2007) found that when individuals with privileged social identities encounter "dissonance-provoking stimuli" (p. 118), they respond with eight defense modes including denial, deflection, minimization, and intellectualization, among others. Similarly, Authors (2016) found that cisgender White women in HESA graduate programs frequently responded to racial dissonance by avoiding or disengaging from opportunities to develop greater racial self-understanding. Educators who work with privileged individuals describe this behavior as resistance to intercultural learning (Jones, 2008).

White Students and Intercultural Learning: Influential College Experiences

Diverse democracies require the participation of individuals who demonstrate intercultural competence in their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors (Perez et al., 2015). Researchers urge postsecondary educators to create and sustain learning environments that foster the development of multicultural competence, intercultural maturity, and/or critical consciousness (Hurtado, Alvarez, Guillermo-Wann, Cuellar, & Arellano, 2012; Pope et al., 2009). For example, a recent study found that students learned interculturally by encountering others' experiences, feeling safe to explore cultural differences, and participating through multiple approaches (King et al., 2013).

Scholars have highlighted strategies for facilitating intercultural learning among White students. For example, Reason (2014) identified intergroup dialogues, academic courses, multicultural student affairs programming, and living-learning/learning communities as interventions that "explicitly invite White students to engage, include trained facilitators to encourage positive engagement, require sustained reflection on issues of race and racism, and promote racial justice action" (p. 87). Ortiz and Rhoads' (2000) five-step framework of multicultural education provides a developmental framework with pedagogical tools for deconstructing and "[d]isplacing Whiteness as the universal standard by which all other races are gauged" (p. 83). Each step of the framework aligns with a cognitive goal, beginning problem statement, ending problem statement, and activity for students. Quaye and Baxter Magolda (2007) used Ortiz and Rhoads' (2000) framework to argue that racial self-understanding requires development in cognitive, personal, and intrapersonal domains, including racial identity development. To experience developmental growth, students at different levels of racial self-understanding need different learning activities and settings (Quaye & Baxter Magolda, 2007).

Facilitating intercultural maturity among privileged students requires educational experiences that generate dissonance. One aspect of intercultural maturity is racial self-understanding, which educators can facilitate by providing learning environments and programmatic efforts that foster cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal development. This development often hinges on experiencing racial dissonance. Yet, few studies have explored racial dissonance, particularly among recent college graduates, graduate students, or White students preparing to become college educators. This study examines academic and co-curricular undergraduate experiences that generated racial dissonance among cisgender White women preparing to become HESA educators.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework guiding this analysis was Jones and Abes's (2013) analysis of educational contexts that foster students' critical understanding of multiple social identities. Critical theories interrogate inequitable systems of power, privilege, and oppression. Jones and Abes (2013) used three critical theories – intersectionality, critical race theory, and queer theory – to develop critical models of multiple dimensions of identity (MMDI). To guide educators in applying these models in practice, the authors reviewed literature on "identity-focused educational contexts" (p. 234) and identified 10 key characteristics that facilitate critical understandings of identity among college students.

One of these characteristics is dissonance, also described as decentering or disequilibrium, which fosters critical understandings of identity by generating "new ways of thinking and worldviews that are inconsistent with one's current understanding, resulting in a need for reflection" in order to resolve one's sense of disequilibrium (Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 235). The need for reflection draws students to additional educational experiences that foster more

exploration, which may in turn facilitate the development of intercultural maturity. For example, the White student in the earlier example experienced racial dissonance after learning about racism through an African American studies class. Then, the student began to notice racist jokes. If the student became increasingly uncomfortable with these jokes, she may decide she would like to learn more about the experiences of students of Color on campus. She might join an intergroup dialogue program, which could advance her intercultural maturity.

Methodology

This study is part of a larger grounded theory study that explored racial identity construction among 11 cisgender White women in HESA graduate programs (Authors, 2016). One aspect of participants' racial identity construction was the role of college and graduate school experiences in facilitating racial dissonance. Undergraduate experiences (both academic and co-curricular) are the focus of this analysis.

The analysis is situated in grounded theory for social justice, a methodological approach to grounded theory conducted from a "critical stance" (Charmaz, 2005, p. 508) that foregrounds inequitable social conditions (additional information about research design can be found in Author, 2012; Author, 2016; Authors, 2016). I distributed a call for participation through a national electronic mailing list for HESA graduate preparation program faculty. In response, 135 individuals identifying as White women completed an initial interest form. Through purposeful sampling (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014), I selected 11 White women, ages 23 to 28, all in their second year as a full-time student in a two-year HESA master's degree program (no participants were in the same program).

All participants identified as cisgender, with one participant describing a "masculine expression of gender identity." The sample included students with diverse educational and life experiences and social class, sexual orientation, and religious identities. I conducted two interviews with each participant focusing on experiences with race and White privilege from childhood through graduate school. Each participant selected a pseudonym, and I recorded all interviews digitally and had them transcribed verbatim. Participants are described in more detail in Author (2012).

Consistent with grounded theory for social justice (Charmaz, 2005), I used a constant comparative approach to data analysis (Charmaz, 2014). I sought feedback from participants on a short summary of findings and one-page individual profile as a means of establishing trustworthiness (Jones et al., 2014). Seven participants replied, and each noted that her experiences were reflected in the emerging theory.

Although participants' developmental journeys began and ended in different places, each reported "eye-opening" experiences that generated racial dissonance (Helms, 2008). Through these experiences, participants recognized racism and White privilege. Their existing strategies for making meaning of race stopped making sense, forcing them to develop new strategies (Authors, 2016). "Eye-opening" experiences occurred in college, full-time work, and graduate school contexts (Author, 2012, 2016). Among seven of the 11 participants, racial dissonance emerged in college through one or more of a total of ten different types of undergraduate experiences (see Table 1).

Importantly, all 11 participants described undergraduate experiences that influenced their racial identity construction in some way, but not all of these experiences generated racial dissonance. Some experiences contributed instead to other parts of the developmental process of racial identity construction, such as denying White privilege (Authors, 2016) or becoming more racially conscious (Author, 2012). This analysis only includes undergraduate experiences that served as catalysts for racial dissonance, which was the case for seven participants. For the other four participants, ra-

cial dissonance emerged through graduate school experiences (Author, 2016), as well as personal and work experiences (Author, 2012).

Findings

Findings include 10 undergraduate experiences that generated racial dissonance among seven White women in this study (see Table 1). Co-curricular experiences included participating in a student government-sponsored intergroup dialogue, multicultural student organizations, or residence life-sponsored programming; holding an RA position; having a student affairs professional mentor with race-related interests; and attending pre-professional conferences. Academic experiences included social science coursework, service-learning (especially experiences involving reflection), study abroad (which included coursework as well as co-curricular experiences), and having a faculty mentor with race-related interests. The following sections present findings that illustrate how these experiences contributed to racial dissonance among seven participants.

"Life Lessons": Opening One's Eyes through Co-Curricular Experiences in College

During the summer between her senior year of high school and first year of college, Michelle found out that her assigned roommate was a Black woman from a large city in a region of the country about which Michelle knew almost nothing. Questioning whether she wanted to "live with that person" and whether it would "be a good experience," Michelle turned to her mom, who simply replied, "You're doing it. It is a life lesson. That is what college is for." Co-curricular experiences provided many "life lessons" about race – in some cases for the first time, as Rachel explained: "It wasn't until I hit college that I really realized or articulated that there are people of different races, or ... the troubles that it sometimes causes."

Most participants lived in residence halls for part or all of their time in college, and many became resident assistants (RAs) or held other student staff positions in residence life. Through experiences and relationships formed in residential settings,

Table 1: *Influential Undergraduate Experiences*

Academic	Co-Curricular
Social science coursework	Difficult dialogue sponsored by student government
Service-learning (especially experiences involving reflection)	Multicultural student organization participation
Study abroad	Resident assistant position
Faculty mentors with race-related interests	Residential programming related to diversity
	Professional mentors with race-related interests
	Pre-professional conferences

participants' eyes were opened to the daily realities of racism and White privilege. Rachel recalled:

> My freshman year, the hall director at the time, I remember him saying ... we watched American History X as a program. He at one point said that basically because he is White he is racist. … To me at the time that was a profound statement. It still kind of is. I think that was one of the starters for me.

Confronted with the idea that racism might be a social structural phenomenon rather than an individual one, Rachel began to consider racism as something larger than hateful epithets spewed by isolated individuals and seek more knowledge about racism and White privilege.

For Stephanie, racism and White privilege began to "hit home" in her RA role. On her way to the dining hall with fellow RAs and their supervising hall manager (a more experienced student staff member), Stephanie reacted to someone's anecdote with the offhanded comment, "That's so ghetto." The hall manager stopped in her tracks, turned to Stephanie, looked her in the eye, and said, "That's not appropriate." She turned away, and the conversation resumed. Stephanie recalled this confrontation vividly:

> I don't even know if she would remember calling me out on it, but it's like one of those things that now I'm thankful that she did…[S]he definitely made an impact. And it was a lifelong impact and it was just that five-second 'that's not appropriate,' and that look that she gave me, like, "You just said that. I cannot believe you just said that." It was one of those things that I will remember forever.

The "lifelong impact" of this conversation was quite evident to Stephanie when reflecting on undergraduate experiences that had opened her eyes to racism and White privilege.

Besides residential experiences, several other co-curricular experiences opened participants' eyes to racism and White privilege. Rachel recalled participating in difficult conversations about racist campus parties through her student government role:

> I remember one year we had, for Halloween, a couple of students painted themselves black…. Someone posted posters on campus with these pictures from Facebook and saying it was blackface, so that kind of sparked a whole lot of conversations on campus. I was in student government and so I attended these conversations. I remember [it] being kind of pivotal, just talking with other students.

In Rachel's words, "being involved on campus really helped" her to develop an understanding of racist incidents and their harmful impact on students of Color.

International travel was another catalyst for opening one's eyes to racism and White privilege. Alexandria described studying abroad in Germany was one of the best decisions she had ever made. In Germany, Alexandria "felt completely out of [her] bubble" and was "thrown into a whole new world." One of the most powerful aspects of her experience was learning about discrimination against Turkish individuals, Germany's largest ethnic minority group:

> A couple of the German friends that I made while I was there they made comments about the Turkish population taking their jobs and stuff like that. … They're still technically Germans because they were born in Germany but they're viewed as outsiders because they're coming from a different culture or a different country, which is how I related it to the U.S. …The U.S. has always had negative stereotypes of African Americans and just seeing that … every culture has their own difficulties they need to work through…. It got me thinking about these issues.

Describing her time in Europe as "never very far from [her] mind," Alexandria concluded that her study abroad experience "helped [her] look at things from other lenses or

other perspectives," including "how different areas look at race and culture."

Although Lucy, too, encountered racism as part of a study abroad term in college, it was a service-learning course that first prompted her to think more deeply about race. From serving soup at an overnight ministry in a large city near campus, Lucy recalled:

> I think I kind of started seeing a connection with race and social class and just with the people that were there it was a lot of working poor people and a lot of people were primarily African American or Hispanic and had kids or had grandkids at home that they needed to take food to. …It was just one night but I think that was the first time that I had really gone out of my comfort zone.

This experience led Lucy to take another intercultural service-learning course where she worked with an Iranian refugee family, and then to travel to New Orleans with Habitat for Humanity to build houses "right after Hurricane Katrina." Lucy's service and service-learning experiences generated dissonance and forced her to recognize the pervasiveness of racism.

Becky was also involved with Habitat for Humanity and "did a couple of alternative breaks," including one in New Orleans. In addition to "an outlet" for her energy and meeting people, Becky credited her Habitat involvement and her coursework with increased awareness of racism and White privilege. Academic and co-curricular learning were intertwined for many participants in their eye-opening encounters with racism and White privilege.

"Every Page I Turned": Opening One's Eyes through College Coursework

Not all participants encountered racism, White privilege, or social justice as topics in their undergraduate coursework. In fact, Zoey explained that unlike some of her graduate school peers, "the concept of social justice is a little bit more foreign because it wasn't something that I encountered a whole lot in college." However, four participants did encounter these topics in undergraduate social science courses, and these encounters generated racial dissonance.

As a second-year student seeking to fulfill a "diversity requirement," Michaela signed up for her first multicultural studies course despite hearing from "all [her] White friends" that the course was "just about everything White people have done wrong." Michaela was at a loss for words as she attempted to describe the impact of reading about privilege, oppression, identity, and difference at a time when she was beginning to recognize both her lesbian identity and her White identity:

> [I]t was finally a point where I felt like I could put what I was thinking about my own identity into words. …I finally could put language to all of the different things I was kind of thinking and experiencing, and I was just totally enamored, and I don't even have words that – I just was reading this and I felt so strongly, and so, yes, I just, every page I turned I went, 'yes, yes, that's right.'

Reading statistics about racial inequities and reflecting on the role of White privilege in her upbringing, Michaela found this course "really eye-opening."

Becky had a similar experience in her sociology courses, encountering some of the same readings and, like Michaela, engaging in class discussions and personal reflections about racism and White privilege:

> It just kind of, like, exploded on my life, because I became a sociology major. I think if I would have been any other major, it would have been a lot more slow and those conversations wouldn't have been had…you jump right into it in that field.

Becky's academic major caused the topic of race to "explode on her life" and thus opened her eyes to racism and White privilege.

Mirroring Michaela's experience in multicultural studies, Rachel found her way to her college's social justice major serendipitously. Having enjoyed a religion class, Ra-

chel met with the professor (who would become her advisor) and asked for advice on selecting a major. Encouraged to consider the social justice major, Rachel chose a concentration in women's studies and continued to take religion classes. The opportunity to talk about "different cultures and different religions" through her coursework opened Rachel's eyes to racism. When she learned something new, she would often "ask people what they think" outside of class, including in her co-curricular experiences. Conversations with peers allowed Rachel to clarify and strengthen her own perspectives and appreciate the viewpoints of others.

Finally, Lucy described several eye-opening undergraduate coursework experiences. In the course through which she volunteered at the nighttime ministry, Lucy encountered readings and ideas that "got [her] thinking more about intercultural topics and social justice." That course propelled her to enroll the following semester in psychology, intercultural studies, and communication courses focusing on social justice issues. After declaring a major in intercultural studies, Lucy took a course facilitated by "a phenomenal professor" who provided opportunities to talk about "race and White privilege" and to journal about these topics as well, which was a new experience. Lucy "took a lot away" from that class and connected it "to who [she] was as an individual in terms of…racial identity." This and other courses allowed Lucy to integrate learning from co-curricular experiences, including service-learning, activism, student organization involvement, an RA position, and study abroad experiences. Thus, academic and co-curricular experiences worked together to open Lucy's eyes to racism and White privilege.

Discussion

This study included 11 White cisgender women who were full-time, second-year students in HESA master's degree programs. All of the participants named college experiences that contributed to their racial identi-

ty construction in some way, but this analysis only included the seven participants who reported college experiences that generated racial dissonance. Collectively, these seven participants identified four academic and six co-curricular experiences that forced them to abandon old ways of thinking and "open their eyes" to racism and White privilege as part of a developmental process of racial identity construction (Author, 2012).

Findings highlight several challenges and concerns. Among the seven participants in this analysis, findings collectively illustrated the presence of most characteristics that facilitate critical understandings of identity (Jones & Abes, 2013), yet most individual participants experienced only one. Further, the quality, quantity, depth, and longer-term influences of participants' experiences differed across participants. If White college students encounter racial dissonance through one-time educational experiences with limited opportunities for reflection or engagement, such experiences – even if high in quality – are unlikely to advance racial identity development or intercultural maturity (King et al., 2013; Ortiz & Rhoads, 2000). Also, seven of the 11 original study participants (Author, 2012) described racial dissonance-generating college experiences, yet four participants did not report having any such experiences in college. Postsecondary institutions do not provide racially minoritized students with equitable access to high-impact educational experiences (Kuh, 2008; Museus & Jayakumar, 2012), yet this study suggests that even among racially majoritized students, college does not necessarily facilitate critical identity exploration.

Still, this study affirms Jones and Abes's (2013) framework of characteristics of educational contexts that facilitate critical understanding of identity. In addition to dissonance, decentering, and disequilibrium (the ninth of Jones and Abes's [2013] 10 characteristics), the experiences of participants in this analysis resonate with eight more characteristics: critical analysis of systems of

power and oppression (for example, Michaela and Becky's sociology and multicultural studies coursework); critical self-reflection (the journaling requirement in Lucy's course on race and equity); cross-cultural interaction, immersion, and border crossing (Lucy's service-learning and Alexandria's study abroad experiences); sustained engagement (Michelle living with a Black roommate during her first year); and intergroup dialogue (Rachel's participation in dialogues about racist campus parties).

In addition to Jones and Abes's (2013) framework, findings also resonate with prior literature about intercultural learning (King et al., 2013); deconstructing Whiteness in multicultural education (Ortiz & Rhoads, 2000); the role of learning activities at different levels of racial self-understanding (Quaye & Baxter Magolda, 2007); and the need for engagement, facilitation, reflection, and action opportunities in learning experiences for White students (Reason, 2014). Further, participants' experiences occurred in both academic and co-curricular contexts. Encouragingly, participants recalled several instances in academic and co-curricular experiences enhanced each other. Integrating knowledge across contexts is "essential to deep, meaningful learning experiences" (Kuh, 2008, p. 17) that generate positive student outcomes. Findings are also encouraging because they emerged from the voices of graduate students as they reflected on their undergraduate experiences. Few studies offer insights into long-term effects of college (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Thus, findings from this study not only affirm prior research on college experiences that facilitate critical understandings of social identity (Jones & Abes, 2013), but they also point to possibilities for the longer-term outcomes of these experiences.

Such possibilities may be difficult to achieve, though, if the uneven reporting of dissonance-generating experiences in this study mirrors the college-going population as a whole. The infrequency of dissonance-generating experiences in this study is especially concerning because participants were preparing to enter student affairs, where social justice and inclusion is a core professional competency (ACPA & NASPA, 2015). College educators who lack intercultural maturity (Perez et al., 2015) are unlikely to become institutional change agents (Jones & Abes, 2013). Yet, intercultural maturity is often a product of social identity exploration, which may hinge on dissonance-generating experiences (Jones & Abes, 3013; Authors, 2016). If, like these participants, White women are entering student affairs without having experienced racial dissonance as undergraduates, it falls to graduate preparation programs to provide such experiences. Unfortunately, HESA programs do not necessarily offer experiences that facilitate racial dissonance (Author, 2016). Even if they do experience dissonance, White students in HESA programs also regularly commit microaggressions against students of Color (Linder, Harris, Allen, & Hubain, 2015) and act in ways that protect their Whiteness (Bondi, 2012). These graduate program dynamics echo findings from the student affairs profession, where White women who deny their racial privilege marginalize their colleagues of Color (Accapadi, 2007). Thus, the failure of undergraduate experiences to facilitate racial dissonance among White cisgender women interested in student affairs has implications both for the undergraduate students with whom these future professionals will work, and for the racial climate of HESA graduate programs and the profession itself.

Implications and Recommendations

Findings from this study offer several implications for college educators. First, this study adds support to the already well-supported claim that both academic and co-curricular contexts play a pivotal role in developing college students' capacity to address twenty-first century challenges (Hurtado et al., 2012; Kuh, 2008; Museus & Jayakumar, 2012). For this reason student and academic affairs educators should

devote renewed attention to creating and sustaining learning environments that facilitate border crossing, critical self-reflection, and dialogue across difference. These and other characteristics contribute to critical identity exploration (Jones & Abes, 2013), which in turn facilitates critical consciousness and the capacity to contribute to diverse democracies (Perez et al., 2015). As one example for practice, institutional assessment professionals might use Jones and Abes's (2013) characteristics to develop interview and focus group protocols to assess how (and whether) students' academic and co-curricular experiences facilitate critical identity exploration.

Yet, the call to facilitate social identity exploration in general must not overshadow the importance of facilitating racial dissonance among White students. This study adds to existing evidence (e.g., Ortiz & Rhoads, 2000; Quaye & Baxter Magolda, 2007) that colleges do not currently provide all students with developmental opportunities in relation to race. Experiencing dissonance in relation to one's racially privileged identity is vital for both individual development and institutional transformation (Watt, 2015).

The need for transformation extends not only to remedying racial inequities in undergraduate experiences and outcomes (Museus & Jayakumar, 2012), but to the student affairs profession. Recent research (e.g., Linder et al., 2015) and activism (e.g., the #Blksapblackout movement led by Black student affairs professionals) provide evidence that professionals of Color regularly experience racism in the profession. Thus, student affairs educators must attend to sustainable working and learning environments for professionals, not just students, which means fostering a racial climate that decenters Whiteness and supports professionals of Color. As one component of this effort, student affairs educators should recognize that if, as this study suggests, many White cisgender women in HESA programs do not report experiencing racial dissonance

until graduate school, then new White professionals may not be much different than undergraduates when it comes to intercultural maturity. Supervisors should therefore work carefully with new White professionals to facilitate their developing competency in Social Justice and Inclusion (ACPA & NASPA, 2015).

This study also offers implications for future research. First, additional research in student affairs and higher education might explore racial dissonance among multiracial professionals and professionals of Color. Second, while this analysis examined students in HESA graduate programs, future studies might consider experiences with racial dissonance among graduate students in other disciplines. A quantitative investigation of racial dissonance among White college students might identify predictors of this important developmental catalyst. Finally, future research might also examine dissonance in relation to race's intersections with other social identities, such as class, gender, and sexual orientation.

The public increasingly calls upon postsecondary institutions to produce college graduates capable of contributing to complex, diverse democracies. To make such contributions, whether in student affairs or any other profession, college graduates need experiences that force them to unearth and question previously unexamined assumptions about who they are in relation to social categories, particularly race. Such experiences are essential for understanding racial oppression, which remains one of the most vexing impediments to democracy in the United States and beyond. College educators must therefore not shy away from the challenge of providing such experiences, however daunting this responsibility may seem.

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