Views Toward American Culture, Race, and Ethnicity Among College Students

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This pilot study will examine whether or not there is significant variation in acceptance of pre-ascribed “American Values” based on a person's racial or ethnic background. More specifically, it will assess the degree to which white students adhere to these values in comparison to students of color. In addition, it will assess the degree to which people emphasize or de-emphasize their racial and ethnic experience as a part of their identity.

Introduction

An on-going exploration of notions of culture and racial identity development is critical in advancing the work of educational equity, social justice, and cross-cultural counseling, just to name a few. Examining cultural values labeled as “American” enables one to examine how these values are shaped, perceived, and adhered to. The following literature review suggests that white Americans as a group tend to have a unique perspective on their cultural, racial, and ethnic background, when compared to people of color. While each individual has a unique experience in terms of their racial identity, recognizing some trends could be helpful in understanding racial issues of today.

Literature Review

Numerous studies have been conducted and theories devised related to racial identity development of people of color (Atkinson, Mortenson, & Sue, 1989; Cross, 1971; Helms, 1990). These researchers suggest that people go through certain stages of their life that increase their sense of self in terms of whom they are racially and ethnically. Recently, there have been studies focusing specifically on white racial identity development (Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1984; Ponterotto, 1988). Research suggests that people of color have significantly different racial identity development processes and perceptions than whites.

Few white people actually see themselves “white” and often feel that they are not a part of contemporary multicultural society. White people tend to avoid discussing their race because they believe that they are viewed as the oppressor or enemy. Indeed, the author has discovered that it is a very difficult process to acknowledge, understand, and deal with being white. Even today, when discussion of white identity and “whiteness” arises in the context of promoting multiculturalism, particularly in higher education, much of the discussion remains intellectualized and does not acknowledge the pain that a white person goes through in realizing and maturing in his or her identity. Moreover, many white people feel “left out” of the discussion because they conclude that they have “forfeited” their ethnic and cultural heritage as a consequence of being white. Further exploration of culture may foster inclusion among whites to explore their cultural and ethnic heritage, while also seeing themselves as contributors to the solutions of race relations issues of today.

Whiteness

There is an emerging area of research and writing in academia that is referred to as “whiteness” or “whiteness studies.” Although by no means a new topic, it has been until the early eighties that white scholars have begun to write journal articles and conduct research
regarding issues of whiteness. It is important to note that people of color have been writing about notions of whiteness for well over a century, including W.E.B. Du Bois in the "Souls of Black Folk," and "Up From Slavery" by Booker T. Washington. These and other prominent leaders in history have written at length about the white experience and the effects of racism on people of color. The study of white peoples' culture, race and ethnicity, white privilege, and white identity development fall under this area of literature and research referred to as "whiteness" or "whiteness studies."

**American Culture**

The notion of an American Culture is an interesting one. This author suggests that any basis for an American Culture is that it consists primarily of white peoples' value systems. These values have been passed from generation to generation, beginning with the first white settlers to this country who gave up their ethnicity and culture, assimilating in order to achieve the "American Dream." Nevertheless, individuals including Kohls, Hofstede, Colin and Johns, and others, suggest there is an American Culture, but only the latter two acknowledge in their writing that it is based largely on "white urban corporate values" (Colin & Johns, 1991). Other researchers suggest that this "dichotomizing of cultures" is both limiting and inaccurate, and fails to take into account the "cultural connections leading to hybridization, the emergence of a heterogeneous global system, and its increasing cultural complexity" (Hermans & Kempen, 1998).

Kohls suggests that there are specific values which are definable as American as opposed to "white," which most Americans uphold in their lives in one form or another. He also suggests, however, that these same values are not knowingly accepted as "American," and that Americans would not agree that they have common values. This is due to the fact that one of their values is that of being an individual, and the right to choose the values they uphold or discard (Kohls, 1988). The thirteen values he suggests are the following:

1. Personal control over the environment/responsibility.
2. Change seen as natural and positive.
3. Time and its control
4. Equality/fairness
5. Individualism/independence
6. Self-help/initiative
7. Competition
8. Future orientation
9. Action/work orientation
10. Informality
11. Directness/openness/honesty
12. Practicality/efficiency

Eight of these thirteen items are used as key variables in this study, and are described in detail within the methods section of this report.

**White Privilege**

A second, and perhaps most critical concept within the literature on whiteness has to do with white privilege. Robert Jensen writes of an exchange he had with one of his students:
I’m sitting in my University of Texas office, talking to a very bright and very conservative white student about affirmative action in college admissions, which he opposes and I support. The student says he wants a level playing field with no unearned advantages for anyone. I ask him whether he thinks that being white has advantages in the United States. Have either of us, I ask, ever benefited from being white in a world run mostly by white people? Yes, he concedes, there is something real and tangible we could call white privilege (Jensen, 1999).

In her article “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,” Peggy McIntosh describes white privilege as “an invisible package of unearned assets which I (as a white person) can count on cashing in on each day, but about which I was meant to remain oblivious” (McIntosh, 1988). bell hooks examines the notion of white privilege this way: “Power in contemporary society habitually passes itself off as embodied in the normal as opposed to the superior. This is common in all forms of power, but it works in a particularly seductive way with whiteness, because of the way it seems rooted, in common sense thought, in things other than ethnic difference” (hooks, 1997). Still other authors from decades past wrote about the detrimental affects of white privilege on white people themselves. Myrdal writes about the guilt and shame associated with white privilege, described as “…the deep cultural and psychological conflict among the American people of American ideals of equality, freedom, God-given dignity of the individual, inalienable rights on the one hand, against practices of discrimination, humiliation, insult, denial of opportunity to Negroes and others in a racist society on the other” (Myrdal, 1944). Du Bois further writes about the tendency of white people to deny their privilege and maintain superiority over people of color. He describes this as being to the white person’s detriment when he writes, “Unfortunate? Unfortunate. But where is the misfortune? Mine? Am I in my blackness, the sole sufferer? I suffer. And yet somehow, above the suffering, above the shackled anger that beats the bars, above the hurt that crazes there surges in me a vast pity - pity for people imprisoned and enthralled, hampered and made miserable for such a cause, for such a fantasy” (Du Bois, 1903).

White Identity Development

A third notion of this concept of Whiteness, and the purpose for the specific examination of race and ethnicity in this study, has to do with White Identity Development. White Identity Development is a process of realization and awareness experienced by white people as they interact with people of different cultural backgrounds and experience multiculturalism in their lives. White Identity Development, unlike ethnic identity development, assumes white people are a part of the dominant culture and possess certain unearned privileges based on their white skin color (McIntosh, 1988). As a result, white peoples’ identity development process may depend on intentional or frequent contact, or critical incidents experienced with, people of color throughout their lives.

Several researchers have defined White Identity Development in terms of stage models. Helms suggests “a healthy white identity develops via a two phase process, abandonment of racism and evolution of a non-racist identity” (Helms, 1992). Other stage models, including the Helms model, typically assume that whites have a lack of awareness of self as a racial being (Helms, 1990) or attempt to ignore race and whiteness by focusing on a person’s “humanness” (Terry, 1975). Through interaction with people of color, whites become aware intellectually of themselves as racial beings (Carney & Kahn, 1984; Hardiman, 1982; Helms 1984). A period of dissonance occurs in the third and fourth stages of several models, where whites experience conflict, guilt, and anger over their understanding of themselves racially and others in society (Carney & Kahn, 1984; Kovel, 1970; Helms, 1984). Next, whites often over-identify with people of color in order to deal with inner conflict (Carney & Kahn, 1984; Kovel, 1970; Helms, 1984; Terry 1975). The final stage(s) involve internalizing one’s own identity as a white person and developing anti-racist tendencies and healthy interactions with people of color.
The progression of development envisioned by these models is not necessarily linear, so that "in reality the movement may be more complex, marked by loops into previous stages at various choice points." Some have proposed that white identity development is not linear at all. Rather, they suggest that whites can be at any given level of racial consciousness or lack of consciousness at any time (Rowe, Bennet, & Atkinson, 1994). Furthermore, these researchers believe that viewing white identity development "as a process parallel to minority identity development is not merited (Id.)." Nevertheless, recognition and development of a healthy white identity may have positive impact on the emotional development (Karp, 1981), mental health (Pettigrew, 1981), and socialization of whites (Dennis, 1981).

Specific Research Questions

This study aims to gain information on two questions. The first question is to what degree do people of various racial and ethnic backgrounds identify with a set of "American values" or cultural norms? The hypothesis is that people who identify as white, Caucasian, or European American identify more with these values than people of color. Particular emphasis will be placed on how respondent’s view American Culture as it relates to the following characteristics as described by Kohls:

- **Time and its control:** Time is seen as an important value as indicated by the stress put on being on time in American Culture. Furthermore, Americans indicate how precious time is by continuously explaining how it is "spent," "wasted," "lost," "gained," and "made the most of."

- **Individualism/Independence:** Although belonging to many number of groups, Americans perceive themselves as "more individualistic in their thoughts and actions than, in fact, they really are" (Kohls, 1988). The notion of one having privacy is of utmost importance in American values, while no similar term exists in many non-western cultures. Hofstede identified this notion attributable to Americans in what he refers to as the Individualism/Collectivism dimension (Hofstede, 1981)

- **Future orientation:** Americans typically devalue the past and the present, and are continually putting their hopes into a "brighter future."

- **Competition:** "Americans believe that competition brings out the best in any individual" (Kohls, 1988). Competition is taught at a very young age in terms of ‘having the right answer’ over other children in class. Americans feel strongly that a highly competitive economy will bring out the best in its people and, ultimately, that the society which fosters competition will progress most rapidly (Kohls, 1988). This is also described as the need for achievement dimension in Hofstede’s model of cultural value systems (Hofstede, 1981.)

- **Action/work orientation:** Productivity, happiness, and a good life are associated with constantly being active, busy, and working hard. Slowing down at work or taking breaks or vacations has to be justified after working “really hard.”

- **Informality:** Unlike other countries, some informality of American Culture is calling people in positions of authority by their first names, and even more extreme, questioning authority. Americans in positions of authority see it as a form of a compliment to allow others to address them this way. Dress in this country is also largely informal.
Directness/Openness/Honesty—Americans generally prefer to give the most direct feedback possible, and may publicly do so often. On the other hand, other cultures have developed the notion of “saving face” and have “developed subtle, sometimes highly ritualistic, ways of informing other people of unpleasant information” (Kohls, 1988).

The second question posed in this study is to what degree do people identify racially or ethnically? This author hypothesizes that people who identify as white, Caucasian, or European American do not identify as strongly with their race or ethnicity as people of color. This is reinforced by the work described in the literature review of Peggy McIntosh, Robert Jensen, bell hooks, and others on the impact of white privilege on white Americans. Particular emphasis will be placed on responses to those questions which address race and ethnicity.

Methods

Sampling Procedure

The sample (n=61) was drawn from the total population of students attending a medium sized culturally and ethnically diverse institution of higher education. Two undergraduate courses were surveyed: one introductory general education course and one advanced course in a specific academic discipline. Participants were asked to complete the survey in November 1999 during an actual course session. Approximately 87% of the students enrolled in the two courses completed the survey.

Demographic Information

Of all 61 respondents, 25 (41%) identified themselves ethnically as Asian and Pacific Islander, zero (0%) as Black/African American, seven (11%) as Chicano-a/Latino-a/Hispanic, 25 (41%) as Caucasian/White/European American, three (4%) as Native American/American Indian, and eight (13%) as Other. Respondents were given the opportunity to check all ethnic backgrounds that apply. Campus demographics based on ethnicity indicate that this pilot study does not contain a representative sample. The campus student ethnic breakdown is as follows: 38.4% Asian and Pacific Islander, 4.1% Black/African American, 25.7% Chicano-a/ Latino-a/Hispanic, 31.3% Caucasian/White/European American, and .6% Native American. Thirty-eight of the respondents were female and twenty-three were male. Ten of the students were ages 25 or older, and 51 of the students were between the ages of 18 and 24.

Variable Definitions

A 25-item questionnaire and an additional page of demographic questions were developed to examine the two primary research questions for this study. The first research question, which addresses respondents’ views on American Culture as defined by Kohls, was addressed by 18 survey questions dealing with the following variables: Time and its control, individualism/independence, future orientation, competition, action/work orientation, informality and directness/openness/honesty. Each variable was addressed by one or more survey questions, measured by a Likert Scale with responses Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree, and were analyzed using frequency distributions and cross tabulations. For purposes of this pilot study and small sample size, ratings were collapsed into Agree or Disagree responses.

To address the variable of time and its control for example, statements such as “being 15 minutes late to a meeting is unprofessional” and “I feel that it is rude to be 20 minutes late to
a social engagement” are used. The statements “I feel most productive when I am busy,” and “If you work hard you will succeed,” address the cultural value of Action/Work orientation. Two statements address the variable “informality”: “It is acceptable to question authority,” and “There are certain ways you should act in different types of settings.” These and the four other American Culture values were scored and analyzed using frequency distributions and cross tabulations to determine any significance in the level of adherence to these values based on racial and ethnic background. The remaining eight questions are used to look at the variables of race and ethnicity. Questions such as “I rarely pay attention to my race,” or “my ethnicity is one of the most important parts of who I am,” address the degree to which respondents place emphasis on these parts of their identity. Again, ratings were collapsed into Agree or Disagree responses for the purpose of this pilot study. Frequency distributions and cross tabulations were used to determine any significance based on a respondent’s own race and ethnicity.

Results

Responses to American Culture Value Questions

Overall results of the students’ perceptions showed mixed reactions to the degree in which they agreed with each of the American Culture values defined by this study. Time and its control appeared to be the most adhered to American Culture value, and having a future orientation appeared to be the least held value of the group. Hispanics, Native Americans, and those who marked Other, value their past more than Asian Americans and whites.

The question addressing the issue of competition was indirect, and would need to be modified in the future if it were to determine the accuracy of respondents’ perception on competition. While a low mean would indicate more concern for problem solving than relationships, it is not certain that this can be inferred to describe a competitive nature on behalf of the respondents.

The questions that stressed the need for a person’s sense of individualism had mixed results. Most people valued quiet time for personal reflection, while the two questions addressing individualism and independence were less important to a majority of respondents. The first two questions may have been perceived in a work setting and the other in a personal environment.

The value of an action/work orientation was highly favorable among most respondents. The most strongly held belief was if you work hard you will succeed. The value of informality yielded inconclusive responses. While a majority felt that it was acceptable to question authority, including their parent’s authority, they also felt strongly that there are certain ways one should act in specific situations, suggesting a formal approach to different settings one is in.

Directness and openness were largely held values of respondents. Closer analysis of their favorable responses reveal that while they prefer to be told directly if people have a problem with them, they are not as likely to be as direct in confronting another person.

Responses to Racial and Ethnic Identity Questions

Responses to the racial and ethnic identity questions indicated that most people are aware of their ethnic identity and some feel that it is an important part of who they are. Most respondents feel that they rarely pay attention to the race of others and agree that we are all a part of the human race. However, most participants disagreed that it is unimportant to think about racial issues.
Analysis

American Culture Values

The first question of this study was to determine to what degree people of various racial and ethnic backgrounds identify with a set of American Culture values. Diagram 1 displays cross tabulations between respondents’ ethnic backgrounds and adherence to these values. The study revealed that Hispanics on average agreed that it is more important to maintain a relationship than solve a problem. Each of the other ethnic groups represented in this survey, on average, responded that it was more important to solve the problem than maintain the relationship.

All but four respondents in the entire survey preferred that someone tell them directly if they had a problem with them, yet respondents were less likely to want to tell somebody else directly if they had a problem with them. Eight of the Asian and Pacific Islander respondents (32%) did not prefer direct confrontation, while eight whites strongly preferred this approach to resolving a problem. Only five others, including three whites and two who marked Other, did not prefer to tell someone directly that they had a problem with him or her.

Whites, Asian Americans, and Native Americans answered favorably to working in groups, while those who marked other and Hispanics preferred to work by themselves. Hispanics, Native Americans, and those who marked Other, on average, place more emphasis on their past than do Asian Americans and whites. Asian Americans demonstrated identified with the slogan “time is money” more than any other group (72%), while whites and those who marked Other were split on this variable. Native Americans and Hispanics disagreed with this notion.
## American Culture Responses-Diagram 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maintain a relationship is more important than solving the problem.</th>
<th>Asian and Pacific Islander</th>
<th>Hispanics</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Native American</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I value quiet time for personal reflection.</th>
<th>Asian and Pacific Islander</th>
<th>Hispanics</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Native American</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>It is not acceptable to question my parent's authority.</th>
<th>Asian and Pacific Islander</th>
<th>Hispanics</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Native American</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I prefer someone to tell me directly if they have a problem with me.</th>
<th>Asian and Pacific Islander</th>
<th>Hispanics</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Native American</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I prefer to tell someone directly if I have a problem with him or her.</th>
<th>Asian and Pacific Islander</th>
<th>Hispanics</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Native American</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I prefer working on a project with groups rather than by myself.</th>
<th>Asian and Pacific Islander</th>
<th>Hispanics</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Native American</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>18*</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>18*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>6*</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>7*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What’s in the past is not as important as what is in the future.</th>
<th>Asian and Pacific Islander</th>
<th>Hispanics</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Native American</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I believe in the slogan “time is money.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

72% 15%

I feel that it is rude to be twenty minutes late to a social engagement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

70% 25%

Race and Ethnicity Responses

The second question of this study was to determine to what degree do people identify racially or ethnically. Responses depicted in Diagram 2 suggest that people of color value more, or place more emphasis on their ethnicity as a part of their identity. Over 70 percent of Asian and Pacific Islanders, Hispanics, Native Americans, and those who specified Other felt that their ethnicity was one of the most important parts of who they were, compared to only 56 percent of whites. More people of color had values related to their ethnic background and felt their ethnic background was important to them.

Forty percent of the white respondents and 48 percent of the Asian and Pacific Islander respondents felt that it was not important to think about racial issues. Eighty-six percent of Hispanics felt that it was important to think about racial issues. Likewise, far higher percentages of Asian and Pacific Islanders and whites identified with the statement “we are all a part of one race, the human race,” than Hispanics.

Race and Ethnicity Responses-Diagram 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asian and Pacific Islander</th>
<th>Hispanics</th>
<th>White American</th>
<th>Native</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree 21 84%</td>
<td>Agree 4 57.1%</td>
<td>Agree 17 68%</td>
<td>Agree 3 100%</td>
<td>Agree 6 75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree 4 16%</td>
<td>Disagree 3 42.9%</td>
<td>Disagree 8 32%</td>
<td>Disagree 0 0%</td>
<td>Disagree 2 25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Agree 19 76% | Agree 5 71% | Agree 13 52% | Agree 1 33.3% | Agree 7 87.8% |
| Disagree 6 24% | Disagree 2 29% | Disagree 12 48% | Disagree 2 66.6% | Disagree 1 12.5% |
### Discussion and Interpretation

The hypotheses were supported in this study. Further research with a representative sample of African Americans and Hispanics may reveal even more conclusive data. Whites demonstrated a strong identification to these American values. Asian and Pacific Islanders identified with many of these values as well, but their responses also indicated a stronger sense of ethnic identity and a need to think about racial issues, perhaps due to discrimination. In some areas whites identified stronger with these values than all others. These included: their comfort level with confronting authority, desire for personal time alone, appropriateness of disagreeing with parents, and confronting others directly with problems. Asian and Pacific Islanders were disproportionately lower in desiring to confront others directly with problems, which may support a cultural characteristic of some Asian groups with regards to “saving face.” This value has to do with showing people a certain level of respect by indirectly revealing another person their faults in order to spare that person embarrassment.

Hispanics as a group were less likely to support these American values, although this was not conclusive in every category. In one instance Hispanics showed a disparity between whites and Asians with regards to emphasizing a relationship over the problem. This may support the cultural characteristic of some Hispanics who identify with a strong sense of family. On the other hand, Hispanics and those who marked other preferred to work alone on projects than in groups. This would seem to go against the collaborative cultural characteristic of
Hispanics, while it may properly reflect the alienation and sense of invisibility they experience in the institution. Some of these experiences are elaborately discussed in Tatum’s “Why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria” (Tatum, 1997).

While many of the American values that Kohl’s suggests appear to be validated by this pilot study, the data also seems to reveal that these values are created and adhered to more by whites than any other group. This has significance for further study of both whites’ and people of color’s experience in this country. First, it depicts a certain degree to which people of color have to assimilate in order to be fully accepted into American Culture. For whites, it suggests a notion of culture that they may not have been able to comprehend in the past (Dennis, 1981; Pettigrew, 1981; Karp, 1981). Further understanding of this process for whites could relate to the notion of white privilege (McIntosh, 1988), in that American values were formed by whites and are expected to be adhered to by all groups. Finally, examining these notions of culture and privilege for white Americans could start them on a journey toward understanding their white identity development, and enable them to identify constructive ways to address the issue of privilege and the effects it has on others (Helms 1990,1992; Hardiman, 1982; Howard, 1993; Row, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994).

This study suggests that people of color place far more emphasis on their ethnicity as a part of their identity when compared to whites. Part of the disparity between people of color and whites is due to the notion of white privilege defined in the literature by McIntosh and others. Because white people usually do not think of themselves as a member of a group, particularly a white or European American group, they do not feel that they identify with the values of a particular ethnic background. People of color are not viewed as “the norm” in terms of their race or their cultural customs, so they are viewed as culturally different and distinct from dominant American (white) cultural values. However, this study suggests that whites do in fact subscribe to specific values, they just do not name them white or American values. This has implications for all people in the true embracing of diversity in this country. It also emphasizes the loss of identity whites may experience when they are unable to connect their values and traditions to a particular part of their ethnic background.

The fact that 86 percent of Hispanics believed it was important to think about racial issues, compared to less than fifty percent of Asian and Pacific Islanders and whites, further emphasized the need for more Hispanics and African American respondents in this study. Both of these groups historically, and continually, deal with the adverse effects of racism (hooks, 1997, West, 1993). The high percentage of Hispanics who feel it is important to think about racial issues suggests that it is still an important issue in this country. Racial and ethnic differences with regard to values of American Culture and identity merit further study, so that differences can be embraced and appreciated. Only then will we truly be a part of one race, the human race.

References


Helms, Janet E. (1992). A race is a nice thing to have: A guide to being a white person or understanding the white persons in your life. Kansas: Content Communications.


