NEGOTIATING RACIAL INTERACTIONS AND BUILDING PEER CULTURE
IN A HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM

A Thesis

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Andrea Marie Nemeyer

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Department of Sociology
Abstract

of

NEGOTIATING RACIAL INTERACTIONS AND BUILDING PEER CULTURE
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by

Andrea Marie Nemeyer

How do students in a racially diverse classroom use race to interact and form peer cultures? In this study, I conducted participant observation for one year at an urban high school in the Sacramento City Unified School District. I developed both a least adult field role as well as a participant as observer field role. I found that the students developed a variety of methods when using race in their interactions in order to build their peer cultures. Students used self-referential stereotypes with same race peers and mirrored racial labels and stereotypes in interactions with peers from other racial groups. I also found that students explored race by probing the boundaries of racial and “racist” peer behavior. The results of the grounded theory analysis showed that students negotiated many different aspects of race in order to build their peer culture in their racially diverse high school classroom.

________________________, Committee Chair
Aya Kimura Ida, Ph.D.

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Date

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

The field of sociology has explored the topic of race in the high school setting in a variety of studies. Research in multiracial settings can help us learn about collaborative practices of children and adolescents (Moore 2002). In my research, I questioned how students in a racially diverse classroom used race to interact and form peer culture. I explored this topic using a qualitative analysis.

For this study, I adopted an interpretive reproduction framework. Interpretive reproduction is the main theoretical framework that argues that children and youth participate collectively, with other peers, in the process of socialization (Corsaro 2005). Through interpretive reproduction, children can build peer cultures. Peer cultures are defined as “a stable set of activities or routines, artifacts, values, and concerns that children produce and share in interaction with peers” (Corsaro 2005: 110). For my research, I also employ a social construction of race. The theory that race is socially constructed is based on race being defined by the way different groups (with biological differences) are treated in society, rather than on biological differences alone (Higginbotham and Andersen 2009, Tatum 1997). The review of the literature on this topic also shows patterns of interactions among both intraracial and interracial groups of children and adolescents.

My research centers on ethnography, specifically the use of participant observation. I observed a racially diverse classroom of freshman students in a local urban
high school in Sacramento, California. My two main field roles were participant as observer and the least adult role.

I conducted analysis of the data using a grounded theory approach. My analysis illustrates how these students negotiated racial interactions in order to build their peer culture. They accomplished this through a variety of techniques in different groups. In intraracial interactions, the students used self-referential stereotypes. In interracial interactions, the students used the technique of mirroring racial labels and stereotypes. Overall, the students also scrutinized the boundaries of racial and “racist” peer behavior.

My research does offer contributions to the current literature on this topic. I explored a setting where the majority of the students were non-White students and White students were the minority. Moore (2002) wrote that further research on this type of setting needed to be done. Wessler and DeAndrade (2006) stated that research on contact dynamics in environments where students of color are the majority needed to be addressed. This depicts how non-White students interact with other non-White students in terms of racial interactions, including how they group and differentiate themselves.

I also described the methods these students used to create peer groups, both intraracially and interracially. There needs to be more empirical research on the emergence and use of race in peer cultures (Moore 2002). My analysis covers this topic. Zisman and Wilson (1992) argued that there needs to be more research about peer group configuration. They also implied that more research needs to be done on the methods that teenagers use to form peer groups. My participant observation in the classroom setting allowed for the observance of these methods and how they were used on a daily basis.
Moore (2002) wrote that more research on kids’ peer cultures in multiracial settings can help us better grasp children’s collaborative practices and conceptions. Therefore, my research is confronting this exploratory gap and adding to the knowledge in this area.

My analysis also shows how these students used racial language on a daily basis. Wessler and DeAndrade (2006) explored the use of racial language in terms of bullying and verbal harassment. However their study heavily explored the after effects of this bullying and verbal harassment, and not the intent of the student. They also did not address how students can use racial language in a humorous way, or as a way to initiate interactions among friends, or even use it to create the possibility of new friendships. Racial stereotypes were noted by many researchers, however it was not explained how they can be used in multiple ways, not just negatively (Kao 2000, Tatum 1997). My research shows that students can use racial language in a variety of ways, not just as a means to bully or verbally harass. My study is significant in that it illustrates the range of possibilities for how students in a racially diverse classroom can use race to interact and form peer cultures.
Chapter Two

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many sociologists have investigated the role race plays in the high school classroom. In this research, I use an interpretive reproduction framework to examine how students who attended a racially diverse high school used race to interact and form peer cultures in the classroom. Peer cultures are created by youth, and through the structure and formation of their peer cultures, youth use race in a range of ways. Some students use race to draw boundaries between different groups and nurture friendships with same race peers. Some youth use these intraracial friendships to both avoid negative treatment from peers from other racial groups and to aim racial stereotypes or jokes at racial out group members. In contrast, some young people cross racial boundaries to build friendships and use racial language and jokes to forge connections across racial lines.

Interpretive Reproduction

Interpretive reproduction is a theoretical framework that offers an alternative to viewing the socialization of children as solely the child’s internalization of the adult world (Corsaro 2005). This perspective argues that children and youth participate collectively, with other peers, in the process of socialization. Interpretive reproduction is a two part concept. First, children participate in society and “create and participate in their own unique peer cultures by creatively taking or appropriating information from the adult world in order to address their own peer concerns” (Corsaro 2005: 349). Second, children do not simply internalize the information but rather actively contribute to society
and cultural production (Corsaro 2005). Two key elements in the interpretive reproduction process are language and cultural routines (Corsaro 2005). Adults and youth use language as a tool for establishing realities and building a symbolic system for local, social and cultural structure (Corsaro 2005). Further, cultural routines are the repetitive everyday activities produced by members of a particular culture (Corsaro 2005). Through interaction with adults, these routines provide children with the shared understanding of belonging to a social group, as well as provide a tool to help them deal with “ambiguities, the unexpected, and the problematic while remaining comfortable within the friendly confines of everyday life” (Corsaro 2005: 19).

Through the use of cultural routines, children’s membership in peer cultures evolves (Corsaro 2005). Peer cultures are defined as “a stable set of activities or routines, artifacts, values, and concerns that children produce and share in interaction with peers” (Corsaro 2005: 110). Children and youth interact with each other and establish social understandings that develop into social knowledge that they can constantly build on. Through interpretive reproduction, children take information from the adult world and creatively appropriate it to build their own peer culture, which then contributes back to the adult world’s culture (Corsaro 1992).

**The Social Construction of Race**

In peer cultures, students discuss topics of interest to them, even when those topics are ambiguous or controversial in adults’ eyes. Race is one such topic that can be unclear to adolescents due to the fact that it is socially constructed (Higginbotham and Andersen 2009). Race is not defined solely by biological difference, but rather by the
way different groups (with biological differences) are treated in society (Higginbotham and Andersen 2009, Tatum 1997). Similar to race, ethnicity is also a socially constructed category. An ethnic group is defined as “a socially defined group based on cultural criteria, such as language, customs, and shared history” (Tatum 1997:16). Ethnic identity and racial identity sometimes intersect (Tatum 1997).

The facets of our identity that capture our attention are those that other people notice and that are reflected back to us (Tatum 1997). In racially and ethnically diverse settings, children and youth make decisions about how to apply racial labels to self and others. They also make decisions about which groups they personally identify with. Indeed, we identify ourselves in relation to the social structures around us (Higginbotham and Andersen 2009).

Researchers have found that adolescents of color are more likely to be actively engaged in the exploration of their racial or ethnic identity than White adolescents due to the impact of dominant and subordinate status (Tatum 1997). During identity development, the child begins to realize what it means to be a member of a group targeted by racism and also begins to develop a heightened sense of the significance of race (Tatum 1997). Tatum (1997: 7) defines racism as a “system of advantage based on race”. American meritocracy shapes racism as being based on individual prejudice because it is more comfortable for people to think about it this way (Tatum 1997). The inability to understand membership in a racial group goes along with denial of any racial prejudice or racism (Chesler et al 2003). This inability to understand group memberships
can lead to differentiation among groups of people and result in intraracial grouping (Tatum 1997).

**Intraracial Grouping**

The social construction of race helps us understand why and how students decide to group themselves according to race (Aboud and Sankar 2007; Gottdiener and Malone 1985; Moore 2002; Rosenbloom 2004; Tatum 1997; Van Ausdale and Feagin 1996). Different peer cultures can create their own racial labels and their own unique way of using racial labels (Higginbotham and Andersen 2009). Adolescents use race categories to structure their peer cultures and negotiate hierarchal peer relations (Moore 2002). Children interact with each other and establish social understandings that develop into social knowledge (Corsaro 1992). Van Ausdale and Feagin (1996) showed that children are aware of racial concepts and labels, even from a very young age. As children grow older and interact with each other, they build knowledge in their peer cultures (Corsaro 1992). Racial labeling is just one facet of this knowledge in relation to race.

Racial labeling is one method that children use to distinguish groups (Van Ausdale and Feagin 1996). Students often arrange themselves into racially similar groups (Chesler et al 2003; Joyner and Kao 2000; Moore 2002; Tatum 1997). Previous research has been done on the homophily of friendships during adolescence (Joyner and Kao 2000; Lee and Walsh 2003; Rosenbloom 2004; Stearns, Buchman and Bonneau 2009). Homophily is the tendency for people to become friends with people who are similar to them, such as in terms of race (Stearns et al 2009). Rosenbloom (2004) found that racial and ethnic identity were the biggest divider between groups of friends, meaning people
were more likely to become friends with people of the same race or ethnicity. The habits of friendship formation during adolescence influences friendship formation later on in life as well (Stearns et al 2009).

One reason for intraracial grouping is to create a sense of identity as well as a sense of similarity with others (Tatum 1997). In a two year study of a mentor program in a Midwestern university, Latinas reacted to early discrimination by seeking out other Latinas in order to empathize with them as well as learn how to be successful from each other (Barajas and Pierce 2001). Tatum (1997) writes that racial grouping is a response to the environmental stressor of racism. These groupings arise due to the developmental need to explore the meaning of racial identity with others who are engaged in a similar process (Tatum 1997). Specifically, Tatum (1997) gives the example of Black kids who group themselves together with other Black kids because they need other people who are going through a similar process of identity development, who go through similar experiences, and who can feel empathy for them or relate to them.

Another reason for intraracial grouping is due to the fact that children and adolescents use race and ethnicity to divide themselves into in and out group members (Aboud and Sankar 2007). In a study on summer camps, the researcher used an interpretive reproduction perspective to study how campers used race category membership in order to develop group relations; more specifically in and out group memberships by race (Moore 2002). Some research shows that both dominant and minority group members try to avoid interacting with out-group members whenever possible (Shelton and Richeson 2005). Both whites and minorities tend to avoid contact
as a result of their fear of how they will be viewed and treated as being a member of their racial group during the interracial interactions (Shelton and Richeson 2005). A study on contact with children found that children who played with out-group members suffered devaluation and rejection from their peers (Castelli, Amicis, and Sherman 2007).

One reason adolescents remain in intraracial groupings is because cross-ethnic relationships run into barriers. One study found that a lot of the students said they did not spend time alone with cross-ethnic friends, and if they did, it was only at school (Aboud and Sankar 2007). One of the issues was that cross-ethnic friends did not mix well with same-ethnic friends. For example, they would stop telling secrets, or they would switch languages so the cross-ethnic friend would not understand what they were saying. This is a way to create a barrier among cross-racial friends.

Another barrier that can be present when trying to form cross-racial friendships is the use of stereotypes by peers (Van Ausdale and Feagin 1996). Stereotypes are defined as “oversimplified beliefs about members of a particular social group” (Higginbotham and Andersen 2009: 75). For example, Van Ausdale and Feagin (1996) found that young preschool children used stereotypes in their peer interactions such as when a White child told two different Black students that they could not have a white rabbit because “Blacks can’t have whites.” Stereotypes used by one’s peers can also affect behavior. For example, Kao (2000) found that students maintained racially and ethnically segregated extracurricular activities, which in turn reinforced segregated peer groups.

In addition to the use of stereotypes, passive racism can also be used in schools (Tatum 1997). Passive racism is more subtle and occurs in situations like laughing when
a racist joke is told (Tatum 1997). Due to the fact that the dominant group is seen as the norm, it becomes acceptable to tell jokes about a minority group (Tatum 1997). In a study on verbal harassment in middle and high schools, Wessler and DeAndrade (2006) found that the most mentioned examples of verbal harassment were focused on race, gender, sexual orientation and religion. These are all reasons why intraracial grouping is common.

**Interracial Interactions**

Although adolescents tend to make friends most often with other adolescents of the same race, cross racial friendships are still possible (Lee and Walsh 2003; Stearns et al 2009; Zisman and Wilson 1992). Joyner and Kao (2000) found that school racial composition accounts for a large part of the variation in interracial friendship by race. The chance of having an interracial friendship increases greatly as the proportion of same-race students decreases (Joyner and Kao 2000). In a study of social interactions during lunch periods, Zisman and Wilson (1992) found that although tight knit groups were racially homogenous, loose knit groups were integrated. The looseness of the group’s structure during lunch time and “table hopping” allowed students the opportunity to cross racial boundaries without losing membership in their “home base group.” The researchers concluded that interracial interactions tend to increase as the social units become less intimate (Zisman and Wilson 1992).

The school’s social context has a large impact on interracial friendship building (Williams 2010). Some research shows that intergroup contact is necessary in order to build friendships across group boundaries (Brown, Cameron and Rutland 2007; Shelton
and Richeson 2005). Intergroup friendships can reduce prejudiced attitudes and beliefs (Aberson, Porter and Gaffney 2008; Shelton and Richeson 2005). In one study, cross-race friendships rarely extended beyond school hours (Williams 2010). The social organization of the classroom also affects the students’ ability to interact cross racially (Williams 2010). Classroom activities and seating arrangements play a significant role in making friends during adolescence (Williams 2010). Whether or not this occurs depends on the teachers’ willingness to place the students in positions to do so (Williams 2010).

Along with cross racial friendships, adolescents can use inclusion techniques to interact with other adolescents cross racially (Moore 2002; Van Ausdale and Feagin 1996). Language plays an important role in interracial interactions (Van Ausdale and Feagin 1996). Lee and Walsh (2003) found that students who spoke different languages could communicate cross-racially if the communication was nonverbal or if the meaning of objects was agreed upon. In a study on preschool children, it was found that even though many students used race and ethnicity to differentiate themselves from each other, language differences were used to include other students as well (Van Ausdale and Feagin 1996). One example centered on a Chinese girl who taught the other students Chinese letters. The other students were eager to learn and write the Chinese letters, and eventually the letters began appearing on other children’s drawings and on the playground (Van Ausdale and Feagin 1996). Not only did this act as an inclusion technique for children of different races to interact, but it became a facet of their peer culture and environment (Van Ausdale and Feagin 1996). This inclusion technique
illustrates the use of interpretive reproduction that Corsaro (1992) discussed about peer cultures.

Another facet of interracial interactions that focuses on language is the use of racial jokes. One study found that most racial jokes were intended as a friendly greeting between students from different backgrounds (Wessler and DeAndrade 2006). Many of the students in the study said that it was acceptable to use degrading words and slurs as long as the intent was to be funny or clever. The researchers found that even though the intent was to be humorous, the students that were victims of the racist language were still hurt.

There are still some gaps in the literature when it comes to understanding how students in a racially diverse environment use race to interact and form peer cultures. Wessler and DeAndrade (2006) explored the use of racial language in terms of bullying and verbal harassment, but they did not address the use of racial language when taken humorously by other students. The use of racial stereotypes was also explored by researchers such as Tatum (1997) and Kao (2000), but it was not shown how adolescents use racial stereotypes in a context of interacting humorously with each other.

Zisman and Wilson (1992) write that there needs to be more research about peer group configuration. Peer group configurations are significant as peer groups are one of the first places teenagers create intimate relationships outside of their families. The methods they use to form groups also need to be studied (Zisman and Wilson 1992). Moore (2002) writes “Little of the literature, though, focuses empirically upon the
emergence and use of race in kids’ collaborative peer cultures,” specifically in multiracial settings. Therefore, my research can contribute to this topic.

Further work also needs to be done on settings where most of the children are minorities, as opposed to a predominantly White environment, in order to study how kids of color differentiate each other by race category (Moore 2002). Also, research on contact dynamics in environments where students of color are the majority needs to be addressed (Wessler and DeAndrade 2006). There needs to be more empirical research on the emergence and use of race in peer cultures (Moore 2002). My analysis seeks to address these gaps in the literature.
Chapter Three

METHODS

Qualitative research centers on face to face interactions and observations of the real events happening in everyday life (Bailey 2007). Ethnography is defined as a type of field research that requires long-term engagement in a natural setting (Bailey 2007). Ethnography allows the researcher to gain access to a specific group and conduct intense observation in order to discover what daily life is like for the members of that group (Corsaro 2005). Ethnography results in richly written descriptive and exploratory accounts of daily interactions, which respect the many facets of human experience (O’Reilly 2009). My research centers on the use of race in daily interactions and the formation of peer cultures among high school students. The formation of peer cultures is an ongoing process which is best studied directly (Corsaro 2005). Children produce and participate in their own peer cultures through their experiences with other people throughout their lives (Corsaro 2005). Interviews are also effective when studying youth as they allow the researcher to study topics in children’s lives that are very important and central yet are rarely discussed in day to day interactions, such as sensitive topics like racism (Corsaro 2005).

In this chapter I discuss the research site, the research site entry process, how the research was conducted, and researcher reflexivity. The research role also played a key part in how I conducted observations, and I explain how it developed over time as well as how I maintained my role in terms of ethics and everyday interactions.
I gathered data using participant observation and interviews. These data are part of a larger team ethnographic project designed by my thesis adviser, Dr. Hadley. The research team was headed by Dr. Hadley and included myself as well as an undergraduate student from California State University, Sacramento. The larger project focused on the Asian community and how Asian students manage their racial identity in the high school environment. Dr. Hadley invited me to join her team since I shared the same interests of how students in a racially diverse classroom use race and racial identities to interact and form peer cultures.

**Research Location**

We conducted the research at a urban high school in the Sacramento City Unified School District. The high school was a closed research site, meaning we had to gain permission in order to observe there (Bailey 2007). The pseudonym given to this high school is South High School. In the 2009-2010 school year, there were approximately 2,200 students (California Department of Education 2012). Dr. Hadley chose the site because it is a racially diverse high school. In the 2009-2010 school year, the school had only about 10 percent white students. There were about 15 percent African American students, 40 percent Latino students, and 30 percent Asian students (California Department of Education 2012). This high school was largely made up of working class students, with over half of the students coming from low-income families (California Department of Education 2012).

**Field Entry**
I completed the field entry process through a number of stages. Dr. Hadley designed the research, gained the administration’s permission to conduct research, and received Human Subjects approval from California State University, Sacramento, and the school district. We attended a staff orientation as a research team prior to the beginning of the school year. After the staff orientation, we obtained teacher permission to observe in the classrooms.

For my research, I observed two classes for a total of 185 hours. I observed an English Language Learner class for one semester that was comprised of students from grades nine through twelve. I also observed a regular freshman class for an entire year that consisted of Geography for one semester and a high school preparation class for another semester, called the First Year Success class. In this thesis I analyze data from the First Year Success class. This class was taught by a white male teacher. There were about 25 percent white students, 10 percent African American students, 50 percent Latino students, and 15 percent Asian students in Mr. Danielson’s classroom. (All names in this research are pseudonyms.)

In order to gain consent from the students to participate in the research, I gave a short but formal introduction in front of the class. Afterwards, students received consent forms that had the research explanation typed on them. Students took the consent forms home and got them signed by a parent or guardian, returned them, and also had a copy to keep. Any student who marked “no” on the consent form or who did not turn in the consent form was left out of the final research analysis.
As a participant observer, I sat in one of the student desks in the back of the classroom and took down jottings of everything that happened. Jottings were done with pencil in a notebook. I purposely wrote in very small print so that anyone passing by could not read what I was writing. Hand-written field notes were later converted to typed field notes.

The research team also conducted interviews during the second half of the year. We recruited participants for interviews in the classroom by making an announcement inviting students to participate and explaining that any student who participated would receive a 15 dollar gift card to a pre-chosen establishment after completing the interview. Once again, the students had to take a consent form home to get signed by a parent or guardian in order to complete the interview. All of my interviews were conducted on campus in the Student Center either at lunch or after school. The research team worked together to create the interview questions which covered topics focused on school activities, identities and home life. The students decided whether they wanted to do the interview alone or with another person. If they did the interview with another person, they chose the other person. I conducted 10 interviews with a total of 16 students from the First Year Success class. After all of the interviews were completed, I transcribed my interviews verbatim. The interviews helped me build on the relationships that I had already established with certain students, as well as open new communication with students I had not interacted with very much in the classroom.

**Research Role**
For my research, I used participant observation, which is the main method used in ethnography and involves taking part as a member of a community while actively observing (O’Reilly 2009). Since I was becoming a member of the community, I had to take on a research role. The research role affected how the participants viewed me and how they acted towards me (O’Reilly 2009). This is especially important for adults who study youth. I did not want to be seen as an authority figure. Pascoe (2007) writes about examples in her fieldwork where she had to negotiate her field roles in order to gain respect from the youth she was studying. She wrote “…negotiating age and authority differences is important when studying adolescents. I had to leave my ‘adultness’ behind and refrain from admonishing them for behaving like teens” (Pascoe 2007: 180). My two major field roles were participant as observer and the least adult role. My participant as observer role meant that I participated in the daily activities and that my research was mainly overt, or in other words the participants knew that I was conducting research and observations (O’Reilly 2009). My least adult role placed me in a specific position. Mandell (1988) states that a researcher can participate in a young child’s social world as a child, and suspend adult like characteristics, while at the same time still acknowledging that there are adult-child differences. A fully immersed role, however, is not possible or even desirable when studying older children (Fine and Sandstrom 1988). Fine and Sandstrom (1988) point out that one of the biggest differences between studying younger children and studying adolescents is that adolescents are closer to an adult age and can make their own decisions, including whether or not to accept a researcher’s presence (1988). Fine and Sandstrom (1988: 72) wrote “to observe adolescents means giving up
some of one’s ascribed, age-based ‘authority’ to learn about a world physically close and
cognitively similar, but often emotionally and socially distant” Mandell (1988:464)
defines the least adult role as “a membership role which suspends adult notions of
cognitive, social, and intellectual superiority and minimizes physical differences by
advocating that adult researchers closely follow children’s ways and interact within their
perspective.” Maintaining the least adult role meant that I attempted to fit in with the
students and act as a peer, while de-emphasizing the fact that I was an adult. While I did
not try to hide the fact that I was an adult; I did convey to the students that I was a non-
authoritarian observer.

Upon initial entrance into the field, I dressed casually but plainly, meaning I
dressed in order to not draw attention to myself. I wore a messenger bag instead of a
backpack in order to establish myself as an adult and not a student as I walked through
campus. I was an immediate outsider upon entering the field, which meant I received
curious looks from people when I walked around campus during passing periods.
McCorkel and Myers (2003) discuss the insider and outsider status for the researcher.
They explained how insider and outsider status is constantly shifting and how sharing
aspects of identity with research participants determines the researcher to be an insider or
an outsider.

When I first entered the field, students did not know anything about me outside
of physical looks. Because of this, I could easily be deemed an outsider, as I appeared to
be one by my physical appearance and lack of social connections with anyone. A few
times in the hallway, students purposely bumped into me as well as stared me down, as if
they were trying to figure out who I was. After a couple days of this happening, I wore a
name tag on my shirt while walking through campus that designated me as someone
associated with the school district. I wore this name tag only while walking through
campus, as opposed to in the classrooms, in order to avoid confrontation with the students
that did not know who I was. I only wore this for a few weeks, until my presence was
established. Then I was able to wear more casual clothing as well as a backpack, since the
students knew I was not a fellow student.

My field roles developed throughout the school year. There was a greater
emphasis on either my least adult field role or my participant as observer role depending
on day to day experiences. I constantly had to monitor my interactions and worry about
field role maintenance. For the first few weeks of observation, my main role was
participant as observer because most of the students were too shy to talk to me. Fine and
Sandstrom (1988) write that many researchers experience a period of a few weeks upon
initially entering the field of being a “nonperson” before the period of acceptance begins.
The only person who really talked to me during this time was the teacher. Here I was
careful to make sure I did not appear too chatty or friendly, as I did not want to alienate
the students. Fine and Sandstrom (1988) write about children being able to recognize the
need for an adult researcher to act both as a friend to them, while still having rapport with
adults in the setting.

Bailey (2007) defines rapport as trusting relationships between researcher and
participants in a setting. It was important to establish rapport with the teachers as they
had the authority in the classroom, as well as the ability to let us enter the classroom in
the first place. I wanted to show respect towards them but not encourage their chattiness or go out of my way to speak to them. Fine and Sandstrom (1988: 24) write “These rapport-building contacts enable one to obtain an informative perspective, while simultaneously ensuring that no objections are being raised to one’s actions.” Building rapport with the teachers was also important in order to get them to trust me so they felt comfortable with being themselves on an everyday basis. The teacher provided insight into the classroom during the initial stages of research through these conversations. For example, Mr. Danielson would explain why he designed his seating chart the way he did or why he used certain disciplinary measures.

Another key to my participant as observer role in the beginning of my field work was the fact that the teacher behaved in a way that made it clear he knew I was observing him. He was very friendly with me and asked me personal questions about my life and college career. The teacher had a habit in the beginning of looking over at me when certain things occurred. He was careful to correct “politically incorrect” statements the students made about race. For example, when an Asian student referred to an African American student as colored, he immediately disciplined the Asian student. This did not happen with every racial comment made as time wore on. He would also justify a lot of his disciplinary actions to me.

Since the purpose of the research was to focus on the students, I wanted to remain open to interactions with students and not be viewed as strictly an adult who was only interested in speaking to the teacher. As the time in the field continued, students slowly began to approach me and speak to me. Often times this was encouraged by one really
outgoing student. The class had one male student, Walter, who was very outgoing, funny and talkative. The outgoing male student approached me and interacted with me almost immediately. I viewed this outgoing male student as my student gatekeeper into learning about the peer culture and my least adult role, as he granted me access into socializing with the other students. My humorous interactions with Walter gave the other students some insight into how interactions with me might work. This allowed them to view me as an approachable person, and more students began to interact with me.

Walter held a leadership role in the student body, which made him not only central in the classroom, but well known to the entire school as a whole. The fact that he was so well known only helped me gain access to the other students through him because if I had bonded with a student that was a loner, or a quiet student, I might not have been able to socialize with the rest of the students like I did.

Generally, in the first couple of months my participant as observer and least adult roles were more or less maintained consistently. I slowly began to speak to more and more students. I joked around frequently with my gatekeeper student. My participant as observer role was also maintained with the teacher. My interactions with the teacher took on a little more depth than the formal interactions at the beginning of the year. The teacher began to loosen up around me and even vent to me about things that were hard for him, such as the block schedule or certain students that acted out. I tried to joke around with the teacher more in order to make him feel more comfortable while teaching.

As the school year continued, I became increasingly close to the students. Due to close bonds with a few select students, my relationships with the students became much
more significant and central than my relationship with the teacher. The students showed that they trusted me by breaking rules in front of me and cussing in front of me. Mandell (1988) experienced this similar behavior as a test to her least adult role. Pascoe (2007) also wrote about how the male students in her field work would actually make sure she was writing certain things down once they trusted her to not discipline them for their disciplinary infractions. When the teachers left me alone with the students in the classroom, the students did not hesitate to start yelling, cussing, talking about the teacher, and behaving as socially as they normally did outside of the classroom. Similarly to Mandell (1988), this was one of the indicators that the least adult role was starting to take precedent in my field work.

One of the factors that helped me align with the students was the presence of many substitute teachers throughout the year. It was during these days that I could fully align myself with the students because I did not have any allegiance to the substitute teacher. I also did not have to worry as much about the substitute teacher judging my behavior in terms of field role. I could also tell the students were starting to trust me more as they would fully act out in front of substitute teachers, even giving them fake names, and would not worry about me reporting the activities back to their regular teacher.

In order to gain trust from the students, I interacted with the teacher less often. This naturally occurred as a result of my increased interactions with the students. I would avoid inside jokes with the teacher during classes. I also completely stopped staying after class to talk to the teacher. The students, for the most part, disliked or pretended to dislike the teacher in the First Year Success class as a result of the disciplinary measures taken.
on a daily basis. My close bonds with the students in this class meant they trusted me and
began to treat me similar to another peer. This meant that they complained to me about
the teacher and expected me to have loyalty to them. This resulted in an increased
emphasis on my least adult field role. My least adult role was extremely evident when I
would accidentally cause disruptions in the classroom that led to direct disciplinary
measures by the teacher. This would mainly occur when the students would attempt to
talk to me during a time when the teacher was giving out directions, or during a time
when the students were supposed to be quiet. One of these situations occurred when the
First Year Success teacher, Mr. Danielson, told the class to be quiet during a video.

Cindy (White female) forged a signature on her form. I quietly told her I couldn’t
accept it. Cindy said it’s not a pen. I can erase it. Mr. Danielson stood up and
angrily said, Okay you guys aren’t taking this seriously. Row one get your books.
Cindy slammed her hand down on her desk and said I ain’t doing shit for this
class now! Mr. Danielson did not appear to hear her. Everyone was getting their
books, so it was loud in the class. I told Cindy, Oh man I ruined it. Cindy said, No
you didn’t. It was me because I said this isn’t a pen when he said that. I said, Oh I
ruined it though. Cindy said, No you didn’t. I said, How do I tell him it was me?
Cindy said, It wasn’t you. Isaac (Mexican/White male) looked at me and teasingly
said “Look what you did!” I said I know, I feel bad. Cindy said, It wasn’t her.
Shut up Isaac! Mr. Danielson was walking around, and passed by us. Cindy said
Mr. Danielson, it was just me because she was giving me this paper. Mr.
Danielson said, No, it was a lot of people. Isaac said, It was just her giving us
these papers. Mr. Danielson said, No, there were people turning around and
laughing. Isaac said, It was me, turning to get the paper. (4/30/2010)

I became more aware of my own behavior since it was affecting the students. In this
specific example, my least adult role was very pronounced. Not only was I causing
disruptions to the classroom by talking to the students, but the students were also sticking
up for me towards the teacher, just like they would for another student. The fact that I
was involved in interactions that led to discipline only bonded me closer with the students
and placed a greater emphasis on my least adult role.

Overall, my participant as observer role was more focused on being professional
and placing a great emphasis on my research. This role was more in line with interactions
with the teachers. As I got closer to the students throughout the year and became more of
a peer to them, my adult identity became deemphasized. This resulted in my least adult
role becoming more prevalent. There were ebbs and flows with both of these field roles
throughout the school year and I was constantly performing field role maintenance. By
the end of the school year, I moved away from an emphasis on my participant as observer
role to a stronger emphasis on my least adult role.

**Reflexivity**

My field role evaluation is only one way I analyzed my identity in the field.
Another key aspect is reflexivity. Reflexivity is “critically thinking about how one’s
status characteristics, values and history, as well as the numerous choices one has made
during the research, [that] affects the results” (Bailey 2007: 6). Reflexivity and self-
evaluation are important actions that still need to be assessed in current research because
they affect the way we conduct research, the way we interact with our participants while in the field, and the way we analyze our research (Huisman 2008). Reflexivity is the researcher’s active analysis of his or her place in the research (Bailey 2007). My racial, social class, age and gender identities all affected my research.

My racial identity as white had a significant impact on my research. I am studying racial interactions between students; therefore, my own racial identity comes into play. South High School was a very racially diverse location and both of the classes I did observation in, as well as the entire school, had a low percentage of white students, which made my racial identity noticeable. Most white adults in the setting were authority figures. My white racial identity could cause some students to feel uncomfortable with me. C.J. Pascoe (2007) wrote about a similar experience she had when conducting gender research. Due to rampant homophobia at her research site, she had to be careful about what she shared or did not share about her own sexual orientation (Pascoe 2007). Initially I feared that the students would not relate to me as I do not share a non-white racial identity. My evaluation of how my racial identity affected my research becomes even more important by the fact that I view my racial identity as complex.

Although I am a white person, I do not necessarily identify with white culture or other white people. I grew up poor and in non-white neighborhoods. I grew up with almost no close white friends; therefore, I identify more with non-white cultures. I believe this affected the way the students viewed me. In the First Year Success class, the fact that I was white was never pointed out or emphasized until the end of the school year, when the students felt comfortable enough to joke around about it once in a while.
In fact, I was able to downplay any differences the students might have assumed about me due to the fact that I was white by using non-white cultural capital. I was able to make jokes and bond with the students, specifically with my gatekeeper student, Walter, who is an African American male. We shared the same sense of humor and similar jokes, which helped a lot in our bonding process. I used slang, made jokes, and presented knowledge that correlated with urban youth culture. My friendship was solidified with this student through this technique. In the following example, a student moved Walter’s backpack when he wasn’t looking, and I saw the student do it. However, when Walter asked me who moved it, I didn’t tell him who it was.

I turned to Walter (Black male) and said “You hate me now Walter?” Walter said “I hate you.” I said “That’s messed up.” Walter said “How is it messed up?” I laughed and said “Just because I’m not a snitch.” Walter said, That’s life. You make friends, then they hate you. No I couldn’t hate you. You’d have to do something really bad. Samantha (Vietnamese/Mexican female) said “Like cut your hair off while you’re sleeping?” Walter said “I’ll kill your ass.”

(12/16/2009).

This fieldnote illustrates several points. It portrays my familiarity with urban youth culture by explaining my actions through saying “I’m not a snitch.” And it also shows how Walter was getting close to me. Even though I would not tell him who moved his backpack, he understood that I did not want to snitch on anyone, and he also voiced the fact that he was not mad about it. Another example occurred when I walked into the classroom, to find Sylvia sitting in my seat.
When I walked into the classroom, all of the back row seats were taken. Sylvia (Mexican female) was sitting in my seat. A few students looked at me, including Walter. I said, Oh hell no.oh hellllll no. Walter said, Whoop her Drea! I sat in a single desk that was in the back of the room. A backpack was on the chair. I held it up and said “Who’s backpack is this?” Emily (Vietnamese female) laughed and took it. She unzipped it and started going through it. She found a cell phone in it, and started looking at the cell phone. Noi (Asian male) came in. Emily was sitting in Noi’s seat. Noi said, Oh hell no! Emily said, Shut up duck. Noi sat somewhere else (2/24/2010).

This field note shows precisely how I used language in almost the exact same way as the students. I used the phrase “Oh hell no” to express that someone was sitting in my regular seat and to negotiate my space, and Noi used the exact same phrase when the same thing happened to him a few minutes later. Another student, who was an Asian male, even made some comments alluding to this fact through a conversation in the classroom with Walter and I.

Walter (Black male) continued talking to Dalton (Mien/Hmong male), and called him ‘blood.’ I said to Walter; Hey remember when you were calling that sub ‘blood?’ Walter said, Oh yeah! He laughed. I said “You were like ‘you like wearing blue, blood’?” Walter laughed. Dalton turned to me and said, What happened to you when you were little? What did your parents do? I said “What do you mean?” Dalton said, You’re black-washed. I said “Really?” Dalon said, Yeah, you’re like a reverse Oreo. I didn’t really know what to say, so I just sat
there and smiled. Dalton said, You’re black-washed. That’s what’s up though.

(4/7/2010)

These comments were significant because the students recognized that even though I was physically white, I did not necessarily present myself or act like a “typical” white person. Walter, specifically, validated this fact on a regular basis, such as in the following example:

Walter (Black male) walked in and said Drea! Drea you keepin it hood? I said “You know it.” Walter said, Drea will go hood on a bitch. Tamicka (Black female) snapped her head around and asked Walter who. Walter pointed at me. I looked at Tamicka. Tamicka said, Oh hell yeah. She’ll go hood on a bitch.

(4/14/2010)

My means of connecting with this class was mainly through shared language practices. We shared a similar set of cultural capital that enabled me to use humorous language to connect to the students. This fact enhanced my insights gained from observing this class as the students shared things with me that they might not have shared with a researcher that they perceived came from mainstream white adult culture.

McCorkel and Meyers (2003) wrote that positionality becomes heavily influential when researchers occupying privileged positions in society elect to study those who are marginalized. I do occupy a privileged white status in society. However, I feel like the whole reason why I wanted to study non-white racial identities is because I grew up in a non-white culture. This does not negate my social privilege of being white, but I do feel it gives me a unique viewpoint when collecting data or when studying those who are
marginalized in a non-white position in society. I also currently hold a privileged status in society of being middle class and college educated.

My social class identity also affected my research. My social class identity is also complicated, as it is directly related to my racial identity. Although I currently hold a middle class and college educated status, I grew up poor and with non-college educated parents. I feel as though my social class was viewed differently by the adults and the students during my field work. The adults viewed my social class as heavily linked to my college education. They constantly referenced the fact that I was a Sac State graduate student, and my education and research were one of the only conversation topics they chose. This social class status allowed me to make conversations with the adults, but it also forced me to remain professional in front of them. I had to maintain that college educated, middle class status with the adults while being able to express my lower class status upbringing with the students.

Although the students knew I was in college, and were very interested in my research, I believe they could tell that I did not grow up middle class. I grew up poor, in lower class neighborhoods, and I have experienced a lot that these students may have experienced growing up poor, in lower class neighborhoods as well. My lower class cultural capital was exceedingly helpful on the day to day basis and allowed me to empathize during student interactions. This became evident when I asked Hernan about doing an interview with me.

Hernan (Mexican male) said I will, but only if we don’t get suspended. I said, Why would you get suspended? Hernan looked at Mr. Danielson to make sure he
wasn’t listening and then turned back around and said Because, we’re in a gang. I nonchalantly said, You guys are in a gang? Which one? Hernan said, The ones that are Mexican and wear blue. It seemed like he didn’t want to say the actual name of it. I said, Is that why they don’t like your belt? I was referring to the Ms. G. incident. Hernan said, My belt is gray, but yeah. Diego (Mexican male) pulled his belt slack out and showed me. Diego’s belt was the same style as Hernan’s, but instead of gray it was black with white writing that said Mexico. Hernan said, Yeah because we might get jumped. I said, They’re going to jump you guys? Hernan said, Well this one guy is going to start a fight and then we have to jump in or they’ll think we’re pussies. I said, Well try not to get suspended. Is Aiden in it too? Hernan said, No he’s in the opposite one. He’s stupid. I said in the opposite one from you? Diego said something to Hernan in Spanish. It seemed like Diego was telling Hernan to stop telling me about it, or to be careful as to what he was telling me. Hernan shrugged at Diego and said I don’t know. I said to Hernan, I’m not going to say anything. Why don’t you guys do it outside of school? Hernan said, Because then they’ll kill us. (5/7/2010)

My lower class cultural capital enabled me to build relationships with students based on my knowledge and experience in certain situations. In this specific example, Hernan was willing to open up to me about his involvement in gang activity. I believe he would not be comfortable with doing that if he thought I would judge him or over-react to finding out about it. The fact that he said he described the gang without saying the exact name of it indicates to me that he knew I probably already knew the name of it and had
knowledge about it. He also was willing to teach me certain aspects of it, such as telling me that Aiden was in the opposite gang and explaining why they did not want to fight off campus. This insight bonded us closer together and also showed Hernan that I could handle this type of knowledge without judgment or sanction.

I believe my knowledge of the students’ cultural capital also had to do with my age. Since I am only in my twenties, I still watch some of the same television shows and listen to a lot of the same music as they do. They also still use some of the same slang that I used in high school. However, since it had been six years since I had been in high school, there were also times when I did not know their slang. These examples were rare, and thankfully the students did not emphasize them. The students understood when this occurred, and did not really even react to it, such as in the following example:

Dalton (Mien/Hmong male) and Walter (Black male) started play hitting each other. Walter said to Dalton, “This is a pimp and ho relationship. I’m the pimp; you the ho. Dalton got a good hit in to Walter’s arm. Walter looked at me, put his hand out, and said, Gimme some baby powder Drea. I said what? I don’t have any. Walter said “Just go like that”, and then he mimed putting baby powder in his hand. I still didn’t understand, so Walter repeated it. I mimed putting baby powder in his hand, and then Walter mimed slapping Dalton across the face with it. (4/14/2010)

Walter, especially, already had a bond with me over knowledge of specific cultural capital, so the fact that I didn’t know this baby powder joke was not significant to him. However, it was obvious to me that I did not know it because of my age. This was a
relatively new joke that people told. I found out in my personal time that “pimps” use baby powder to cover their hands when slapping or hitting their “hos” in order to not leave any visible marks on them. After experiencing this interaction in the classroom, I began to notice people my age using this joke socially in my real life, but not until almost a year later.

My gender identity as female also affected my research and made me feel more visible as I constantly monitored how I was dressing and acting so as to make sure I was perceived as an adult, professional female. However, I feel like I was able to bond more with male students since I have more of a male sense of humor. I have never really related to females growing up, and my close female friends have also had more of a male sense of humor. This could have hindered me in the field as I tended to interact more with the male students. I did not become very close to any of the female students. This did not occur to me while I was still in the field. It was not until I started analyzing my positionality that I realized gender did in fact have an impact on my research in terms of who I got close to.

**Data Analysis**

I used a grounded theory approach to analyzing my data. Charmaz (2006: 2) defines grounded theory methods as “systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories ‘grounded’ in the data themselves.” This approach includes collecting data, coding the data, making comparison and analytic notes between data, and refining analytic categories (Charmaz 2006). In relation to ethnography, Charmaz (2006:22) writes that “grounded theory ethnographers study what
is happening in the setting and make a conceptual rendering of these actions.” There are many layers of analysis when using a grounded theory approach. These layers can include comparing data from later research to beginning research, analyzing relationships between concepts and categories and comparing data with emerging categories (Charmaz 2006). Through my analysis, I was able to compare previous research to my study to explore how these students used race to interact and build peer culture. I discovered several themes in the way these students used race to interact within intraracial and interracial groupings. These themes included using self-referential stereotypes within intraracial interactions, mirroring racial labels and stereotypes within interracial interactions, and probing the boundaries of racial and “racist” peer behavior.
Chapter Four

ANALYSIS

A review of existing literature showed little research on the process of how students in a racially diverse classroom use race to interact and form peer cultures, yet research in multiracial settings can help us learn much about children and youth’s collaborative practices and conceptions (Moore 2002). In this chapter, I show how students drew on their multiracial environment and used race as a means to build peer cultures in their classroom. At times, students used self-referential stereotypes with same race peers. They also used racial words, labels, and stereotypes when interacting with students from different racial and ethnic groups. Most importantly, these youth probed the boundaries of racial and “racist” peer behavior through their discussions about and use of racial stereotypes and labels.

Students demonstrated their awareness of school wide and classroom racial dynamics in their interviews. They reported that social groups and cliques seemed to be very segregated in terms of race, and similar to previous research (Stears et al 2009), students tended to form friendships with other people of the same race. Even though most students reported that they socialized with students of the same racial or ethnic background during free time, the classroom presented the opportunity for them to interact with students of other backgrounds.

The First Year Success class I observed was composed entirely of first year students who reflected the racial and ethnic diversity of the school. There were about 25
percent white students, 10 percent African American students, 50 percent Latino students, and 15 percent Asian students. The class was taught by a White male teacher. From the very beginning of my time in the classroom, students and teachers frequently discussed race both directly and indirectly. On one of my first days of observation, the teacher listened to a student discussion about race and then commented on the importance of the topic.

Thomas (Asian male) asked Samantha (Vietnamese/Mexican female) if she knows how to speak Vietnamese. She said no. Thomas asked her, “Are you Viet?” Samantha said, No, I’m Mexican. Noi (Asian male) asked, “You’re not Viet?” and she said no. Thomas said, “I’m Black, White, Mexican.” Thomas’s last name is Ngo. Samantha said, “You’re not Black, White or Mexican so you need to stop playing.” Mr. Danielson (the white teacher) got up and told them, People here at SHS are obsessed with ethnicity. We all bleed the same blood when we are cut, so there is no reason to be so concerned about ethnicity. (09/23/2009)

First, through the frequency of discussions on this topic, the students made it clear that race was very important to them. They also showed that they were exploring how complicated race can be. Even though Samantha is both Mexican and Vietnamese, she distanced herself from her Vietnamese identity by saying she could not speak Vietnamese, and is not Vietnamese, only Mexican. (Her last name is Vietnamese, but her first language is English, and her parent’s language is English, as indicated on her interview survey.) After this exchange, the students continued to discuss racial labels as
Thomas (Asian) announced that he is Black, White and Mexican. Samantha clearly challenged Thomas’s assertion.

Mr. Danielson recognized how frequently the students discussed race and racial identity. Yet, instead of encouraging the students to discuss further the subtleties of these claims of racial identities, he made a plea for a focus on sameness and recognition that all people are the same on a “blood” level. While the teacher wanted the students’ focus to be removed from race, the students chose not to de-emphasize their racial discussions. Instead of downplaying their racial concerns, they decided to actively recognize them and point them out. In fact, I observed frequent references to race throughout the year, showing that the students did not take the teacher’s advice. Instead, they continued to focus on race as an important facet of discussion and interaction.

**Intraracial Interactions: Using Self-Referential Stereotypes**

The students in this classroom used racial references to engage their peers (Moore 2002). One way the students inserted racial topics into peer interactions was by discussing and using stereotypes linked to their own race or ethnicity. In the following example, Dalton (Mien/Hmong male) joked about his own race:

Emily (Vietnamese female) asked Dalton if he break dances. Dalton said, Yeah it makes me more hot. But then I’m half Hmong so it makes me less hot.

(04/14/2010)

After part of a longer discussion, Emily asked Dalton if he break dances. At South High School, many Asian students spent time before school and during the lunch period break dancing in the hallways, so this activity became one associated most often with Asian
boys. While Dalton embraced this stereotype when he agreed that he is a break-dancer, he also made a joke about the positive, “hot” status that comes with being a break-dancer. At the same time, he tempered his joking declaration about his “hotness” when he acknowledged the Hmong part of his Asian identity which tempers his attractiveness.

Dalton held a unique racial and ethnic position in this group because he was the only Hmong student in this class. The Hmong are a Southeast Asian ethnic group from Laos and Cambodia (Chan 1994), and Hmong students comprised one of the largest Asian ethnic groups at South High School (Education Data Partnership 2012). In this classroom, Hmong students were the frequent targets of derogatory comments or objects of ridicule. For example, when the teacher passed out letters for parents explaining impending school closures and asked if anyone needed a Hmong language letter, a few of the students joked around and sarcastically said they were Hmong (fieldnote 02/26/2010). In contrast, students did not respond in this derisive manner when the teacher offered letters in other languages. This is the type of joke made towards Hmong people that Dalton witnessed often.

Tatum (1997) observed that the facets of our identity that capture the attention of other people the most will be the facets that we focus on. Hmong was a trigger word for laughter in this classroom. Emily (Vietnamese female) had already made fun of Dalton on several occasions for being Hmong. Dalton knew this and thus made a self-deprecating joke about his Hmong heritage when discussing his participation as a break dancer. This was Dalton’s way of turning the fact that he was the only Hmong person in this classroom, and the fact that it got made fun of into a weapon he could wield first. He
recognized a stereotype existed about Hmong people, and he chose to make fun of it before anyone else took the opportunity to do so.

A second instance of using self-referential stereotyping occurred when Hernan (Mexican male) made fun of his own racial identity during an interaction with Mateo (Guatemalan male).

Hernan said, It’s hot in here. Hannah (Mexican female) said, Take your sweater off. Hernan said, No, my shirt is faded. Hernan took half of his sweater off so that it was still on one shoulder. He had a faded black t-shirt on. A minute later, Hernan said, It’s hot. I said, Take your sweater off. He took it ¾ of the way off. I laughed and said, Just take it off! Everyone can already see your shirt. He took it off. Mateo looked at Hernan and said, My dad wears those shirts to work. Hernan said, Yeah I look hella Mexican, like a paisa. (05/21/2010)

After looking at his own shirt, Hernan labeled himself a paisa, which is a derogatory term for someone who has recently emigrated from Mexico and who has not assimilated into American culture. Paisa is also a label used in reference to lower class workers. Hernan showed that he was insecure about showing his shirt in the first place because he was reluctant to reveal it, and he said it was faded. So when he finally took his sweater off and Mateo made a reference to his dad wearing those shirts to work, Hernan made fun of himself by saying he looked “hella Mexican” and “like a paisa.” Here Hernan not only “insulted” himself by aligning his own behavior with that of lower class Mexican workers, but also indirectly insulted Mateo’s father since they both wore faded shirts. While it is not clear if Mateo registered the implied slight against his father, Hernan used
self-deprecating humor in front of a Latino (Guatemalan) peer who had stated that he hated Mexicans in general and had insulted Hernan directly about being Mexican.

Both of these examples focus on the way these students used stereotypes about their own racial group (i.e. Asian or Latino) with same race peers. This technique illustrates how complicated interactions that focused on race or ethnicity were in this peer culture. Even though these students were interacting within the same broadly defined racial group, they came from different ethnic backgrounds. Emily and Dalton were both Asian, but Dalton was both Mien and Hmong whereas Emily was Vietnamese. Even though they shared being a part of the same broadly defined racial group, Dalton had the individual experience of being the only student of Hmong background in the classroom, as well as being part of the stigmatized Hmong group. This was a part of his identity that Emily did not share, and also a part of his identity that she had ridiculed in the past. By using self-deprecating stereotypes in order to humorously interact with her, he managed the interaction and the tone of conversation surrounding his ethnicity.

A similar pattern occurred with Hernan and Mateo. Hernan and Mateo were both part of the broadly defined Latino racial group, but Hernan was Mexican and Mateo identified as Guatemalan. Similar to the way Emily made fun of Dalton’s ethnic identity in the classroom, Mateo had also previously expressed derogatory views towards Mexicans and a dislike for Mexican culture. In this interaction, Hernan made fun of himself and labeled himself a *paisa* to manage the interaction and make the stereotypes about his specific ethnic group obvious. In both of these interactions, the students were friends with one another. They used self-referential stereotypes in a humorous way in
order to make fun of themselves before anyone else, even their own friends, could. They were communicating that they were aware of the negative stereotypes that existed, and showed that they were comfortable pointing it out themselves inside this racially and ethnically diverse classroom peer culture.

**Interracial Interactions: Mirroring Racial Labels and Stereotypes**

Students often divide themselves along racial and ethnic lines (Rosenbloom 2004). In fact, interracial friendships can be difficult to develop in the school setting for a variety of reasons, including fear of judgment from intraracial friends or the lack of opportunity for meaningful interactions (Aboud and Sankar 2007, Rosenbloom 2004). In my research, I witnessed interactions between students of different races on a constant basis. The students developed strategies for interacting across races in their peer culture including mirroring or matching each other’s use of racial labels and stereotypes. In other words, if a student said a racial word, the other student would react using another racial word. If a comment was made about a student’s physical looks in terms of race, the other student would respond with a comment about their race in terms of looks. This technique of mirroring illustrated one of the key elements of interpretive reproduction which is social routines (Corsaro 2005). This shows how the students built their knowledge of different types of racial words and use them again and again. An example of this mirroring routine follows.

Emily (Vietnamese female) and Walter (Black male) continued yelling out the window. The substitute teacher told them, If you’re going to act like fourth graders, I’ll send you away. Walter and Emily sat down. The video finally started
playing. Someone turned the lights off. Walter looked at Dalton (Mien/Hmong male) and said, “Open your eyes.” Dalton said, “Where’d you go?” They said this very quickly to each other. There wasn’t really any kind of tone to it.

(03/10/2010)

This interaction took place very early in Dalton’s time at SHS. He had just transferred from another high school and was still adapting to the peer culture in this classroom and building his friendship with Walter. Once the lights went out, Walter referenced Dalton’s narrow, Asian eye shape by telling him to “open” his eyes. Dalton quickly showed understanding of this form of racial joking and referenced a physical element of Walter’s own racial characteristics, his dark skin tone, by acting like Walter disappeared and blended into the unlit classroom. This interaction illustrates the positive role of racial teasing in this classroom peer culture. If Dalton had not copied Walter’s joke style, he might not have been accepted as readily into this peer culture.

When students interact in a racially diverse classroom, the occurrence of racial labeling is going to be present (Higginbotham and Andersen 2009). Due to the social construction of race, different peer cultures can create their own racial labels and their own unique way of using racial labels (Higginbotham and Andersen 2009). One of the ways the students used racial labeling in this environment was when they interacted with a student of a different race. One example of racial labeling occurred between Mateo (Guatemalan male) and Dalton (Mien/Hmong male).

Dalton sat down in Diego’s (Mexican male) seat in front of me. Mateo dropped his worksheet and it flew over by Dalton. I told Dalton to pick it up, since he

(05/28/2010)

When Mateo initially dropped his paper, it flew over by Dalton. At first, he did not ask Dalton to pick it up for him, and this might be due to the fact that they were not friends and rarely talked. Instead, I initiated the interaction by telling Dalton to pick it up after he seemed not to notice. Once I broke the ice, Mateo used a joking tone when he referred to Dalton directly using a general racial label, Asian. In response, Dalton also used a humorous tone when he aimed another general racial label, Mexican, back at Mateo. This type of lighthearted yet racially focused interaction occurred often in this classroom. And when Mateo initiated this type of verbal exchange, he showed knowledge of the language styles of this particular peer culture. This is one of the examples that depicted just how complex interactions centered on race and ethnicities were in this peer culture. At times, students used racial labels to point out negative stereotypes. Here, these students used racial labels simply to name one another, thus revealing how specific the uses of these words were in this peer culture.

As the interaction progressed, however, Mateo changed the pattern by turning the racial labeling on himself. Even though Mateo did not actually self-identify as Mexican, he labeled himself as a “beener” after Dalton greeted him as a Mexican. Here the students used a technique that is characteristic of this peer culture, mirroring each other’s use of racial labels and self-deprecating stereotypes. Mateo declared several times throughout the school year that he was Guatemalan and did not like Mexicans. I am not sure if
Dalton knew this at the time he called Mateo a Mexican. Nevertheless, Mateo did not correct Dalton’s “incorrect” racial label. Perhaps Mateo felt comfortable use this self-referential label specifically because he knew the word did not “really” apply to him as a non-Mexican. Most often, however, these ethnic differences were not readily apparent among peers, especially when students were not close friends. So while on an individual level Mateo may have felt safe calling himself a name that did not really define his ethnic group, that subtlety was most likely lost on Dalton and any other students who observed this brief exchange. In this interaction then, general racial labels were used to initiate interaction across racial groups and Mateo followed through with a self-referential stereotype at the end of the interaction.

In the next example, students once again used race to invite interactions among peers who were not friends and were of different races

I sat down in a desk. Emily (Vietnamese female) walked in, followed by Hernan (Mexican male) Hernan said to Emily “Suushi sushi.” Emily punched Hernan three times in the arm. Emily said “You’re gonna get punched again later.” She sat down. The tone here was teasing each other. They are not friends, but it was not super serious either. Emily often punches boys and gets into arguments with them, especially with Hernan. Hernan sat down as well. Hernan looked over at Diego (Mexican male) and said, “Your back is wet…wetback.” Diego’s back was not wet at all. (01/20/2010)

Hernan greeted Emily (Vietnamese female) using the name of a type of Asian food not typically associated with Vietnamese culture. Emily reacted by punching Hernan in the
In the field note, I made sure to describe the tone of the exchange since these two students were not friends and Emily’s reaction was physically and verbally “threatening.” This is another example of how a student used a racial reference to initiate an interaction with another student who was not a friend. Hernan and Emily did not routinely greet each other, yet on this occasion, Hernan did invite interaction with Emily when he said “Sushi sushi.” While she did not claim or refute a specific connection to Japanese culture here, she expressed a lighthearted sense of disagreement through her physical punches.

Immediately after this interaction, Hernan aimed a play on words towards Diego, another Mexican student who was his friend. “Wetback” is a derogatory term students used for Mexican immigrants. I did not record any specific reaction from this exchange.

This interaction provides a comparison of how one student used a racially defined word to interact with a person who was not a friend and not of the same race to a person who is a friend and same race peer. In the interaction with Emily (Vietnamese female), Hernan commented on Emily’s race, but did it in a much more vague way than the comment he made on Diego’s race. Hernan simply said the name of a food to Emily and she reacted with playful arm punches. This method of “racial greeting” was specific to this peer culture. Hernan could have just decided to walk in and sit down, but instead he used the sushi comment as a way to initiate an interaction with an Asian student who was not a friend. The comment he made to Diego was much more obviously racial in that he used a negative stereotype specifically aimed at Mexicans. Perhaps he felt comfortable aiming this term at Diego because Diego was his friend, as well as of the same race. In essence, Hernan could also be labeled as a “wetback”; therefore, he chose a label for a
friend that also implicated him in the same way. Hernan could have chosen to call Emily by a name with a clearly negative meaning, such as “banana,” and the interaction could have proceeded much differently.

The way these students used race and racial knowledge to interact helped them build their peer cultures. Being in such a racially diverse setting allowed the students to investigate who they were racially as well as how that affected those around them and how it impacted their social interactions. They were also learning what they were allowed to say and what they were not allowed to say socially, in terms of race. This was accomplished through ongoing racial interactions and social negotiations about what was acceptable.

**Probing the Boundaries of Racial and “Racist” Peer Behavior**

Students’ negotiation of racial meanings became most apparent through the use of the word “racist” in classroom discussions. To label an action or a person as racist in certain settings can be taken very seriously (Tatum 1997). Blauner (1992:12) defined racism as “an explicit system of beliefs postulating the superiority of whites based on the inherent, biological inferiority of the colored races.” This definition did not fully capture how these students used the word racist in this setting to explore the boundaries of peer behavior through their discussions about and use of racial stereotypes and labels.

Sometimes the teacher’s participation cut the discussion short.

After roll call, Mr. Danielson got up and passed out flyers for the food fair they were having in the quad the next day. Frank (Mexican/White male) said “It’s like a flea market.” Walter (Black male) said “That’s racist.” Mr. Danielson asked him how it
was racist. Walter said, It was a joke. Mr. Danielson said, It’s hating on fleas, but I hate fleas, so hate all you want. (10/07/2009)

Walter quickly responded to Frank’s characterization of the food fair as a flea market and labeled it as racist. Before Frank had an opportunity to respond to Walter, the teacher joined the conversation. When Mr. Danielson asked Walter how the statement was racist, Walter did not provide an explanation but rather dismissed his declaration as a joke. Rather than directly addressing the potentially serious accusation posed against Frank by Walter, Mr. Danielson acknowledged the “hateful” dimension of racism but claimed it was directed at “fleas” rather than a group or groups of people associated with flea markets. Here Mr. Danielson followed Walter’ characterization and framed the statement as a joke.

Through this brief exchange, Walter started to communicate his belief that there was something negative about labeling the food fair as a flea market. Perhaps he viewed the flea market as a stereotype attached to a specific racial group or groups. Frank was a student who self-identified as both Mexican and White. Indeed, Frank may have been referring to his own Mexican ethnic group when he compared the food fair to a flea market. However, Frank appeared physically White, and many of the students called him “White Boy” throughout the year. Therefore, Walter may not have known that Frank could be referring to his own racial group when making that comment. In this situation, the students did not have a chance to talk about the meaning of “racist” since Mr. Danielson interrupted the interaction. Clearly Walter did not want to discuss why Frank’s comment was racist with Mr. Danielson. Mr. Danielson was not a part of their peer
culture and therefore did not understand the students’ definitions of “racist” in this setting.

When given the opportunity (without adult intervention), the students did negotiate and explain their own understanding of the word “racist” in their peer culture. Consider the following example.

I went to the bathroom. When I came back, Dalton (Mien/Hmong male) said, Aw you’re back? Where’d you go? I said I had to pee. Dalton said, Aw you find out like your dog died, like oh shit the Asians got to him! Everyone here is racist towards each other. Mexicans are racist towards Mexicans. Asians are racist towards Asians. White people are cool with each other. I said, You think white people are cool?

Dalton said, Nah, with each other. I said, Oh. Hernan (Mexican male) said to no one in particular, Guero, guero, guero. Guero is a Spanish word that means a person with a fair complexion. Walter (Black male) imitated it. Hernan said, Que paso? which means “What happened?” Walter said, “Speak English!” Hannah (Mexican female) said, Walter, you’re hella racist. Walter said, Why? How? It would be racist if I said ‘mow a lawn.’ Hannah laughed and said, Yeah I don’t think white people could do anything without us. Hannah said, Mexicans do everything. Walter said, Um hello have you heard of slavery? Who you think picked the fields? Hannah and Walter continued arguing about who had it worse: Mexicans or blacks. (04/14/2010)

At the beginning of this long discussion about race relations, Dalton opened with a joke about Asians, people from his own racial group, “getting” to (killing and perhaps eating) my dog. Next Dalton observed that students targeted their own group members by acting
“racist toward” each other. In fact, Dalton implicated himself in this critique because he had just made a self-referential joke about Asians and their negative behaviors aimed at dogs.

Dalton’s observation about negative in group relations did not extend to white students, however. When I asked Dalton for clarification about his characterization of white people at SHS, he specified whites’ behaviors as positive toward their own in group members. This explanation illustrated the way Dalton viewed race relations in this setting as well as offered some insight into how some of these students used the word racist. Typically the word “racist” depicts the majority group’s negative treatment of one or more minority groups. In this peer culture; Dalton recognized that people at SHS aimed racism at members of their own group – with the exception of white students. At South High School, Latino and Asian students did comprise the largest groups numerically, and white students were the smallest (Education Data Partnership 2012). According to Dalton’s explanation, only students of color students were “racist” toward one another while whites were not.

In the same interaction, Hernan briefly spoke Spanish, repeating a word used to describe white people. Walter, a black student, briefly imitated Hernan’s use of Spanish but then demanded that Hernan speak English. Directly after, Hannah accused Walter of being “hella racist.” Hannah’s accusation pointed to Walter’s attempt to limit Hernan’s use of Spanish in this English speaking environment. Hannah was a Spanish speaker herself and defined the imposition of speaking English as a racist action.
As in many of the examples using the word racist, this lead to a discussion of what is racist and what is not. Walter questioned Hannah’s accusation of him being racist, and said that it would indeed be racist if he had told Hernan to do something else (go mow a lawn). This suggested that Walter did not think it was racist to tell someone to speak English in an English speaking classroom. However he recognized that it would be racist to demand that someone perform a low income service jobs like mowing lawns specifically associated with Mexicans. Through this discussion, the students showed how they set up boundaries for themselves when it comes to the use of stereotypes. Hannah laughed after hearing Walter’s response, showing that she viewed the discussion as humorous and not necessarily as a serious one. In fact, she recognized the vital role that Mexicans who do “mow lawns” play in the economic structure when she declared that white people couldn’t do anything without “us.”

The fact that this interaction occurred after Dalton’s explanation of students being racist in their school is an interesting comparison. Dalton just finished explaining that students of nonwhite backgrounds are racist against fellow group members. But then a Black student demanded a specific behavior from a Mexican student, and another Mexican student accusing Walter of being racist. Dalton said that Mexicans are racist against Mexicans, yet here was a Mexican student who defended another Mexican student against perceived racism from a racial outsider. Walter and Hannah followed their disagreement about what counted as a racist statement with a show of solidarity in opposition to whites in general. When Hannah declared that “whites” benefit from this form of Mexican labor, she linked Walter’ comment about “mow a lawn” not to Walter
personally but rather to the racial group she saw as receiving the specific benefits from that labor, whites. In this sense, Hannah recognized that Walter had avoided wielding this stereotype. In the end, Walter and Hannah disagreed about each of their own positions of deprivation as nonwhite group members in relation to whites. In a way, they shared a similarity in that both identified as oppressed in relation to whites.

This interaction showed that accusing someone of being racist can be a method of defining out loud what is racist, as well as setting up boundaries as to what is simply a joke and what can be construed as offensive. It can also be a method to bring up racial subjects and discuss them further. This example demonstrated that these students were very aware of race. Dalton’s explanation of racism in the school showed that he recognized that race was often discussed in this setting. The follow up of Hernan, Walter and Hannah’s interaction showed that racial differences had many different levels in this setting. The students could be “racist” towards each other, they could band together in their non-white identity, and they could argue about the differences between their races and who has it worse in terms of history and present day treatment in society.

These examples have showed how the definition of racism varies in this setting. The students decide for themselves what is racist and what is not through negotiations and interactions. One of the methods they used to define racism is humor. When something was labeled as racist, the students could choose to laugh it off or make a joke out of it so that it was not viewed as actually being seriously racist. A lot of times, even when something was confirmed as being racist, it was not taken very seriously such as in the following example.
A woman came into the room and handed Mr. Danielson some papers. He walked out of the room with her for a minute. Noi (Asian male) got up to go get a drink of water. Walter (Black male) was talking to Emily (Vietnamese female). He said about Noi “Just because his hair is messed up doesn’t mean he’s on crack.” Noi said “Your momma’s on crack.” Walter said “I don’t care” and laughed. Noi walked by Emily’s desk to go back to his seat. Emily said to Noi, “You nigga” and laughed. Walter said “Emily’s chink ass is so racist. Why are you so racist Emily?” They both laughed, as well as a few students around them. Mr. Danielson came back into the room and they quieted down. (10/19/2009)

This interaction occurred between three friends: Emily, Noi and Walter. This was one of the many examples where the students used the word racist in a light hearted, humorous manner. In fact, this interaction was framed through humor, as any one of these students could have chosen to get offended at any time, and the label of racist would have taken on a much more serious context. The interaction began with teasing as Walter and Noi made fun of each other. When Walter mentioned crack and aimed it at Noi, Noi turned the teasing around to say that Walter’s mother was on crack. Here Noi used the racial stereotype that crack addicts are often Black, and in this example it was an Asian student saying a Black student’s mother was on crack. Emily continued the racial banter when she called Noi a “nigga.” Usually “nigger” or “nigga” is a word that is used by and within the Black community (Young 2004), yet Emily was Asian and used it to label another Asian student. Walter continued the banter by mirroring Emily’s use of one racial label as he aimed another right at her by calling her a “chink ass” in order to accuse her of being
racist. When he directly asked her why she is so racist, she laughed, along with some of the surrounding students. When Walter used the phrase “chink ass” to label Emily as racist, he showed that he was being sarcastic.

Even though these students maintained a humorous tone in this interaction, they also showed that they understood each other’s definition of racism. Walter matched Emily’s use of a racial word. This interaction depicts how the students used race and racial identity to interact as well as form peer cultures. They were negotiating this interaction and building the humor in it with racial words. But they were also defining what is humorous for their peer culture with a specific type of racial humor. This interaction is specific to their peer culture in their unique use of race as well as humor.

When a student used the word racist, the actions of the other students following the word seemed to determine whether it was actually considered offensive or humorous. In most of the examples where a student called another student racist, the actions following even the non-humorous examples showed that students decided for themselves through their peer culture what was offensive and what was not. Therefore by analyzing how the students used this word, we are able to gain insight into how they used race to interact in their peer cultures. Accusing someone of being racist became a gateway for discussion in this setting and became a way to negotiate boundaries and express racial values and concerns.

Throughout this analysis, I discussed the importance of race in this setting and this peer culture. I discussed the many ways these students used race, both with other students of the same race as well as students of other races. I also explored the unique way the
students discussed race in the ways they used the word racist, as well as how they defined racist in their peer culture. These students negotiated many different aspects of racial words and meanings, in only a few short interactions. Through all of these interactions, a broader perspective can be used to discuss other themes, such as in group friendships and cross racial friendships.
Chapter Five

DISCUSSION

For this study, I used an interpretive reproduction framework to examine how students who attended a racially diverse high school used race to interact and form peer cultures in the classroom. Interpretive reproduction states that children and youth can “create and participate in their own unique peer cultures by creatively taking or appropriating information from the adult world in order to address their own peer concerns” (Corsaro 2005: 349). One of the unique peer concerns that these students addressed in this environment focused on race. The students in this classroom were able to creatively address these concerns through general methods, such as using humor. Although my analysis showed the students were doing different activities such as using self-referential stereotypes, mirroring racial labels and stereotypes, and probing “racist” behavior, the overall underlying way that this was accomplished was through humor.

These students were able to creatively address their concerns about race through the safety of humorous interactions. The interactions that addressed racial concerns were often light hearted and not meant to create tension or cause offense. At face value, the interactions could be taken as simply jokes or teasing between peers. Through analyzing the interactions over a period of time, I was able to see that there was more to the interactions than just humor. Humor was a way for these students to creatively take the information that they received from the adult world about race and turn it into jokes, puns, humorous media references, and interaction styles that they could use on a daily
basis with their peers. Through this strategy, they were able to explore what meanings the information held for them. For example, the students were able to discuss what was considered racist and what was not considered racist through a series of humorous interactions. Discussing something that would normally be considered such a serious conversation became more of an exploratory interaction where they could figure out meanings with their peers.

Humor could also be found in two key elements of this peer culture which were language and cultural routines. The students in this classroom used both of these elements to build their peer culture as well as build individual membership in the peer culture. The type of humorous language that they used was heavily focused on race, whether it was to stereotype themselves, to mirror another student’s racial labels and stereotypes, or to probe the boundaries of racial and racist peer behavior. The students were able to interact with each other and build peer cultures by establishing social understandings based on race and humor. Their type of humor that was based on race was specific to this peer culture, and an outsider had to learn the cultural routines and use of language surrounding this in order to fit in.

Through the establishment of social understandings, it was also apparent that these students constructed their own meanings attached to race. Through specific interactions, they socially constructed their own meanings of what race and racial identity meant to them. The students would bring up topics of race for discussion, and would actively discuss the meanings behind certain things such as racial stereotypes, racial humor, racial labels, the definition of racist, and more. Race and racial identity in this
peer culture was unique to them and their own definitions. An outsider could not necessarily observe one interaction and understand everything going on in terms of the racial language that was used.

Along the lines of the way different racial groups were treated, there were also patterns surrounding friendship in this classroom. There were both intraracial friendships and cross racial friendships. The methods used to manage both of these were highly centered on race, meaning the students would use race blatantly as a way to interact with each other and create friendships or define friendship boundaries. Similar to past research, the students used methods to distinguish between groups, based on such things as racial labeling, racial stereotyping, or telling another student they could not participate in something for being a certain race. For examples, Hernan and Diego were two Mexican students who were not really friends with any of the other students in the classroom. Their racial identity was constantly at the center of jokes towards them. The joking went both ways, depending on who they interacted with. Hernan and Walter, who was a Black male, were not friends and did often make fun of each other’s racial identity. Walter would make fun of Hernan’s second language, by telling him to speak English. Hernan would make side comments to me about Walter being Black.

Despite what past literature shows us, students did not necessarily only become friends with other students of the same race in this classroom. There were a lot of examples of students not only interacting across races in the classroom, but being friends with students of other races as well. Part of this was a result of the fact that these students used racial language and racial labeling in a humorous way. Race was one of the more
visible facets of identity in this classroom due to the fact that it was such a diverse environment and this resulted in the students using race as a way to interact with each other. We can see this evidenced in such friendships as Walter, a black male, and Dalton, a Mien and Hmong male. They used their racial differences to their advantage in terms of friendship building and getting closer to each other. They used racial labeling and racial language to be humorous with each other as well as push the boundaries of their friendship. Students who were not initially friends used racial language and racial humor to initiate interactions and grow more comfortable with each other.

Another way the students used their racial differences to come together was when they would band together as a class against the teacher. More often than not, this occurred when a substitute teacher was present. The students unified in their racial diversity to highlight the fact that their teacher was an outsider to their peer group, not only because of the teaching position, but often times because the teacher was White as well.

Zisman and Wilson (1992) argued there needs to be more research about peer group configuration, as well as the methods used to create peer groups. I have addressed this gap in my research. I showed how the students configured their peer groups, both intraracially and interracially. I also explored the methods that they used to create and build peer groups. These methods included self-referential stereotyping, mirroring racial labels and stereotypes, and probing the boundaries of racial and racist peer behavior. I also discussed how these peer group configurations affected friendships.
Wessler and DeAndrade (2006) discussed the impact of racial language used among students in a school. There has not been much research done on the ways students use racial language on a day to day basis. My research showed how students used racial language on a day to day basis, but I also showed that they used it in a humorous way. The students in my research even used racial language to build friendships.

Many studies have focused on comparing White students to nonwhite students. Moore (2002) stated that more research needs to be done on settings where most of the children are minorities, as opposed to a predominantly White environment. There were a limited number of White students in my research. Moore (2002) also discussed that there needs to be research on how kids of color differentiate each other by category. In my research, I showed how these students differentiated each other by race category as well as used racial language and racial stereotypes against each other. I showed specific examples of how these students verbally recognized each other’s racial differences and used those racial differences to categorize each other.

**Limitations**

There are limitations to my research. One major limitation was my own identities and how they may have impacted my interactions with the students. My perceived identity of being a White, middle class, female researcher could have hindered me in this environment. All of those facets of my identity could have hindered how the students and research participants interacted with me as well as how I viewed the interactions.

Another limitation was the limited number of students I was able to grow close to in my short time observing. I only used my research from one classroom in one school.
for my analysis, and I was limited in where I sat and the fact that I did not have enough
time or opportunities to get to know more students on a deeper level. Another limitation
was the fact that I only studied the students in the classroom. I never studied the students
outside of the classroom, in a more social and unstructured environment at this school.
Finally, I only used the research from one age group for this analysis. I did not get to do a
longitudinal study to observe how these students developed over time, and I also did not
get to compare this research with students from a different age level.

**Future Research**

There are always avenues for future research. For example, White educators
witness the formation of racial and ethnic identity in racially mixed classrooms on a daily
basis, and yet lack the important interpretive framework to understand what is happening
(Tatum 1997). Research can be conducted to learn how to train these White educators
with the important interpretive framework that they lack.

The way that nonwhite students interact and build friendships with other nonwhite
students can also be explored in depth. I discussed this as a general underlying theme in
my research; however future research can focus on this in greater detail. Many studies
have focused on comparing White students to students of color in terms of building
friendship. Many studies have also focused on racial homophily and the fact that children
and adolescents tend to be friends with other students of the same racial or ethnic
background (Joyner and Kao 2000; Lee and Walsh 2003; Rosenbloom 2004; Stearns,
Buchman and Bonneau 2009). However, more research needs to be done on how students
of color build friendships with other students of color.
My research discussed how students used racial stereotypes and racial language in the everyday classroom setting. Future research can address why students use certain racial concepts, racial stereotypes and racial language. In other words, future research can investigate how the students initially learned these concepts, and why certain students use certain concepts and others do not. My research has added to the field of sociology on this topic, and has addressed my initial research question. It has generated an interesting analysis and detailed findings. Hopefully, it will generate an area of interest and more questions to be answered and explored in the future.
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