Ethnic Voices in Secondary English: Developing Student and Teacher Understanding through Journal Writing

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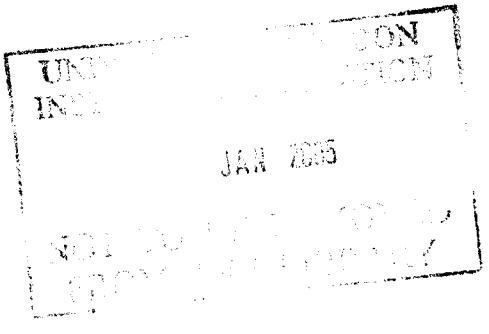
All work presented here is the author's own work.



Abstract

The ways that students read, interpret, and write about books they study are connected to notions of self. I aim to shed light on processes of ethnic and racial identification in students' responses to literature and in their interactions with their teacher. In particular, I seek to provide insight into how a group of young women grew to understand themselves in relation to literature, their peers, and their teacher by focusing on teacher-student journals. Over a period of fifteen weeks, students composed journal entries, and I responded at regular intervals. This process created an opportunity to reflect on our exchanges over time.

The story of the class's reading together cannot be told adequately without also looking at the teacher's (my own) development. Studies that look at teacher-student journals have tended to focus on literacy and reading comprehension rather than on identity. Moreover, there has been little discussion of the role of teacher development in such processes. My research examines how our understanding of both our own and others' ethnic identity was produced through our dialogic exchanges.

My questions are these: What can we learn from student written testimony, and what can we learn, too, from teacher responses about the ways in which ethnicity, race, racism, and privilege are experienced? By concentrating on a reading course, Ethnic Voices, in an all-girls secondary school in California, I show how literature was the starting point for sustained dialogues about identity. Ethnic Voices is a course meant to explore how historical, cultural, and social experiences shape identities and understandings through the shared reading of fiction. In addition to studying entries, I also reflect on the difficulty of looking retrospectively at my responses for, in reality, both teachers and students are involved in parallel processes of development as they write and share responses to literature that connect with their own lives.

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Introduction: Autobiography of the Question

> Who the teacher is has a great deal to do with both the way she defines problems and what can and will be done about them. The academician solves problems that are recognized in some universal way as being important, whereas a teacher's problems arise because the state of affairs in the classroom is not what she wants it to be. Thus, practical problems, in contrast to theoretical ones, involve someone's wish for a change and the will to make it... She identifies problems and imagines solutions to them, but her job involves the additional burden of doing something about these problems in the classroom and living with the consequences of her actions over time. (Lampert 2000:65-66)

Jane Miller (1995) advises her students to begin their research with the autobiography of the question, the story of their own interest in the question they are researching. This allows researchers to move from their own personal history and development towards a more public context. My own research autobiography begins with my students. Their experiences helped me to develop a new self-consciousness regarding issues of diversity and social justice grew because I began to work with others who had different life histories from my own. My story means nothing unless it is intertwined with the story of my students and our context for learning.

I grew up in a town in Northern California only twenty miles from where I conducted my research. Between graduation from secondary school in 1986 and my return to California in 1996, I travelled across the country teaching in Colorado and attending graduate school in New York. My work at Columbia University marked the beginning of a shift in the way I saw the world and my place in it. For the first 25 years of my life, I had little to no understanding of diversity or multiculturalism. Los Gatos, my hometown, was a white, middle-class suburb, and all of my friends looked, talked, and sounded just like me. My father's parents immigrated to the United States from Italy, and my mother's grandmother came from Ireland. Both of my parents grew up in Northern California, and my father became a self-made man while my mother worked at home and raised five children. Being the youngest by nine years, I grew up like an only child,

and my parents economic position improved steadily as I entered high school. We took nice Hawaiian holidays and drove expensive cars, but to me it was all *normal*. I attended an elite, private university near Chicago with no sense of the cost or privilege associated with such an institution. My first teaching job was in a ski resort in Colorado, and, again, I was surrounded by people who seemed to be just like me. It was a history course at Columbia that changed my understanding of racial and economic relations in the United States.

Professor Eric Foner is a leading nineteenth-century historian, and I had the privilege of working with him for a year, taking two of his courses on American history. As I read the first text we studied about slavery, I felt the balance of my world shift. At first I was angered by all that had been left out of my own secondary school history courses. Then, as I learned more about the experience of racial minorities in the U.S., I became incensed. I did not know that American citizens of Japanese descent were interned during World War II. I did not know that Chinese immigrants had built the transcontinental railroads under slave-like conditions. How could I be so ignorant? When I finished my degree in American Studies, I devised an Ethnic-American studies curriculum that would combine the study of history and literature. I wanted to teach students the books and the history that had opened my eyes at Columbia.

When I moved back to California in 1996, I taught in a private college preparatory in San Francisco. An English teacher had quit suddenly, and so I was asked to teach his two courses. The first day I arrived, I learned that one of the sections of a short story class I was going to teach had erupted because of the use of a racial slur in a story by William Faulkner. The Dean of Students, who had served as an interim teacher until I was hired, was embroiled in a nasty battle with a very outspoken African-American boy from a poor neighborhood across the Bay. He was tired of reading the word "nigger" in literature classes, and he was through with all of the historical and theoretical justifications for the appearance of the term. He never wanted to read or hear the word again. At first, I thought, why can't this young man see the rational argument?

Surely, we were not racist, and Faulkner was only using a term that he had heard. What was the problem? And then I realized it was one of the very first conversations I had ever had with an African-American on the subject of race. He was also the first African-American student I had ever taught or known. In fact, I had only worked with one African-American woman, and my experience with other minorities was the same: almost non-existent. Looking back on the incident, I know that we (the educators) did not handle it well. I do not think the African-American student felt like he had been heard, but he affected me immensely. He made me look beyond my worldview to try to see another perspective so different from my own.

I left the school at the end of the semester because I had a previous commitment to teach in the spring of 1997. Camino[1] School had hired me as a sabbatical replacement, and as I prepared to leave the San Francisco school and begin the commute south down the peninsula, I thought differently about what I wanted to teach. I realized it was not enough to just teach the books. I had to develop a critical conversation around those books. Luckily for me, our dean of students offered me an elective course she had been teaching entitled Ethnic Voices (see Appendix A for full course syllabus and description). As I began to consider taking on the course, I was suddenly apprehensive about teaching Ethnic Voices. My concern centered around issues of race and ethnicity because several of my colleagues in San Francisco had questioned the ability of a white woman to teach literature written by people of color to a class attended predominately by students of color. Yet because of my work in the field of American Studies, I was excited to tackle issues of identity and belonging in the classroom, and my first semester teaching Ethnic Voices worked well. However, I realized the implications of my own background, and I began to look for opportunities to explore my own identity as a white teacher and to look for ways I could assist both whites and students of color in their own ethnic identity development through the teaching of Ethnic-American literature.

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[1] The name of the school has been changed to preserve anonymity.

In the summer of 1997 I attended the Bread Loaf School of English in Middlebury, Vermont, and worked with John Hardcastle, lecturer in English at the University of London. I took his course, Writing, Discourse and Culture, and wrote an analysis of two students' texts from Ethnic Voices. I was especially concerned about my responses to the writing of students of color, sensing that it was much easier for me to write back to white student journal entries, and I used the course to focus on two students of color and the ways I could best support their development. I read Mikhail Bakhtin and Lev Vygotsky, two writers who challenged the way I understood language and the teaching of literature. We also studied the text *Woman Warrior,* and it was interesting to complete a critical analysis of Maxine Hong Kingston's work because I had never formally studied the book before I taught it in Ethnic Voices. I looked at my students' writing in a new light and glimpsed the process of identity development that could be fostered through writing. I also viewed my role as teacher differently. Instead of seeing myself as the authority in the classroom, I began to look for ways to share my power and to allow for student expertise to emerge. Their experiences could very often teach me more about ethnicity than all of the texts we study in the class. Based on my work at Bread Loaf, John encouraged me to pursue a Ph.D. because he felt that my area of interest would be an excellent thesis project.

So I returned to Camino School and looked forward to teaching Ethnic Voices again in the spring. Yet my 1998 class became a different story and challenged me on an entirely new level. In the 1997 class, there was no ethnic or racial majority, but in 1998 the class was half white, half students of color. This shifted the power dynamics significantly, and I felt like I was in over my head. The white students were defensive and made claims of "reverse racism." They would not willingly acknowledge their privilege, and I became frustrated as did the students of color. I was unable to bridge the gap, to help the students increase their awareness of their own identity while moving towards a greater understanding of others. Instead of creating a common goal that could be supported by our diversity, the class disintegrated into factions: white racists

and angry minorities. About six weeks into the course, six students came to me in tears. There were all students of color, and they wanted to quit the course. The class had become too much to tolerate. I was devastated and went to our Dean of Students in tears. I felt like I had failed, and in a sense I had. But I had also made a commitment to these students that I would try to make things better, so I could not give up. We struggled through the remaining weeks, but the end of hostilities was more like a cease-fire as opposed to a real peace agreement. Things continued to go on outside of class that were hurtful, and I knew that if I were going to continue to teach the class, I would have to get some help. And who was there to guide me? My students.

In June of 1998 I took eight students to a diversity conference in Massachusetts. The week I spent with students and teachers from across the country confirmed my feeling that classrooms are unique sites where students and teachers can work together to confront ethnic and racial diversity and to combat prejudice. The conference also renewed my faith in the study of literature as a means for understanding the stories of others and learning how to grow and develop through difference. The counselors initiated excellent discussions on power and privilege, and I began to get a clearer view of what had happened in my classroom. But I also sensed I had a long way to go as far as being able to understand and change power dynamics in multi-ethnic classrooms. Identity development became the core of my inquiry, and what better place to start then with an exploration of my own identity. I began to read as many texts as I could find on white racial identity development, learning through the stories of other whites who were facing the same kinds of issues I was now wrestling with. A process that had started with my students of color became an exploration into my own identity and the way it impacted my teaching.

My research queries emerged from this educational context and my role as a literature teacher. The central questions to be considered here are:

1. What we can learn from students' journals about the ways in which ethnicity, race, racism, and privilege are experienced?
2. How can teachers respond effectively to student writing about ethnic and racial identity?
3. What is the role of the literature classroom in regards to dialogue about aspects of student and teacher identity?

One way to envision this work is to look at the process as a series of concentric circles. The center of this research examines journal writing by students in an effort to understand how these young women conceived of ethnic identity in the context of our readings, discussions, and their life experiences. The next circle or "ring" focuses on my role as teacher and how I responded to their journal entries given my background and position. Finally, the outer ring investigates the larger context of an English course devoted to issues of racial and ethnic identity development and how literature can serve as a frame for discussion and exploration.

Ethnic Voices was a unique literature course. At my school and many other independent secondary schools, the exploration of racial and ethnic identity was generally not explicitly addressed. My course was part of a larger diversity movement that began in the early 1990's, and the course was created as an attempt to infuse multiculturalism into the curriculum. The study of equity and multicultural education is a contested field where definitions of "race" and "ethnicity" have not been settled. For these purposes, the terms refer to the social construction of identity and the pursuit of social justice, and they will be discussed in depth in the next chapter.

The area where I grew up, and where most of my students lived, had become the heart of Silicon Valley. Although the ethnic and racial makeup of the Bay Area was changing, it was (and still is) a highly segregated community. The school's neighborhood, even with its university population, remained white and economically prosperous while the eastern side of town, only miles away from Camino, was predominantly Latino and poor. In my school's neighborhood it was not unusual for a house to sell for hundreds of thousands of dollars over its asking price.

This perceived homogeneity and ever increasing prosperity created a feeling of normalcy around whiteness. Just as when I grew up, most of my white students, 70% of the school population, spent the majority of their time in white, middle-class areas. There were, of course, exceptions, but they were few and far between. In the 1998 Ethnic Voices class, I began by asking students to identify and write about the first time they became aware of their ethnicity. The white students stared at me blankly. One raised her hand and said, "But I don't have an ethnicity." If asked the same question when I was their age, my reply would have been the same. To me, this was the heart of the crisis.

Without a clear understanding of who we are as individuals, how can we possibly come to know and appreciate others? And if we cannot name who and what we are, we might tend to define ourselves by what we are *not*: white students seeing themselves as not ethnic. This leaves a huge gap between those who are "ethnic" and those who are not, a space that creates divisions between people that are arbitrary and artificial. It is also a convenient way of abdicating responsibility for racial and ethnic tension, prejudice, and violence. If a white student locates herself as normal and average, then multiculturalism is not for her. When a new group called Student Nation was organized to affirm student identity and to help build a coalition of several existing ethnic groups, many whites said to me, "I can't join. I'm not a person of color." Multiculturalism and diversity have become synonyms for racial minorities, and as long as students and teachers continue to ignore their ethnicity and deny its existence, the gap between whites and people of color will continue to widen. My goal is to find a way to open up the discussion of race and ethnicity to all of my students, and this research is an attempt to throw light on the role of literature and writing in the understanding of ethnic identity.

> The human subject can only interpret itself by interpreting the signs found in the surrounding world. There is no such thing as a notion of self-hood or self-identity that is genetically transferred. We are joined to the past and to the future because it is a constituent feature of mind to have memory and to have projection. The past then is always categorically linked to the future and when that future becomes the past it will, similarly, be linked to another future. However, selves are not free agents within this temporal schema. They arrive in a world already made, in a language already in existence... Subjectivity is therefore the product of a variety of social discourses and a unique, personal, life history. (Erben 1996:159-60)

The processes of identification and notions of self are connected to how students read, interpret, and write about books they study in a classroom context. In my classes, I watch as students actively identify with certain characters in a novel or reject others who may not represent their experience in the world. My research stems from this active engagement with texts and my interest in ethnic identity development in the context of reading literature. As Erben notes above, subjectivity develops in a social framework where individual experiences are shared in relation to specific contexts, such as reading texts together. Narrative can provoke a strong sense of empathy, drawing students in and affirming how they see themselves. But sometimes, students may not recognize themselves and they resist any attempts to locate them in a subject position that does not concur with their own sense of self. And, crucially, the teacher is also engaged in her own process of recognition and resistance. This study concentrates upon this process of identification and as a means of explicitly describing interactions and responses to literature that can provide insight into how adolescents grow to understand themselves in relation to literature, their peers, and their teacher.

Focusing on teacher-student journal writing, I aim to shed light on processes of ethnic and racial identification that occur through the reading of literature and the writing of journal responses. Over a period of fifteen weeks, students wrote entries that were either self-directed or

that utilized prompts I had given them. As they wrote and I responded, our understanding of each other and ourselves was produced through our exchanges. The story I shall be telling cannot be told properly without also looking at my own development for in reality, both teachers and students are involved in parallel processes of development as they write and share responses to literature that connect with their own lives:

> This means that all viewpoints are historically, culturally, and socially located, that students and teachers together socially construct meanings rather than transmit/receive ideas full-blown, and that students of all ages learn most felicitously by wrestling with difficult questions, considering conflicting interpretations, and interrogating their own assumptions. (Cochran-Smith 1995:560)

With these ideas in mind, I concentrated on our journal writing because it would enable me to reflect on how we constructed classroom life together and to analyze changing understandings of race and ethnicity.

By concentrating on an English course, Ethnic Voices, in an all-girls secondary school in California, I show how literature was the starting point for sustained dialogues about identity. Ethnic identity in America involves a complex set of relationships, and Ethnic Voices explored how historical, cultural, and social experiences shape identity and understanding of others. The course asked students to look carefully at their own ethnicities, and the literature provided many perspectives on ethnicity and how individuals are positioned within larger communities. We examined the role of power and hierarchy in ethnic relations to see why certain groups are dominant while others are marginalized. While looking at ethnicity, many of the writers we read discussed other social identifiers such as gender and class in an effort to illuminate the complicated and dynamic nature of ethnic identity. We looked critically at stereotypes and assumptions concerning ethnic groups in an effort to see many of the familiar concepts we took for granted in a new, unfamiliar light. Similarly, Ethnic Voices gave voice to ideas, feelings, and opinions that might not have been familiar to us. Indeed, the larger goal of the course was to comprehend and affirm our own ethnic backgrounds and to see how our social positions were

integrally connected to and dependent on others. These aims of the course set a context for the research project which focused on bringing teacher knowledge and experience to the research process.

To frame our discussions of ethnicity, I shared Hall's (1992) definition with the class about one week into the course: "The term ethnicity acknowledges the place of history, language and culture in the construction of subjectivity and identity, as well as the fact that all discourse is placed, positioned, situated, and all knowledge is contextual" (257). Our ethnicity is socially constructed according to our family, its history and language, as well as our experiences in the world; therefore, there is no essentialized notion of ethnicity. I asked students to consider their family's country of origin and also any languages spoken at home or within their family as possible ways they could identify their ethnic background. Although "race," which refers to the social construction of skin color, and ethnicity are often considered synonyms, the two terms should be distinguished. Tatum (1997) offers this helpful distinction:

> An ethnic group is a socially defined group based on cultural criteria, such as language, customs, and shared history. An individual might identify as a member of an ethnic group (Irish or Italian, for example) but might not think of himself in racial terms (as White). On the other hand, one may recognize the personal significance of racial group membership (identifying as Black, for instance) but may not consider ethnic identity (such as West Indian) as particularly meaningful. (16)

The term "people of color" refers to racial groups in the United States that historically have been the targets of institutionalized racism and discrimination due to their physical characteristics, such as African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, and Native Hawaiians (Banks 2002; Tatum 1997). For this study, I do not capitalize the term "white" because white does not denote any particular ethnicity or nationality, unlike the term "Black" which specifically refers to people of African descent. As Kailin (2002) notes, "The capitalization of terms identifying people of color is important for legitimation and recognition, especially for those who have suffered racial or ethnic discrimination in a white supremacist context" (xxi).

Even though ethnic identity is recognized as a critical aspect of self-conception, Phinney (1993) and Roberts, et al (1999) work shows that there has been a lack of attention paid to adolescent ethnic identity development. And most of the research on ethnic identity development has focused on attitudes towards other racial and ethnic groups as opposed to one's own attitude about his or her ethnic group (Phinney 1990). Erikson (1968) established identity formation as one of the central tasks of adolescence: "The process of reflection and observation in which an individual judges himself in light of what he perceives to be the way others judge him in comparison to themselves" (22). Basing her work on Erikson's theories of identity formation, Phinney (1993) positions identity as a "subjective sense of wholeness that is achieved during adolescence through the experience of an identity crisis" (62). This crisis leads to a period of exploration followed by a commitment or incorporation of one's ethnicity. Phinney (1996) describes the study of ethnic identity as an emphasis on "how group members themselves understand and interpret their own ethnicity" (1). Applying James Marcia's identity status model, Phinney and Chavira (1990) note four stages that adolescents move through in their search for an understanding of their ethnic identity. In the first stage called *diffusion*, there is an absence of both search and commitment. *Foreclosure* is characterized by a commitment without search. *Moratorium* is evidenced by involvement in an identity search, and finally, *identity achievement* is indicated by a clear commitment that follows a search. Although my project is not a study in social psychology, these stages help to provide a context for looking at ethnic identity development. Phinney (1996) also notes an important difference between white or majority student identity development and the ethnic identity development of minority students:

> The models of minority ethnic identity and White identity are quite different because of the underlying fact of power differential and the history of relations between Whites and non-Whites. For ethnic minorities of color, identity formation has to do with developing an understanding and acceptance of one's own group in the face of lower status and prestige in society and the presence of stereotypes and racism. (2)

So ethnic identity is seen as a complicated construct that evolves over time and that includes a sense of belonging, positive evaluation of one's ethnic group, interest and knowledge about the group, and involvement in traditions and activities of the group. In order to learn about cultural diversity, students need to begin with exploring their own identity, and they need to understand the concept of ethnic identity development (Phinney 1990,1996). For the students in my Ethnic Voices class, this meant using the journals as a safe place to write about their attitudes and experiences while the course readings and my responses gave them more general information about ethnic identity.

The Role of Literature

Rosenblatt (1995) demanded that teachers recognize the relationship between a book and the individual reader. She develops a transactional theory of literature where "transactional" refers to a give and take between the reader and the text, "the to-and-fro, spiraling, nonlinear, continuously reciprocal influence of reader and text in the making of meaning" (xvi). The reader brings his or her cultural environment, and the text offers not only literary values, but also "some approach to life, some image of people working out a common fate or some assertion that certain kinds of experiences, certain modes of feeling, are valuable" (19). Noting that most adolescent readers would not have settled on a consistent life view or stable notion of self, Rosenblatt recognized that literature contributed to an "enlargement of experience" where students could "participate in imaginary situations, look on at characters living through crises, and explore ourselves and the world about us" (37). The teacher cannot only focus on the literary texts she makes available to her students; she must "understand the personalities who are about to experience this literature" (50). Similarly, Beach (1990) found that students' autobiographical, personal writing fostered insights into the literature they studied. Having understood their own experience in greater depth, they were better able to use that experience to identify the

significance of the main idea of a work of literature. Thus, the students' responses become part of the teaching materials, pointing to the critical connection between reading and journal writing where students pose and develop their own questions, reactions, and experiences.

Both teachers and students are negotiating cultural and social meanings as they study literature (Rogers 1997), and in classrooms where multicultural literature sits at the center of the curriculum, students can begin to see the lives of others, who may be the same or different from them, and compare the written texts to the text of their own lives (Bean and Rigoni 2001). Enciso (1997) writes about "talking back" to literature, creating a space for students alongside of the characters: "As children read about racial, ethnic, and class differences in literature, they encounter metaphors of and meanings about difference; these new metaphors and meanings must be negotiated by children as they struggle to understand how they will see themselves, their peers, and their teacher in light of the literature's new possibilities" (13). Journal writing in response to literature can be seen as a way of talking back, a means for interrogating and exploring differences encountered in the text and in the classroom.

Multiculturalism

I am indebted to several scholars in the field of multicultural education who have profoundly impacted the way I understand and think about teaching and learning. Researchers such as James Banks and Geneva Gay at the University of Washington and Sonia Nieto at the University of Massachusetts have set the standards for multiculturalism in the US. In addition, Beverly Tatum's work on racial identity is referenced throughout this project, and all of these educators have worked to increase equity in American schools for children and adults.

Multicultural literature is derived from and supports the theories of multicultural education, a reform movement designed to confront discriminatory school practices (Banks 2002). It assumes that ethnic and cultural diversity enriches learning, locating racial and ethnic

identity as important elements of US society. Implicitly, as students have more opportunities to experience other cultures, they become more fulfilled and active participants in an already diverse society. One goal of multicultural education is to help students and teachers develop greater understanding of themselves by viewing themselves from the perspectives of others. The assumption here is that respect will come from understanding (Gay 2000; Nieto 1999). Although many teachers believe multiculturalism only applies to students of color, Banks (2002) is clear that multicultural education is for *all* students: mainstream students need to understand their own culture and the culture of others just as underrepresented cultures need to understand the mainstream culture, their own, as well as other underrepresented cultures. Students must be able to move between and among cultures, negotiating multiple identities in order to fully engage with the world. Gay (2000) terms her pedagogy "culturally responsive teaching," centering classroom instruction in multiethnic frames of reference. This means teachers must recognize, respect, and incorporate student abilities into their teaching method. For the English teacher, multicultural literature serves as a way of bringing this theory into practice by utilizing texts that affirm the identities of all students.

Shirley Brice Heath's work deepened my understanding of diversity. Her seminal work, *Ways With Words*, is an ethnographic study of literacy in communities and schools. From Heath I gained a sense of the importance of ways of reading that vary according to the settings in which they are learned. Such insights have been invaluable to teachers. Heath (1983) studied the power of language and knowledge and the need for teachers to serve as ethnographers and learners, and her work with families and teachers still illuminates discussions of the effect of culture on classroom communities. Heath stresses that teachers have to develop an understanding of the differences in language and culture their students bring to classrooms. In this way, all students can be empowered, not only those with a specific class standing. Knowledge becomes more

inclusive as opposed to divisive, and teachers can enable students to discover "how to recognize and use language as power" (266).

Researchers and educators alike cannot disregard their own identity development. They must look carefully at their own backgrounds to understand better the cultures that have made them who they are. This kind of personal investigation may help to bridge language and culture differences. Thus, teachers can move away from labels such as "normal" and "natural" in order to see that every culture has its own notion of what is "mainstream." As one black student states eloquently in Heath's study, "Help me retain my identity and self-respect while learning to talk 'your' way" (1983:271).

Heath touches upon issues surrounding power and knowledge specifically where she discusses politeness and good classroom manners. Teachers had learned "unconsciously what to expect of their students," (279) yet none of these expectations had been stated explicitly. Therefore, those students who were not privy to the school norms were labeled as disrespectful. Lisa Delpit (1995) addresses this same topic as "the culture of power" (24). She lists five aspects of power that she discusses in depth, and two of her points have significant relevance given Heath's work. First, "If you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier," and second, "Those with power are frequently least aware of -- or least willing to acknowledge -- its existence. Those with less power are often most aware of its existence" (24). Both of these assertions require the teacher to step away from her role as expert or "power broker" as Delpit states, "To deny students their own expert knowledge is to disempower them" (32-33). By being indirect and not stating clearly what is expected, the teacher is taking away the explicitness the student needs to understand classroom rules.

Heath and Delpit invite teachers to embrace their students and the knowledge they bring to the classroom and to accept the responsibility to teach them at the same time (Heath,

1983:314; Delpit, 1995:38). This requires a different perspective, a shift in norms and assumptions: teachers need to know "what students have, not to tell us what they lack" (Heath 1983:314). Teachers can help students understand the codes of power only once they are willing "to understand the power realties in this country," referring to the US (Delpit, 1995:40). This sentiment echoes Heath's call for teacher-researchers who have taken the time to investigate their own cultural norms, privilege, and access to power.

In order to provide a direct link between ethnic identity development and multicultural education, Gay (1999) notes that "genuine acceptance of one's ethnicity is positively related to psychological well-being, interpersonal relations, social consciousness, and personal efficacy. These are also major priorities of multicultural education" (195). Therefore, the exploration of ethnic identity should be an explicit part of the educational process. A commitment to multicultural education can help students develop positive self-concepts as well as work against distorted understandings of ethnicity due to the legacies of racism, cultural hegemony, and exploitation (Gay 1999).

While examining the role of Black literature in the curriculum, Scafe (1989) calls for an acknowledgement of the importance of the text *and* the lived experience of the reader: "As teachers committed to dismantling a racist, culturally biased approach to literature teaching, we need to build strategies which do not undermine students' sense of themselves and of their place within social and cultural communities" (12). When teaching Black literature, teachers have to be sure that it is not taught in a way than confirms students' (and teachers') reservations that it is second-rate and should not be part of the curriculum. Thus, in an American context, there must be a strategy which recognizes the political significance, power implications, and differences between a text written by a person of color and a person from the dominant, white culture.

Desai (1997) writes: "When we read, we bring our own individuality to what we read, but we also need to consider what it is that framed and continues to frame our personality. I would

like to suggest that it is our cultures that frame us and that our interpretive communities are in many ways synonymous with our cultures" (169). This points to the importance of the English classroom community; it functions as a culture, influencing students in the same way they are affected by their home and peer cultures. Therefore, English classrooms can be intentional in their use of multicultural literature and writing to support identity development: "An equally important issue is the role that literature plays in the growth of our cultural and ethnic understandings, and the insight that our responses to that literature might provide" (169). This points to the value of journals as a way to respond, interpret, and understand ourselves in light of what we read about and hear from others.

In addition, other research (Hynds, Appleman, and Vinz 1997) suggests that the reading of literature and the response of readers serve as a form of social action. The political, social, and cultural contexts of classrooms have to be considered, meaning that we have to acknowledge students' backgrounds as well as the sociopolitical nature of teaching environments. So, the teachers' backgrounds figure as well, meaning that in a culturally-diverse classroom "the personal, the social, the cultural and the political are woven into a complex tapestry that complicates response centered teaching in ways we might never have imagined" (4). Ultimately, the reading of multicultural literature and the development of a multicultural classroom will lead to transformation through a personal consciousness and a call to act on what we have learned about ourselves, others, and the nature of our society (Nieto 1999).

Multicultural Literature Studies

Bean and Rigoni (2001) explored the reader response patterns and intergenerational dialogue produced by five pairs of students reading and reacting to a multicultural novel, *Buried Onions*. The high school students exchanged dialogue journals weekly with five university students. The adults created scaffolding questions to guide the student responses, and the

students saw the literature as a way of making sense of their own lives by working together and sharing their own experiences. The authors included examples of both student and adult responses, showing how "each partner gained form the other's views" (10). They found that the literature reduced the notion of the teacher as omniscient authority and that students gained insight into the value of diverse opinions supported by dialogue.

Athanases (1998) conducted a year-long ethnographic study of two urban secondary school classes composed of ethnically diverse students. The teachers were looking at how diverse groups of learners would respond to equally diverse literary texts. Although this study did not look specifically at student journals, it did describe how students were studying about cultural norms and experiences of both their own and other ethnic groups. Athanases found that students identified with characters and gained support and insight from the texts: "Works by an ethnically diverse group of authors can engage equally diverse groups of students and teach across the lines that divide about profound human experiences" (10).

Bean, Cantu, Valerio, Senoir, and White (1999) researched secondary student reading engagement and interpretation while studying a multicultural novel entitled *Heartbeat, Drumbeat.* Data included student journal entries and some teacher responses. They found that students had a sense of agency while interpreting the novel, frequently writing about their personal reactions to the reading by contrasting their own sense of their ethnic identity with the character in the novel. They also found that students were able to find their critical voices and look at themselves differently because of their experience reading and writing about the novel. Although the authors offered significant interpretation of student writing, there was no analysis of the teacher responses. The study included a few samples of teacher responses, but they were incorporated without any commentary.

In her study, Fuhler (1994) advocated the use of literature response journals because it gave students a voice in their work. She studied middle-school student responses as well as her

replies, noting that "it isn't that my responses are so exceptional. Instead, it's that I have validated a learner's efforts by giving some thought to what he or she had to say and then carefully reacting to it" (401). All of her students' responses were to the literature; she did not give them her own writing prompts. She did not grade her journals, and she did not include examples of her responses, setting her study apart from mine, but pointing to the value of using journals as a means of engaging students in reading and discovering their development over time.

Dialogics

Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of consciousness is potentially useful in a class like Ethnic Voices where students come from both marginalized and dominant cultures and have to learn, interpret, and communicate together. One of the class themes is hyphenated identities, such as African-American or Chinese-American identities, and Bakhtin's (1984) sociology of consciousness is located in interaction, in a kind of borderland between self and other: "Consciousness never gravitates towards itself but is always found in intense relationship with another consciousness" (32). The novels of Dostoevsky were the starting point for Bakhtin's analysis of polyphony: "a plurality of fully valid voices within the limits of a single work" (34). Characters are allowed to express their subjectivity and are not suppressed by an omniscient narrator. Thus, the author's voice joins the voices of independent characters, and the hero emerges not as the author's object, but as a fully formed subject in search of self-consciousness. The distinction here is critical to understanding the move from fixed, monologic, authorial control to undetermined, independent dialogical relationships between authors and characters. As opposed to just offering a monologue that expects no response, the writer can speak *with*, not about, characters and maintain contact that does not mean complete fusion. This establishes a connection between the author's consciousness and the characters' points of view because the

role of the author is to produce a kind of unity formed by the interaction of many consciousnesses, none of which can dominate the other.

This theory can assist in understanding classrooms where novels serve as the basis of the study of identity. As Wayne Booth notes in his introduction to Bakhtin's work on Dostoevsky, human life is itself multi-centered and polyphonous even if there are attempts "to close out voices prematurely in order to keep things simple and to dominate the world" (Bakhtin, 1984:xxi). Literature can challenge such monologic tendencies because of the "inherent capacity of narrative to incorporate languages other than the author's (or reader's) own" (xxii). The position of the author is analogous to the self; as individuals we only come into self-consciousness when we are interacting with, and not dominating, other fully constituted, independent selves.

This move is critical for adolescents who are striving to integrate notions of themselves with notions of others. To fully enter into the world, students must see and understand the value of others, as opposed to the fear of difference that is often associated with those who do not look, act, or talk like we do. In writing about the relationship and interdependence of autobiography and biography, Stanley (1993) offers her own interpretation of dialogical relationships:

> We are social beings through and through, and it is the shared features of "knowledge" seen from particular vantage-points that such a style of sociological inquiry makes available... "My self" encompasses second- and third-hand knowledges as well as first-hand knowledges; "experience" is multi-faceted and always at the least first-order theorized, always understood through social typifications and common "stocks of knowledge"; and "the self," its mind and body, its thoughts and feelings, is socially produced and understood. Another way of expressing many of these points is to emphasize that "a life," whether of one's self or another, is never composed of one decorticated person alone. (50)

Stanley describes articulately the need for individuals to admit shared knowledge, and to recognize that when we speak, we have other voices in our ears and stories in our heads that help us to make sense of our own experiences. Of course, we have our own sense of self, but our identity and self-knowledge are products of our interaction with others. Similarly, Bakhtin's

dialogism can assist the teaching of literature and language to help students move into the world while maintaining a strong sense of themselves at the same time. Context, conflict, and borders become sites for understanding and the creation of shared meanings. It is only through difference and the meeting of the self and others that true existence emerges and thrives: "As a living, socio-ideological concrete thing, as heteroglot opinion, language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent" (Bakhtin, 1981:293). In the context of this project, the notion that understanding is produced in the interaction between voices is key to the analysis of my data, for we were writing to and for each other.

Freire and Shor (1987) echo this notion of dialogue in their article "What is the 'Dialogical Method' of Teaching?" and their critical pedagogy shares Bakhtin's perspective of language and provides a direct link between dialogics and teaching. According to a dialogic epistemology, we know what we know through dialogue with others: "Dialogue is a moment where humans meet to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it" (13). Thus, knowledge is produced when teachers and students come together, making knowing "a social event with nevertheless an individual dimension" (13). Because our knowledge is only partial, we need others to fully know and transform our world. Like Bakhtin, Freire and Shor emphasize the importance of context and the inherent tension and power involved in any dialectical relationship: "Dialogue does not exist in a political vacuum. It is not a 'free space' where you may do what you want. Dialogue takes place inside some kind of program and context. . . Dialogue means a permanent tension in the relation between authority and liberty" (16). Freire and Shor go on to discuss how their pedagogy begins by discovering themes that are most important to students, yet have not been thoroughly analyzed by them. This way there is motivation to move from what students care about to a position of detachment where they can

reflect critically on their experiences: "Transformative tensions emerge if the study is situated inside the subjectivity of the students in such a way to detach students from that very subjectivity into more advanced reflections" (19) This process of making the familiar strange moves students from concrete to abstract thought, or from the self towards the other. To reconceptualize the curriculum so that it emphasizes students' subjectivities, teachers must use their imagination to interrupt dominating monologues and to challenge elitism and oppression in the classroom. As speakers and listeners, teachers and students can work together to create meaningful and transformative dialogue. As Freire states, "Liberation is a social act. Liberating education is a social process of illumination" (23). Here the necessity of the self and the other for understanding is evident. Since our knowledge is always partial, we need the perspectives of others to help develop our critical consciousness.

Lev Vygotsky: A Picture of Development

In most English classes, books are the heart of the course, and Burgess (1984) offers an acute description of the role of literature and the impact that narratives can have on the lives of young people: "A voice is being offered them which may join, somewhere, with voices which they are seeking to develop for themselves" (66-7). In a class like Ethnic Voices, this concept is critical because many of my students have not been exposed to authors who reflect their own experiences as Ethnic-Americans within the pages of books. Also, even if I have a student who has read materials related to her own ethnicity, she usually has not been exposed to works that address the concerns or lives of other ethnicities.

During almost any given class period, we focus on a chapter or section of a book we have read, asking questions and offering interpretations. In this way, we are trying to put the literature into a context that we can apply to our own lives and knowledge of the world. Yet we do this as a group; although we read independently, we come together to discuss ideas and conflicts. Thus,

my classroom functions like a community. Britton (1987) quotes Jerome Bruner in order to stress the significant role classrooms play in socializing children:

> I have come increasingly to recognize that most learning in most settings is a communal activity, a sharing of the culture. It is not just that the child must make his knowledge his own, but that he must make it his own in a community of those who share his sense of belonging to a culture. It is this that leads me to emphasize not only discovery and invention but the importance of negotiating and sharing – in a word, of joint culture creating as an object of schooling and as an appropriate step en route to becoming a member of the adult society in which one lives out one's life. (25)

This description highlights negotiation, which implies a process or joint endeavor, and any community is dependent on this kind of interaction. This statement echoes Lev Vygotsky's central contention: "the claim that human consciousness is achieved by the internalization of shared social behavior" (Britton 1987:24). Students are exposed to words, concepts and meanings in the classroom, and through discussion they can begin to internalize this material and then use it to express their own interpretations to the community.

Vygotsky (1986) offers this process as his model for how children develop and learn: "Thus our schema of development – first social, then egocentric, then inner speech – contrasts with the traditional behaviorist schema...In our conception, the true direction of the development of thinking is not from the individual to the social, but from the social to the individual" (35-36). Students operate in a classroom community, and they use language as the principle means of communication. As they discuss literature, they begin to generate ideas and to stimulate their critical thinking. In Vygotsky's analysis, it is this emphasis on language that brings about their learning: "Thought development is determined by language, i.e., by the linguistic tools of thought and by the sociocultural experience of the child...The child's intellectual growth is contingent on his mastering the social means of thought, that is, language" (94). According to this theory, students need the stimulus of a learning community. This has tremendous implications for the classroom because it is this community that can provide the impetus for higher levels of thought and understanding: "Learning awakens a variety of internal

developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers. Once these processes are internalized, they become part of the child's independent developmental achievement" (Vygotsky 1978:90). This is most evident to me when I read my students' journals, and this is why I have elected to look at journal writing as the focus of this project. I see this internalization, the way in which they take what we have discussed in class and begin to turn it over in their minds. Vygotsky (1978) states that language begins as a means of communication, and then once language is internalized, or converted into inner speech, it becomes a mental function that helps to organize thoughts in the mind.

Vygotsky (1978) offers a learning theory called the zone of proximal development (ZPD). In it he establishes two developmental levels: an actual developmental level and a level of potential development. The space between these two planes serves as the ZPD: "It is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (86). This has significant impact on the relationship between development and learning because Vygotsky's (1986) model positions learning as a key to development: "The only good kind of instruction is that which marches ahead of development and leads it" (188). Teachers are placed in the position of mentor; they provide the assistance that enables the student to reach her potential: "What a child can do with assistance today she will be able to do by herself tomorrow" (Vygotsky 1978:87). Again, the emphasis is on collaboration, and teachers and students must work together effectively in order to create a successful learning environment. Vygotsky's notion of the ZPD offers a way of approaching students' developing understandings in the literature class. Britton (1987) states that teachers are "lending consciousness to those learners and enabling them to perform in this relationship tasks they could not achieve if left to themselves" (25), and his use of the term

"lending consciousness" accurately describes the teacher's role. When things go well, teachers are there to raise students' awareness of other cultures as well as their understanding of their own culture for themselves and in relationship to a larger community.

Power, an element in all language, is central to these conceptions of learning as a shared social experience. Focusing on its productive force as opposed to assumptions of coercion or repression, this notion of power suggests a kind of community where power must be shared in order for development to occur. Burgess (1984) advocates "ceding expertise" where children can help a teacher if the teacher gives students choices: "The formulation of this choice offers a space to be filled on a basis of complementary expertise and mutual support between pupils and teacher" (65). In a class where there are many ethnicities represented, this concept is central to creating a communal atmosphere. Inclusiveness is crucially important. If each student is not given the opportunity to participate, no learning can occur because that student is isolated and cut off from the culture of the class. Thus, as the teacher provides a framework, her students must be allowed to contribute to the makeup of the class and, perhaps, to challenge original assumptions the teacher may have made: "What evolves is mutually constructed. A description of this process needs to attach weight both to the ways in which pupils are constituted as learners and to the manner in which they, in turn, act on and order much of the content of the classroom culture" (Burgess 1984:67).

Maybin, Mercer, and Stierer (1992) adopt Bruner's term "scaffolding" which serves "as a metaphor for depicting the form and quality of the effective intervention by a 'learned' person in the learning of another person" (186). Students receive support during interactions with mentors, such as parents and teachers, and this guidance helps children as they begin to learn new concepts and skills. Scaffolding is directly connected to Vygotsky's zone of proximal development: "The tutor in effect performs the critical function of 'scaffolding' the learning task to make it possible for the child, in Vygotsky's words, to internalize external knowledge and

convert it into a tool for conscious control" (186-7). Through their interaction with a "tutor," students are able to accomplish an assignment which they would not have been able to complete on their own, and in realizing their own potential, they are learning how to eventually complete a similar assignment on their own. In relation to issues of power, scaffolding is a way in which to share expertise. Although teachers serve as guides, they cannot reserve all the power to themselves. Students are capable of and must work towards creating a role for themselves in their learning.

When applied to journal writing, the concept of scaffolding can be seen in the interaction of responses. As the child is writing, there is the unseen presence of the instructor and peers because the subject of the writing usually develops from previous discussions: "The child's concepts have been formed in the process of instruction, in collaboration with an adult... The adult's help, invisibly present, enables the child to solve such problems earlier than everyday problems" (Vygotsky 1986:191). The distinction of "problems" here relates to Vygotsky's spontaneous and scientific concepts:

> We may conclude that (a) the essential difference between written and oral speech reflects the difference between two types of activity, one of which is spontaneous, involuntary, and non-conscious, while the other is abstract, voluntary, and conscious; (b) the psychological functions on which written speech is based have not even begun to develop in the proper sense when instruction in writing starts. It must build on barely emerging, immature, processes. (183).

Writing, or "written speech," has a different function than oral speech because it is abstract. A blank page that does not respond or react to the student's ideas. Also, the ideas in a her head cannot just be put onto the page in an unproblematic way. Her ideas must be properly organized and articulated so that a reader might understand her meaning. This is profoundly different than being able to speak to someone in person because she has no visual or verbal cues to follow. "Written speech is deployed to its fullest extent, more complete than oral speech. Inner speech is almost entirely predicative because the situation, the subject of thought, is always known to the

thinker. Written speech, on the other contrary, must explain the situation fully in order to be intelligible" (Vygotsky 1986:182).

Vygotsky (1986) stresses the conscious nature of writing because the method of writing is a scientific concept that has to be acquired from teachers and parents, i.e. we have to learn the alphabet and the structure of the sentence in order to be able to write. This consciousness, as distinct from the unconscious nature of oral speech, "enhances the intellectuality of the child's actions. It brings awareness to speech" (183). Because a student has to think about what has been said and what she is saying in her mind in order to communicate in writing, she has to critically assess and synthesize her argument. Britton (1987) agrees with this important aspect of writing: "Learning to read and write had a profound effect upon the achievement of abstract thinking. The *constancy* of the written language, grafted, so to speak, upon the *immediacy* of the spoken language, enables a speaker to *reflect* upon meanings and by doing so acquire a new level of control, a critical awareness of his/her own thought process" (23). Britton's comparison between immediacy and constancy is especially relevant to the way I have gone about studying students' responses. They spend months reading and discussing texts and issues and create a record or document of their experience through their journal writing. They explore issues of ethnicity that are relevant to them. Thus, their writing is the process of imposing a kind of control or order upon their ideas so as to come to a higher level of understanding.

Since speech is directed towards others whereas in written dialogues "the closeness of the writing to one's thoughts is retained" (Stanton 1987:55-56), journals give the teacher and student time to elaborate and negotiate meaning together. They also serve as written milestones of the learning process: "A way of conceptualizing the many ways in which an individual's development may be assisted by other members of the culture, both in face-to-face interaction and through the legacy of the artifacts that they have created" (Wells 2000:57). In my experience, the learner is both the student and teacher; students rely on my feedback just as I do

on theirs. And our development does not happen sequentially or progressively in all cases. Most of the time it is dependent upon our feedback and comprehension, creating a spiral as opposed to a linear form of understanding (Samaras 2002).

Vygotsky and the Zone of Proximal Development

Using an explicitly Vygotskyan theoretical framework, Nassaji and Cumming (2000) looked at dialogue journal writing, "a situation where language teaching and learning are organized so that communication is systematically dialogic" (99). They analyzed 95 exchanges in interactive dialogue journals written over 10 months between a 6 year-old Farsi speaker beginning to learn English and his Canadian teacher. Like other researchers, they noted that most inquiry into students' writing has generally looked at the process as solitary and monologic, and even when there are studies of student/teacher interaction, most research examines "a teacher's unidirectional comments or isolated feedback provided at one particular moment in time, rather than as continual interactions over time" (100). Here the researchers set up their study so as to analyze the written interactions and elucidate some of the main qualities of the (ZPD) that were mutually constructed over time. They defined the dialogue journal as "a written, ongoing interaction between individual students and their teacher in a bound notebook" (101). They presented an account of the ongoing, reciprocal dimensions of language and teaching, showing the ZPD as a set of interactive processes. In conclusion, they stated the need for more research that would highlight the contingent progression of teaching and learning.

Wollman-Bonilla (1989) also noted the role of the ZPD: "Replying allowed me to collaborate with students, support their efforts and also help them understand and recognize what they could not grasp alone" (118). Her research addressed her own growth as a reading teacher as her students were engaged in a literature-based reading program. Instead of giving them specific writing assignments, she asked them to write her letters about their reading. She included some examples of her responses to students along with what she hoped to do for them,

but she did not provide any in-depth analysis of her own development. She also noted that students did not generally respond to her replies in their next entry, something I found as well. Each new reading assignment seemed to inspire a new entry. She noted in her conclusion how much she learned about her students and how the journal provided each student room to grow at his or her own pace.

Dialogue Journals

As I reviewed research that reflected the key methodological aspects of my case study, I found that there was a great deal of research on student-teacher journal writing, but very few studies examined teacher responses in the same depth as student writing. I also noted that the majority of studies of student and teacher journal responses focused on improving literature reading and literacy skills with only minor attention paid to issues of ethnic or racial identity. Here I have focused on the studies that illuminate my own research process and place my work in the context of other studies of student-teacher interaction through journal writing.

Stanton (1988b) shared the results of a study which analyzed the text of 26 student-teacher dialogue journals from a sixth-grade classroom. The researchers' purpose was to describe and understand the process of communication through writing which emerged as relatively unplanned, usually coming directly from the students' themselves and reflecting their concerns. They looked at both the classroom as a social system and the individual relationships between each student and the teacher. Similar to my study, these students were not given a block of time to write in the journal during class in order to promote autonomous learning and self-management. They concluded that the journals served three purposes. One was to develop mutuality between teacher and student, increasing understanding and establishing trust and cooperation. The second purpose was to provide a channel for self-expression, giving students the opportunity to share their opinions and feelings. Even if they disagreed with the class or

teacher, they would be affirmed and supported for being themselves. The third was to provide information, expanding the students' perspectives and offering explanations when necessary.

Meath-Lang (1990) collected and analyzed journal exchanges in her writing course for college students. She found that dialogue journal writing between teachers and students could be the foundation for a student-centered language program that would allow for the questioning of assumptions and the recreation of the curriculum. Dialogue journal writing allowed students to reflect on their learning and to develop their own educational goals, positioning the teacher and student as collaborators: "The dialogue *writing* that remains as an artifact further validates and documents these goals by recording their development across time" (11). She included complete examples of student journal entries and her responses. Although she provided in-depth analysis of her students' writing, she offered only a brief analysis of one of her responses. After feeling frustrated with what she felt was a "neutral" response, she commented:

> My response here dissatisfies me in all that I am thinking and saying...Teachers must consistently be on the lookout for the right time in communication and communion to give or not to give. They can only continue to reconceive, to do better the next time, as I hope to do better and better in my communication with this student. The journal will document and evaluate my success or failure. (16)

Similar to some of the frustration I felt as I looked back on my responses, Meath-Lang reflected on the need for teachers to continue learning and commit to their own progress even if their responses were not satisfying upon review.

Atwell (1987b) researched eighth grade readers' responses to a variety of subjects in order to discover how written dialogues about literature could help students engage in reflection and make texts more accessible: "I invited written dialogues about literature because I had some hunches about the combined possibilities of writing as a way of reflecting on reading, and teacher-learner correspondence as a way of extending and enriching reflection through collaboration" (158). Different from my study where students wrote about both literature and their experiences outside of the classroom, Atwell was careful not to respond too personally

students, deciding to focus only on the academic subject at hand. She articulated her role of respondent as striking "a careful balance between experienced reader, mentor, and teacher responsible to her adolescent students" (167). She also discussed the "explicit nudges" (168) she gave students in some of her responses, directing them in a particular way to expand their thinking. She concluded that dialogue journals encouraged students to read, enter the world of written texts, and make it their own. In addition, she could teach every reader and respond to what they were learning.

After returning to graduate school and writing her own journal entries for one of her courses, Chandler (1997) began to question how journals were evaluated in her classroom. Once she was back in her own classroom, she asked her students what kind of teacher response they found useful. Students appreciated honest feedback, wanting first a human response and then a teacher response that included a grade and suggestions for improvement. She advocated the use of "shared journals" (48), where both student and teacher responses were validated: "Journals should be physically constructed to promote further discussion of past issues and responses, as well as to allow for further dialogue on new subjects" (49). She put great emphasis on the value of "real dialogue – rather than no response or pretended response or critical response or graded response" (49), which required that the communicators trust each other enough to allow themselves to become vulnerable. Journal writing, like all other work in the classroom, should be a shared experience. Although she included samples from her own journals written in graduate school, she did not provide any of her specific responses to students.

Hancock (1993) explored the possible avenues of response that may be used in literature response journals. She defined the literature journals as a place for questions and speculations, discovering reactions and making room for the unexpected, while reading: "Not only does the response journal provide the freedom to focus on the expression of personal thoughts, but it elevates reading to an active process of personal meaning-making" (466). She catalogued the

types of responses based on her classroom study of sixth-grade students who responded to four books in a journal format. These broad areas of response were personal meaning making, character and plot involvement, and literary criticism. She highlighted the critical role of the teacher in expanding and enriching student responses to literature: "The teacher serves as a catalyst for encouraging exploration of the suggested avenues for responses...Striving to awaken new modes of response within the reader is the responsibility of the teacher in the role of facilitator and response guide" (470). She concluded that is was important for teachers to be supportive and non-judgemental. It was fine to be suggestive, but not demanding: "While a literature response journal provides a comfortable format for the collection and expansion of personal response, the teacher alone can provide the trusting environment in which readers feel the freedom to respond during their personal encounters with literature" (473). Teachers were instrumental in the scaffolding of student learning, encouraging readers and guiding them to extend their personal responses.

Werderich (2002) studied the extended use of dialogue journals for reading instruction for seventh-grade students. She examined the ways in which teachers could be responsive to individual differences among learners. Two of her key questions were: how does the teacher respond to students in dialogue journals, and how are dialogue journals used to promote personalized learning. Using a letter format, students wrote once a week to a peer and one letter every two weeks to the teacher. Journals were read to identify the ways in which the teacher promoted personalized reading instruction, and Werderich included many examples of both student and teacher letter exchanges in her study. She also looked for responses that showed how the teacher encouraged students to make discoveries about themselves. Again, there was not extensive analysis of teacher responses, but the author did note that teachers "play an important role in guiding students to make such valuable and rewarding discoveries" (7). In her conclusion she stated that the dialogue journals encouraged personal and insightful engagement with the

literature, and that how a teacher responds to students' journal letters was a key aspect of personalized learning. She noted that although there have been studies of teacher responses in the context of dialogue journals, research continues to focus on student responses without full examination and consideration of the teacher's role in the exchange. Finally, she noted that the influence of the teacher on student responses needed to be considered in future research on adolescents' responses to literature.

Reflective Practitioner

Boyce (1987) examined her students "commonplace books," what her class called their journals, and she included not only examples of their writing, but also their responses to her comments. Students wrote two entries per week, and after asking students to write about her comments to them in their commonplace books, she learned the effects her responses were having on their writing. At first, she responded quite defensively to some students after they said her comments were "bad and wrong" (130). Upon further reflection, she realized her annoyed responses to the students' critique dismissed their feedback, which she had solicited! Instead, she decided to "begin shaping my vision of student-teacher communication to the reality of student perception" (131). She learned that her most successful comments were those in which she was not a teacher, but rather another human being. They liked it when she told them what she did or thought. Boyce noted the risk of disclosure involved for the teacher, but noted that her "willingness to take the risk students do – the risk of meeting with indifference – is one reason they like conversational comments" (134).

Kinder (1996) studied narratives from her secondary English classroom in order to discover how "written and spoken stories can lead to praxis through narrative knowing" (11). She invited students to write stories about health issues that were affecting their lives and encouraged them to find research questions within their stories in order to name and transform

conditions in their lives. Kinder's dissertation was her own retelling of stories from four of her students, and through out the research process, she was aware of her own development: "When I write these stories for you, I discover added layers and more questions...As I rewrite them now and look for patterns and anomalies in the narratives, I continue to learn from writing their stories" (2-3). The research process caused her to make significant changes in her teaching practice, and her storytelling helped her understand what was happening in her classroom and what needed to happen next. Her self-reflection led to the questioning of her influence on students: "I must also consider the extent to which I was directing them or manipulating them. How can I make that judgment about myself and my practice?" (12). She also noted that even though she worked on the stories for three years, "They are not finished...they shifted meanings as I wrote them, and they have grown into new stories" (200). She concluded that as she asked her students to use dialogue to change their lives, she had to look at her own transformation which came from the student stories and to plan her own course of action.

Researching his own classroom community, Madigan (1990) documented the changes that occurred as he adopted critical pedagogy for literacy learning. He included many secondary student journal entries as part of his ethnographic narrative as well as his own writing from a journal he kept during his research process. As he told his own autobiography and documented his journey as a teacher-researcher, he explored the complex relationship between students and teachers and the need for more active participation through dialogue: " This may mean transforming our classroom communities from places where we go to accept the knowledge of others to places where we (students and teachers) go to generate knowledge of our own as we interact with others through dialogue" (4). He was actively engaged in reflective practice in order to evolve his pedagogy: "It is my intention to argue that telling the stories of the interactions that take place in classrooms is an especially viable means of noting changes in them" (45). He discovered that dialogue during his classroom writing projects had enabled the students to

develop a critical view of their worlds through shared knowledge. Along the way, he discovered a great deal about himself and the kind of teacher he wanted to become.

Samaras (2002) is a teacher educator and practicing theoretician who has designed and implemented a Vygotskian, sociocultural model for preparing preservice teachers. In her research, she conducted her own autobiographical self-study: "As I sorted out the sources of my teaching theory and practice, I moved toward an interpretation of the lived relationship between my education-related life experiences and my efforts to learn to teach preservice teachers from a sociocultural perspective" (5). Her findings demonstrated how to use and assess a Vygotskian model to support preservice teacher education as well as the value of a self-study of how that model became integral to her teaching: "I found that telling my own story helped me understand my teaching better, but I wanted to be sure that I told more then merely my story...I believe you have to be willing to tell the truth about your own life if you want students to tell their truths" (5). She utilized a reflective writing process similar to the one she asked her students to engage in, enabling her to better understand what her students were experiencing: "I am a practicing theoretician, modelling and studying theory in practice. I have enjoyed this writing more than any other I have ever done" (8).

I, too, found my own reflective practice invigorating. As many of the researchers cited here note, my role as a teacher-researcher was multi-dimensional. Although challenging, it allowed me to raise my practice to a new level. This body of research encompassing multiculturalism and literature, dialogics, Vygotsky's work on how children learn, and the use of dialogue journals helped frame my own work and provided a context for the study of my Ethnic Voices class in the fall of 1999.

METHODOLOGY

The overall project I am interested in is the development of ethnic identity in the context of the literature class and the use of dialogic writing. As noted in the previous chapter, my research crosses several fields including identity development, literature teaching and literary response, and dialogic engagement as educational process. My teaching and graduate work sparked my interest in ethnicity, and I chose to pursue this project in the hopes of illuminating a process of identity exploration that could be undertaken specifically in a literature course. In addition to capturing this developmental process, I also wanted to look at the contributions of the teacher to this process and the role of revisiting and retelling personal histories. Thus, this work is driven by teacher insights that, it is hoped, will enrich and deepen my interpretation of student responses and analysis of data. As a teacher, I bring knowledge of the school context, the course, the students, and their relationships to each other and their communities to the research process. I look at ethnicity not as a static abstraction, but rather as something that emerges and changes as the course happens. Essentially, this study focuses on the development of conceptions of ethnicity.

My central research questions are: what can we learn from student written testimony? I also consider what we can learn from students' journals about the ways in which ethnicity, race, racism, and privilege are experienced. Inherent in this inquiry is the work of the teacher: how can teachers respond effectively to student writing about ethnicity? This raises particular issues around the concept of white ethnicity and the tensions in white identity as self-defined: how does dialogic writing inform the process of developing self concept? I am interested in how a teacher contributes to this process and how to capture students trying to make sense of their ethnicity through their personal writing. This will necessarily entail revisiting experiences in childhood and adolescence. Ultimately, these questions lead to the every nature of the literature course and

its potential role in relationship to social justice: what kind of space can we create for students to engage in dialogue about aspects of their identity that they may not be able to explore in other settings? These queries guided the development of my research.

Case Study Method

I decided to use a case study, and I chose an interpretive research methodology because of the nature of what I wanted to discover. I wanted to understand how my students expressed their ethnicity in the context of the class and the literature we studied. As Erickson (1986) notes, interpretive research explores "the immediate and local meanings of actions, as defined from the actors' point of view" (119). This demonstrates a commitment to documenting "'in their own terms' the perspectives of the people involved in the events and settings they describe" (Hammersley 1992:33). I used journal writings as empirical evidence of how my students were constructing themselves in their own language. Thus, I wanted to research the daily practice of my teaching and their learning, an attempt "to make the familiar strange and interesting again" (Erickson 1986:121; see also Hammersley 1992). Additionally, I wanted to provide an analysis of what I sensed was happening for my students in a systematic way, illuminating the often invisible processes of teaching and learning (Erickson 1986). In this way, I was a participant observer. I remained in touch with their lives for an entire semester, watching them, asking questions, and reflecting on our time together, and I used our classroom culture as an "object available for study" (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995:9).

Yet in describing the events of my classroom, I needed a methodology that would not "ride roughshod over the complexity of the social world" (Hammersley 1992:32). I wanted a better understanding of how my students understood their own identity and the relationship between me, my responses to their journals, and their development through reading, writing, and discussion. This was a complicated scenario given the multiethnic identities of the young women

and range of texts we studied together. I was committed "to seeking to *understand* the perspectives of others, rather than simply judging them as true or false" (Hammersley 1992:45). Rather than discovering some universal truth, I wanted insight into the subtleties of identity and the relationship between English class and identity expression. I needed to focus on my students and the way in which they interpreted their world. Further to this, I was conscious of how my own identity development emerged. As Hammersley (1992) puts it: "People *construct* the social world, both through their interpretations of it and through the actions based on those interpretations (44; see also Scott and Usher 1996; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). My teaching had showed me that my students were actively engaged in their own process of discovering who they were through the lens of ethnicity and culture. The literature class provided a means, a way of interacting with the world that allowed them to develop a sense of themselves and their role in a larger community.

Given that "all accounts must be interpreted in terms of the context in which they were produced" (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995:130-31), I focused on one group of fourteen students I taught in class from September 1999 to January 2000. The purpose of my case study was to investigate and analyze this particular group in the hopes of establishing some larger generalizations about adolescent ethnic identity development in the context of the secondary English classroom:

> The initial task is analyzing qualitative data is to find some concepts that help us to make sense of what is going on in the scenes documented by the data. Often we will not be sure *why* what is happening is happening, and sometimes we may not even understand *what* is going on. The aim, though, is not just to make the data intelligible, but to do so in a an analytical way that provides a novel perspective on the phenomena we are concerned with or which promises to tell us much about other phenomena of similar types. (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995:209).

There are several advantages to the case study method that were crucial to the nature of my research. First, case studies tend to be "strong in reality" because they are grounded in experiences the reader can relate to, thus providing a likely basis for generalization. Second, they

recognize the subtlety and complexity of a particular case, but also allow for generalization from one class to another. Third, because of their focused attention to specific social situations, case studies can account for differences in perspectives among participants. Fourth, case studies produce insights that can directly impact classroom practice because those insights "begin in a world of action and contribute to it." Finally, case studies are a very accessible form of research, allowing readers to study the data and judge for themselves which contributes to the "'democratization' of decision-making" and knowledge production (Cohen and Manion 1994:123). By using the case study method, I would be able to bring my teaching insights to my analysis.

Journal Writing

I need to say why I chose to look at journal writing. Stanton (1988a) defines dialogue journal writing as "the use of a journal for the purpose of carrying out a written conversation between two persons, in this case a student and the teacher, on a regular, continuous basis" (4). Ideally, it is an equal process that creates interactions in order to bring about new ideas and understandings, and both participants have the right to comment on each other's entries. The participants do not have to focus on just academic work; a wide range of personal concerns is acceptable. Another key component is that the teacher participates fully and responds to the student's concerns and experiences, not to the writing. Instead of evaluating errors and commenting on form, the teacher writes back as an interested partner focused on content: asking questions, clarifying ideas, eliciting more details, sharing her feelings and concerns, and introducing topics she finds interesting. It is not a method for teaching specific writing skills (Stanton 1987, 1988a; Lucas and Jurich 1990).

There is also an important distinction to be made between just replying to a piece of writing and *responding* through a written conversation. Stanton (1987) writes: "A response

involves an implicit commitment of self, an engagement with the other. Dialogue journals involve this kind of response by the teacher, and eventually by the student as well – first by the act of 'listening' to the student's person/voice as it comes through the page itself and then by making a commitment of self in written response" (47). This is one of the main reasons I chose to examine our journal exchanges: the process required something of both me and the students. Journals allow for the development of teacher and student: "What is striking about the dialogue journal is that it provides opportunities for both student *and* teacher to experience the need to be understood, and to find out who they are in this context. In each dialogue, the initial discussion of daily events and problems, the sharing of opinions and desires, builds a foundation of understanding and knowledge" (Stanton 1988a:313). Lucas and Jurich (1990) call this process a "mutual search for meaning" (x) wherein the student untangles ideas and experiences as the teacher examines personal and professional philosophies as she struggles with how to respond to students. In our exchanges, I sometimes asked students to respond to a specific question. These "nudges" served as scaffolding questions whereby I could guide their writing (Bean and Rigoni 2001). Generally, students chose their own writing topics, allowing for "student ownership, voice, personal and multiple interpretations, and a shift away from superficial responses" (Bean and Rigoni 2001:3).

Another significant contribution of dialogue journals to research on writing is to expand our understandings of what written communication can look like: "If writing research remains limited to studying only the traditional writing tasks and texts of students in classrooms, it will be studying only constrained, often artificial uses of language which do not occur in the real world, and which ignore the child's natural communicative competence" (Stanton 1988a:317). Ideally, the dialogue journal positions the teacher as a colleague as well as "teacher," and the result will be clear, concise, and authentic writing on the part of students. Thus, potentially, the dialogue journal affords insight into the writing process. A series of entries cannot show the

whole picture of development, but in the way I have chosen to use them, they provide soundings that give an indication of a larger process. In addition, journals offer a picture of something students and teachers share: "The dialogue journals provide documentation of the social interaction essential for human learning. Each interaction in the journals records actual dialogue between a young member of he human community and a more experienced member charged with the task of human education" (Stanton 1988a:320). Studies by Lucas and Jurich (1990) have found that journal writing helps students gain self-confidence and develop skills for arguing issues and seeing different points of view. It also allows students to integrate their own knowledge with the text they are reading, providing a space for reflection and learning.

Cochran-Smith (1995), a white teacher trainer, notes that her work with preservice teachers often means having her students "rewrite their autobiographies or reinterpret some of their own life stories and/or previous experiences" (547). As her students connected their personal experiences with their new insights and learning about race, ethnicity and racism, they could see how their backgrounds impacted their teaching and how stereotypes, prejudice and racism were inherent in schools. But this often left her students with more questions than answers, setting them on a journey to understand their own identity in relation to their future students and to be committed to a process of discovery that would continue as they entered their classrooms.

The Young Women Enrolled in Ethnic Voices

Fourteen students enrolled in Ethnic Voices, an elective English course available to all juniors and seniors (students 16-18 years old). During the first two years of our secondary school, English was a required course, and all students studied the same material. After the first two years, students chose one English elective course each semester from a variety of choices, meaning they would take two courses per year. The Academic Dean solicited course preferences

from each student, and according to her schedule, she was placed in her first or second choice. Therefore, all of my students had read the course description in advance and had chosen to take Ethnic Voices. Students also had the ability to drop the course during the first weeks of school, but none of my students left the class.

There were five self-identified white students. All came from European backgrounds, including Irish, German, Scandinavian, and English ethnicities (see Appendix B for class list). There were seven students of color who self-identified as African-American, Asian-American, and Indo-American. In addition, there was one Jewish student and one bi-racial Middle-Eastern/Euro-American in the class. These two students saw themselves as moving across borders and between worlds, passing as white at times but also identifying strongly with students of color due to experiences with anti-Semitism and racism.

These young women attended a prestigious, college preparatory where the curriculum was academically demanding. Their ability to read and analyze texts was strong, due in part to a rigorous and highly structured English curriculum. Ethnic Voices was considered an "advanced placement" (AP) course meaning that students who took the Literature AP test at the end of secondary school and received a passing grade would be given college credit in advance of their enrolment in university. This had financial implications (students could take fewer courses to graduate) as well as academic consequences because students could enter higher level courses earlier in their university career. Thus, these were highly motivated students.

Course Description and Data Collection

Ethnic Voices involved both informal and formal writing. Students composed essays on literary criticism outside of class and wrote in-class essays in response to given questions or as an explication of a text excerpt. Most weeks they had to write two journal entries, and I collected their journals every two weeks (for a full description of the journaling process, see Appendix C).

Some weeks they did not write entries if they were working on a formal essay or if we had an in-class writing exam. All the students completed the sixteen required journal entries, and some wrote additional entries. At the midpoint of the course, students created a "class journal." Each student wrote an anonymous entry (coded by a letter), and I put all of the entries together and distributed them. Students were then asked to write a response to the class journal. This gave them the opportunity to read each other's writing and to have a sense of how other students were composing journal entries.

Sometimes I responded to an individual entry, or I made comments after several entries. I wrote right inside their journals, alongside their text. Often I made brief marginal comments, or I posed questions and offered reflections. Generally, I did not proscribe topics for the journal writing, but on four occasions I asked students to address a specific topic or question. To help get them started, I provided a question for the first entry. After reading an article on white racial privilege, I asked them to consider the privileges they had. Towards the mid-point of the course, I asked them to evaluate their process: how were they feeling about their ethnic identity? What were they learning/seeing? I also asked them to write an evaluation of the course as one of their final entries. For this project, I cited a few examples of student writing from a formal essay if it helped to elucidate a particular student perspective on her identity, but the rest of my data was derived form the journal entries and my responses.

The context for all of this writing was fiction and non-fiction texts (see Appendix D for complete list of course texts, chronology, and descriptions). Together we read four novels: *Bread Givers*, *Ellen Foster*, *Ceremony*, and *Woman Warrior*; one play, *Twilight Los Angeles, 1992*; and the choreopoem *for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf.* We also read essays on a variety of topics such as Peggy McIntosh's work white racial identity and privilege, the definition of "Standard English," and stereotypes of Asian-American women. I also included short stories and poetry when appropriate. Most of the reading was completed

outside of class, and so we spent time together reflecting and responding to the literature. Students were always free to share their journal entries with the class, but I did not require them to do so. It was our understanding that I would be the only one to read their work unless they gave their journal to someone else.

When I collected the journals, I photocopied all of the entries after I had responded. I kept a file on each student, so when the course was finished and I began to interpret the data, I had my own hard copy of all of their work. On the first day of class, I sent home a research release form with each student. They and their parents read the document, signed, and returned it to me. It described the topic and nature of my research as well as the fact that I would be using students' writing as my data. The release gave me permission to use their work and assured them that none of their names would be used.

These journal entries contain sensitive material and personal information. In following ethical guidelines for research, I have made every effort to be conscious of what is offered here. These young woman shared their perceptions with the understanding that their identity would be safeguarded. Therefore, all names that appear in this project have been changed to preserve anonymity.

Data Interpretation

I did not start analyzing my data until after the course had finished. I began by reading through the complete set of each student's entries and making notes on each entry. After I read all the entries, patterns and themes began to surface. White students wrote about their ethnicity in very different ways than the students of color did, and I soon realized that I needed to look at these groups separately. This was not to provide a systematic comparison, but rather to acknowledge differences among processes of identity development and various ways of responding to the course material. It was also apparent that my Jewish and bi-racial students had

a special experience, and I felt they should also be looked at on their own. I needed to look explicitly at their responses to the literature, so I considered those entries in their own light. These initial observations helped to shape the chapters presented here around specific themes so I could identify their growth and their voices, and allow their histories to emerge.

As I read through all of the students' journals entries, I selected those that either directly mentioned ethnicity or referred to issues related to their ethnic identity. I also looked for entries that revealed reflection on their process, how they understood their own development and growth. I found anecdotes to be some of the most powerful responses because they were detailed and nuanced, and I felt they communicated the complexity of specific contexts. I used similar criteria in the analysis of my own writing. Anytime I mentioned my own identity or reflected on the process of identification, I included those responses as part of my data. Overall, I selected entries and responses that helped to tell the story of what happened for us over the course of the semester. Our developing consciousness was not a linear progression, but rather a series of moves forwards and backwards, bumping up against each other in an effort to understand our notions of ourselves and others.

The Role of the Teacher-Researcher

I need to be clear about my methodology in relation to my position as a teacher-researcher. Atwell (1987a) writes: "As members of that classroom community, we teachers are in an ideal position to observe, describe, and learn from the behaviors of our student writers. As those who will most directly benefit from and increased awareness of children's language learning processes, it is to our advantage to take on the role of researchers of writing" (88). For those of us working in classrooms, it is critical that we formulate questions, pursue dialectic ways of understanding classroom culture, and reflect on what we have learned. Bertoff (1987) notes, "Research, like REcognition, is a REflexive act. It means looking – and looking again.

The new kind of REsearch would not mean going out there after new 'data,' but rather REconsidering what is at hand. REsearch would come to mean looking and looking at what happens in the English classroom" (30). I knew I had a rich source of data in the journals, but I needed a way of seeing our writing through a new lens. While I was teaching the course, I did not have the space or time to reflect on what I had read and how I had responded. When I first considered the project, I thought I would not be able to develop a critical analysis of my own practice. I assumed I needed an "outsider" to help me see what I needed to be doing. Yet, even though I had these concerns about my role as both teacher and researcher, I ultimately decided the benefits far outweighed the disadvantages. In fact, I came to see my position as advantageous: "How people respond to the presence of the researcher may be as informative as how they react to other situations. Indeed, rather than engaging in the futile attempts to eliminate the effects of the researcher completely, we should set about understanding them" (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995:18). Thus, I chose to reflect on both my students' writing as well as my own responses in order to better understand how we were co-constructing understanding and identity, positioning myself in Erickson's (1986) words as "an unusually observant participant who deliberates inside the scene of action" (157).

My role as a teacher-researcher raised the issue of reflexivity as a key aspect of interpretive research. Scott and Usher (1996) offer a clear definition of this problem:

> As researchers, we seek to make sense of what we are researching, and we, too, do so through interpretive schemes or frameworks. This process of double sense-making is referred to as the "double hermeneutic." In other words, unlike the situation in the natural sciences, in social research both the subject (the researcher) and object (other people) of research have the same characteristic of being interpreters or sense-seekers. (18-19).

As my students interpreted both the course texts as well as the representations of their lives, I was interpreting their writing and examining my own position and relation to them and the literature. In a sense, therefore, I was just as much a part of the research as they were: "Research may be carried out by individuals but it is not individualistic. Indeed it could be said that the very

notion of the 'individual' is a *subject position* produced by a certain kind of discourse" (Scott and Usher 1996:35). The researcher and the researched exist in a dialogical relationship, and the meaning of that relationship is constructed by their interaction. Both occupy social positions and have experiences in the world that cannot be ignored. Thus, another core element of reflexivity is power: "Research imposes a closure of the world through representation; it is always and inevitably involved with and implicated in the operation of power" (Scott and Usher 1999:1). I had become increasingly aware of how my knowledge of the world was shaped by social identities, such as race, ethnicity, and gender, and by my membership in both dominant and sub-dominant social groups.

I want to call attention to three key feminist methodological aspects that Harding (1987) highlights. First, women's experiences become resources for social analysis, and as Harding states, "there is no such thing as a problem without a person (or groups of them) who have this problem: a problem is always a problem for someone or other" (6). Specifically, I was observing young women and their experiences, conflicts, and understandings of ethnicity. Second, although traditional research has been for men, my research was focused on women, another hallmark of feminist research. Finally, there was the issue of reflexivity: "locating the researcher in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter" (8). As the girls began the process of reading, writing, and sharing their experiences with the class, I realized that I, too, was on my own journey to better understand my ethnicity and how I was socially constructed. Palmer's (1998) thesis in *The Courage to Teach* is a simple, straightforward directive: teach who you are. In order to support the learning of my students, I had to be aware of my own identity development and of how my position affected the course. Consequently, as I analyzed journal entries, I was looking at not only my students' writing, but also my responses to their entries. At the onset, I did not anticipate this plane of reflection, but after including my own writing along with my students' journals, my

position as a teacher-researcher highlighted the complicated role of bringing my experience as a teacher to my work as a researcher.

The Research Process

When I first started copying the students' journals, I did not plan on referencing my responses specifically. I knew my role as teacher would be considered as it impacted my task as researcher, but I did not intend to include my own writing for analysis. However, as I was reading through the entries, I reflected on what I had written to the girls and realized that my responses were an important piece of the data for they directly referenced and affected the girls' writing.

From the onset, I knew that I could not take at face value what the students wrote about the literature and their lives. They were not innocent transcriptions of their intimate thoughts and beliefs. Rather, these journal entries emerged in a complicated social space and served many functions. They meet a teacher's demands for they were self-presenting. However, they also provided a potentially unique opportunity for the girls to think through what they found interesting and difficult about ethnic identity with an adult who was aiming to support their development and who needed to engage in a similar set of processes. Thus, in order to capture these developing understandings presented through journal entries, this story relies to some extent on the teacher's narrative and her interpretation of events as they unfolded in a concrete set of circumstances.

White Ethnics: How White Students Construct Ethnicity

When I was teaching in California in Spring 2000, some of my high school students hosted a diversity week as one of their multicultural club events. One of the events of the week was affinity group discussions on ethnic and racial identity. Signs were posted in the lunchroom telling students where their affinity group would meet. A white student leader and I waited patiently in the classroom designated for Euro-American/white students and teachers. No one else came to this meeting. After lunch as I was debriefing with the student leaders, one of my students of color turned to me a said with a look of disbelief: "Do white people know they are white?" It was an excellent question, and we spent the next half hour trying to think of ways we could help white people see their race and ethnicities as an essential part of diversity and multiculturalism.

This chapter focuses on my five white students and their understanding and interpretation of ethnicity (see Appendix B for complete class list). These five young women had different notions of their ethnic identity at the beginning of the class, and they developed conflicting understandings as the course progressed. My goal here is to show where the students were when the course began and how their sense of their identity changed over time as we read, discussed, and wrote about course readings and their experiences in their communities and with their families. It is important to note that in these entries, students were representing experience. These were instances of writing, and writing in school for a teacher at that. I did not read all of what they wrote as the actual state of affairs, recognizing that they might have been operating strategically. Rather, these writings captured their ideas and experiences at specific moments in time, not definitive truths or what they might have actually believed. As a group, they offered insights into understanding that developed over time.

Some key themes emerged in these entries and in my responses. Students struggled with their individual identity in contrast to their membership in an ethnic or racial group. Most students had not thought about either their ethnic or racial identity, so the literature was eye-opening for them. The essays and fiction we read were a means of introducing topics and bringing other voices to our discussions. Students could read accounts where writers were attempting to describe their ethnic or racial identity, and these narratives served as both models as well as in-depth explorations of identification. Some of the white students envied people of color who they thought had an ethnicity (as opposed to white people who had no ethnicity), and even if they could label their ethnicity, they felt no real connection to that ethnic group. There was a great deal of defensiveness and discomfort around their racial identity, and so I tailored my teaching to respond to what I perceived was a need for a safe place to begin a discussion their racial and ethnic identity. In my responses, I felt myself trying to encourage these students to stay with the process in light of their uneasiness. I shared my own experiences in an effort to show them that they were not alone in this process and that other whites struggled with notions of ethnicity and race.

The Social Construction of Whiteness

It is important to place white ethnic identity in a historical context. The term "white" did not explicitly emerge until the latter part of the nineteenth century in American society. James Banks (2000), a leading scholar of Multiculturalism at the University of Washington, writes about new immigrants from Ireland, Eastern, Southern and Central Europe who challenged notions of whiteness upon their arrival in the US. In an effort to experience the American dream, many white ethnic groups assimilated and their distinct ethnic characteristics, such as language, were abandoned or erased in order to become "American." Moving through Ellis Island, names were changed and left behind in favor of new names that were easier to pronounce or that

sounded more "American," further contributing to the homogenization of white ethnics. By the early 20th century, multiple ethnic categories had become one racial category

Valerie Babb (1998) writes about the development of the term "white" in her book *Whiteness Visible*. She states, "For the different ethnicities and classes who left Europe to come to an unfamiliar wilderness where new structures had to be devised to meet new needs, whiteness furnished a social order that forged a nascent national identity and minimized potential class warfare" (37). To create this exclusive national identity, it was necessary to fabricate a shared Anglo-Saxon past that would give a variety of whites a common heritage even if this past was in direct conflict with the multiple ethnicities and classes that made up American society. By creating a white racial identity, as opposed to an English or Irish one, a nation of white ethnics could become a race that would create an identity and, at the same time, serve as a rationale for excluding non-whites. English superiority and domination in the colonies was replaced by white superiority.

It is not unusual for a new group to develop a norm that represents the group's character, and here the norm was established by rejecting other groups with a different character. In a time of rapid social transformation, whiteness was a unifying force that diffused social tensions, consolidated social and economic power, and integrated new white immigrants into a "white American fabric" (Babb 1998:41). Babb exposes a great American irony: with whiteness as a naturally superior racial identity, whites could reconcile undemocratic principles like slavery and limited voting rights with higher democratic ideals. This means of creating white hegemony brings us back to identity, but it is an identity created through difference. Here exclusion is not the ability to say who is white, but rather the power to determine who or what is *not* white. Colonists were the chosen white people who solidified their identity by being different from Native Americans and Africans. Thus, another irony emerges: even though cultural mixing was a

huge part of the formation of an American identity, there was this desire for racial purity that would privilege one group over another. Babb writes that by the mid to late nineteenth century:

> The social label of whiteness mitigated potential class strife among white ethnics and that more and more, whiteness became synonymous with Americaness as the identity of the nation was cemented to the identity of a single created race. The question of who was a "real" American was increasingly answered with the response that it was one who was white, thus giving this race a position of national privilege. (93)

In the first quarter of the twentieth century, obvious and pervasive cultural rituals and institutions sustained whiteness as the American norm along with white superiority. Cultural images erased racial plurality and established whiteness as a privileged social category, again illustrating the irony of a multiracial country portraying itself as monoracial.

To foreground ethnicity as a distinct social identifier, I began teaching Ethnic Voices by assigning an immigrant research paper along with the novel *Bread* Givers, a novel about a young Jewish woman whose family immigrated to the United States in the early 1900's, and "Children of the Sea," a modern Haitian emigration story by Edwidge Danticat (see Appendix D for full description of course texts). My intent was to place ethnicity within a historical context, to help students see that ethnicity is different from race and that it is a strong identifier for individuals and families, especially those who have just arrived in America and/or who are willing to sacrifice their lives to experience the American dream. Students interviewed an immigrant and wrote a narrative account of their interview, allowing the reader to hear the voice of the immigrant, his/her experiences of assimilation and the retention of ethnic identity, perceptions of America, and any questions that may have occurred to the writer during the process of interviewing, reading, and writing. While working on these papers, students began writing their journals (see Appendix C for description of journaling process), and for our first journal entry, assigned at the first class meeting, I asked the students to write about the first time they became aware of their ethnicity. I used this writing assignment to give me a baseline of how they

interpreted their ethnic identity. All journal entries appear as originally written. I have not edited grammatical or spelling mistakes, choosing to preserve the personal expression of each student.

First Journal Entries on Ethnicity

Four out of my five white students wrote mainly about race as opposed to ethnicity, and this pointed to one of the main hurdles white students faced when discussing ethnicity. Ethnicity was seen as synonymous with race, and the distinction between the two was not evident. Even Stephanie, who was active in the multicultural club and had attended people of color conferences and diversity institutes, wrote about her racial identity. When I gave the assignment, I did not explain or define the term "ethnicity" because I wanted to establish their initial understanding of the term and how they saw their ethnicity at the beginning of the course.

Elizabeth, the only student who really focused on her ethnic identity, began by saying, "This is a tough question for me to answer. As I grew up, I never really was aware of my ethnicity." (all references are to journal entry #1 unless otherwise noted). Even though she was told she was Irish and German, it did not mean much to her, and "even now, I do not feel as though I identify with either of these groups." Her reason for not identifying was interesting: "If I was to travel to either one of these countries, I would not feel comfortable or as though I fit in." Here ethnicity was comfort within a group, yet the idea was returning to a home country, not seeing how she might fit in with an Irish-American community in the United States. She then referred to holidays, especially St. Patrick's Day, that held no meaning for her like they did for others: "I never did any more than dress in green on St. Patrick's Day and even that was because all my friends were."

However, her lack of identification then took an interesting turn: "I always wished that I felt a special tie to Ireland or Germany and I always envied my friends who did." The issue of envying others who seem to have an ethnicity emerged as a theme for many of the white

students. The paradox here was significant: she had an ethnic identity, which meant very little to her, so in affect, she envied others who had what she thought she lacked. This dislocation and lack of ethnic identification creates another dividing line between white ethnics, who see themselves without ethnicity, and people of color, who have readily identifiable ethnic backgrounds. Elizabeth's final statement reasserted her struggle: "So, to answer the question, I guess I never have become truly aware of my ethnicity. I have always known about it. Ever since I can remember, I have known I was Irish and German, but I have never identified with either group." She deftly illustrated the distinction between knowledge and identification; she might have known what she was, but that awareness was not integrated into her lived experience. It was simply a label with no substance.

Kimmy began by discussing her ethnic background as Norwegian "and a bunch of other Anglo-Saxon parts." To her, the word "ethnicity" meant "where you come from." She made an immediate jump to race: "I first felt that I was white/traditional caucasian when I came to [school]" in sixth grade. So school was the place she first felt white, not ethnic; racial and ethnic identity lines blurred. She wrote that she remembered "almost all of our assemblies centering around the topic of race." Her perception of the predominance of race, which was not supported by actual events, showed how white students were sensitive to racial issues. Did she perceive an over focus on race even when there was very little time devoted to the subject? This question is tied to the conception that diversity *is* race; in my experience, any mention of diversity conjures images of people of color, so any assembly about diversity may be coded as "race." Kimmy felt it was the assemblies that told her she was different; until then, she had not been aware of being different. She referred to her best friend from kindergarten through fifth grade who was African-American, "and I'd never been told that, if you can understand this, she was black or different or anything like that. Coming to [school] was the first time it was called to my attention that whites and blacks were separate." These lines suggest, perhaps, white society's silence about race and a

desire for color-blindness, to not even see racial differences. Also, her use of "separate" had a negative implication; the noticing of race caused division.

Then Kimmy jumped back to ethnicity: "Now as I continue here ethnicity has changed in meaning from where you come from to a statement of almost defensiveness. With all the political hoopla flying around people are so afraid of being judged by just their color." And, again, her description of ethnicity was actually about race. Besides, the idea of judgment here could be read as having two meanings. First, white people who see the color of others might be perceived as judging or discriminating against people of color -- perception of difference was synonymous with racism. Second, to see their own whiteness, they might be judged as white supremacists or racists. Either way, acknowledging color was a no-win situation for white students. Then, she asserted ethnicity as a *useful* category: "In a way it is a good identifier (ethnicity) because you learn so many things from just one person with so many in them." Although a bit hard to interpret (so many what in them?), this line, coming on the heels of the comment about "political hoopla," shows that Kimmy moved between both race and ethnicity, and the distinction was not always clear. She seemed ambivalent and unable to settle on one interpretation.

Mary used ethnicity as the understanding of her racial identity. Throughout her entry, her use of the word "ethnicity" could be substituted for "race" because she used the terms interchangeably. She began with an interesting assertion: "I suppose that I have been fortunate to not have had a negative experience with my ethnicity at an early age." This assumed that most people had negative experiences in relation to their ethnic identity and located difference as a deficit. Her mother told her she was blind to all ethnic differences until age five. Again, school became a place where children learned about difference, not at home, and she made an important distinction: "Although this was the time in my life when I first realized that I was white as opposed to black or another shade of skin tone, I did not understand or become aware of any of

the implications that came along with being a white girl." Awareness of difference was set apart from any kind of valuation or consequence of difference. She continued:

> It was not until my race was used against me that I finally understood my ethnicity. This happened when I was in seventh grade and was harassed by a car full of Hispanic men. I realized that in their eyes my ethnicity meant something about my character or family. It was the first time that I had really noticed being pre-judged because of my race. I remember wondering what motive these men could have had in hassling me. I realized that it was not with me that they had the problem, it was with my whiteness.

The idea that a young white woman could have her race used against her was significant. Critical details were missing from the story, most importantly what the Hispanic men said, and this made it more difficult to understand why Mary drew the conclusion that her race was "the problem." She did feel judged, but what could a car full of men of color yell at a white girl to make he feel that her race was being used against her? Given the reality of racism in the US, what kind of racial power would their prejudice carry? Despite the lack of clarity surrounding the event, the significance was in her perception: race was triggered for her, be it what the men said or the very fact that they were Hispanic men. And this event became a defining moment for her in her racial and ethnic identity development.

The theme of defensiveness around being white also emerged in Christi's entry. She, too, immediately conflated ethnicity and race. After writing my journal question at the top of the page which clearly asked about her ethnic awareness, Christi wrote:

> The question of "what race are you" can be easily answered by many people with a statement like: I am Indian, I am Chinese, I am Russian, etc. For me, this question has no obvious answer. I feel that I am supposed to reply with "I am white," but that only describes my skin and appearance, not my background, culture or heritage.

She seemed to understand the difference between race, skin color, and ethnicity, country of origin/language, but instead of answering with her ethnicity, she immediately asserted race and used ethnic identifiers as racial distinctions (i.e. Russians are white). She then moved directly to "reverse racism": "I have grown to resent the term 'white.' This is because every time I become

aware of my ethnicity, it is in a negative context." She positioned herself as a victim of racial prejudice, and at the same time, commented on the fact that her racial awareness was not fixed or intrinsic; her awareness of her race was dependent on someone else telling her she was white:

> One of my friends is African-American. I was eating a family dinner at her house where I was the only "white" person. Someone said a joke about me not understanding a lot because I am as white as they come. My skin color has no effect on my intellect and even though I now don't think that that is what the person was implying, at the same time, his statement brought my whiteness to the center of my thoughts.

My first reaction was why is this a negative context? As she stated, she realized later that this was not a criticism of her race, but it seemed as if just the fact that she had to think about her whiteness made her uncomfortable. And so, was it her discomfort that created a negative context? She was clearly sensitive, and being the only white person at dinner would not be easy if it was not a familiar experience. It is difficult to assess the comment made to her out of its context, but it would seem to imply that she could not understand something related to African-American culture because of her background or naiveté. Of course, it was not a particularly polite thing to say to a guest in one's home (someone clearly trying to be a part of another culture), yet Christi felt it was negative. The attention to her color was negative, illustrating again the difficulty some white people might have addressing their whiteness when they were used to just being normal, not "raced."

She continued by saying," throughout my life, people have made cracks about me being the 'typical white girl.' Even though this is true in many ways, it shouldn't be used in negative connotations and it shouldn't forget the fact that I have so many different yet strong backgrounds." The stereotyping had an obvious effect on her racial and ethnic identity development. She appeared to see beyond the superficiality of her color and was frustrated that others often couldn't see beyond her whiteness. Yet did the noticing of her race discount her culture? Did marking her as white serve as a negative connotation? Perhaps is was the role of her racial group membership when she wanted only be seen as an individual. She told another story

about her Mexican roommate at summer camp: "She was proud of her heritage and ethnicity and would not tolerate anyone cutting her down in any way. However, she constantly kidded me about being a 'little white girl.' I know it was a joke and I took no offense. I just get curious how so many people today don't even think twice about insulting white people." Clearly, she was offended, but why? The diminutive is clear, but by locating the statement as an insult, Christi moved the exchange to another level. Sometimes feelings of guilt about being white can create defensiveness, and perhaps this was behind Christi's statement. Christi concluded, "I guess people with white skin have no culture or background, but believe me, my ethnicity cannot just be described as white." This was both an insightful and troubling statement. She recognized race as an empty identifier since it was not a biological or essential fact, yet she indicated no understanding of the political nature of race or her own privileged position as a white person. She knew ethnicity was something different from her white skin, but she did not articulate how they were related.

Finally, my fifth student Stephanie wrote about her racial identity and the first time she was part of a racial minority. Interestingly, although she referred to herself as white and part of the majority, showing a high level of identity awareness, she still wrote an account of her racial, not her ethnic, identity:

> Growing up, I was always part of the majority. My entire class from kindergarten through seventh grade was made up of white people. In ballet, there were only white people. In swim class and playgroup and girl scouts, more white people. I was surrounded constantly by people who looked and talked like I did. I never had to say, "I'm white" out loud, or seek our familiar faces in a crowd. I lived in the epitome of a sheltered environment.

Stephanie's level of awareness was helpful because it illustrated the extent to which segregation limits ethnic racial identity development. Her "sheltered" environment shielded her from having to confront or acknowledge a significant part of who she is. As a young child, she wanted to learn about people of color: "I decided that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was 'cool,' and I wanted to learn about all these people who I never interacted with and hardly ever saw." Her inquisitive

nature led her to a diversity institute the summer she was sixteen years old: "Suddenly I was a minority. I was surrounded by a sea of dark hair and dark faces, feeling isolated and conspicuous with my blond hair and blue eyes. Although I tried my best to not let it bother me, it did." This description showed how white people could experience the same feelings of isolation as people of color did when they were in the minority. The difference was most white people never found themselves in Stephanie's situation. Possibly, her discomfort came from years of never having to reflect on her skin color or even her culture because she was always in the company of others who were just like her.

She continued her consciously crafted account of her feelings while at the institute:

> So many things raced through my head at once: I want to see a familiar face, I'm racist for thinking that, I'm uncomfortable but shouldn't be. My mind screamed "help" but was censored by years of society's teachings. Years of being told that white and black people are the same and being racist is the worst crime a person could commit. So I suffered through the week feeling rejected by my peers and horribly alone. And on top of all this, I felt that everything I was feeling made me a bad person. I actually felt bad that I was white.

Stephanie described a situation that Giroux (1997) writes about in his work with students. It is difficult for them to see themselves as both white and anti-racist; the terms seem mutually exclusive. Giroux describes a space for students to move beyond polarized notions of race to the development of a continuum of white identity. Instead of either drowning in guilt or accepting whiteness as the norm, students ought to be "part of a broader new discourse of ethnicity, so that White youth can understand and struggle against the long legacy of white racism while using the particularities of 'their own culture as a resource for resistance, reflection, and empowerment'" (314, quoting Stuart Hall).

Stephanie seemed to have the voice of society in her head telling her she should be embracing the situation, yet she also received contradictory messages. She named the fear expressed by most whites I work with: the worst thing one can do to a white person is to call her a racist. And this led to self-judgment: she felt like a bad person. There was no gray area, no

continuum of development. She was either good or bad, a dichotomy detailed by Alice McIntyre (1997) in her research with white teachers: "The participants spoke about whites in very dualistic terms throughout the research experience. There were the good whites and the bad whites" (95).

Stephanie then recounted a breakthrough moment. She talked with an Asian student from her school who helped her to see that she was not a bad person. What she had been feeling was OK – it is hard for anyone to be the minority. Through her dialogue with another who was different from her, she could see her experience in a new way and reconstruct herself as someone who was not racist. She made a critical distinction:

> So although I've always known that I'm white, I never fully understood what that meant until the NAIS conference. It was there that I was forced to look at my ethnicity from a whole new perspective, the perspective of being a minority. I was depending on people who were from different backgrounds and different ethnicities for the love and support that everyone needs.

Here she incorporated her ethnicity with her race, showing her realization that to fully know herself, she had to experience herself differently. She had to be white in a new way, as a minority and not a majority. Then, to move through her guilt, she had to make a connection with someone outside her experience to see herself from another perspective. It was only when she could see herself through her friend's eyes that she felt better about who she was. She clearly articulated the necessity of her dependence on difference for a stronger sense of self. Thus, she represented a moment of complicated self-awareness.

She also noted the larger societal forces at play and the relevance of context. She realized that "it's not that [minorities] are different, it's just the situation they happen to be in that creates difference. And it could just as easily be me... I can still be a minority. I am still vulnerable to judgments and criticisms based on my skin color." She no longer saw herself as isolated or separate from the group; she could finally locate herself in the bigger picture of racial and ethnic identity and see her privilege from another angle.

Several themes emerged from these first journal entries. First, the students demonstrated a great deal of confusion about their ethnic identity. This is consistent which much of the research that has been done on the ethnic identity development of white students. They tend to score very low on ethnic identity scales and do not feel the need to identify themselves ethnically (Roberts, et al 1999). They either conflated race and ethnicity or made constant jumps between the two identifiers. Their consciousness of difference changed for many when they went to school, showing that most grew up in homogeneous settings. This isolation could contribute to a lack of awareness: if social differences are not present, how do children learn about others?

The focus on race in four of the five entries suggests the need for racial discourse in our schools. Students had questions and concerns that needed to be addressed, especially when there were indications of "reverse" racism. Since racism requires power *and* prejudice, it is not possible for whites to experience racism when they are the dominant power in the larger cultural context or system (Tatum 1997). However, Mary and Christi's narratives suggested feelings that their race had been used to prejudge them and that they had been the victims of racism. Here it is important to note the difference between Mary and Christi's narrative and Stephanie's contrasting reaction to confrontation with difference. Mary and Christi were uncomfortable with their group racial identity. They felt like they had been singled out, targeted due to their race, and there was nowhere to go for them except to feel victimized. Stephanie made an attempt to push through similar feelings. She tried to move beyond her individual perspective in order to see the larger implications of her group membership and connection to others who occupy a minority status most of the time.

This raises many important questions for teachers: when and how do they teach students about ethnicity? A course like Ethnic Voices was designed to offer students a space to look at their progress toward becoming ethnically aware of themselves and their larger society. But to

fulfill this objective, I had to begin with my work, my own exploration of my ethnic and racial identity

White Teacher Identity

Turning to my responses to these first journal entries, it is important to acknowledge my position as a white woman. We engaged in a form of journaling where they knew that they were writing to me and that I would respond to each journal entry. Thus, I was implicated in their discourse; my identity and responses to their writing shaped our knowledge of each other, the literature we studied, and the larger community. I, too, was on my own journey to better understand my ethnic heritage and the intersections of ethnicity with race, social class, and gender. This meant that I had to confront my own discomfort and lack of attention to my own development, something that Cochran-Smith (1995) found in her own research on white teachers:

> Eventually the student teachers in this group pieced together their central uncertainty: How do we help children develop their own racial and cultural identity and establish meaningful relationships with children of other races and cultures when we ourselves are uncomfortable with that? When, in fact, we have failed for most of our adult lives to talk directly and constructively with others about issues of race and culture? (558)

This uncertainty remains a critical issue for me. In addition, I am reflecting on what I wrote to students and trying to recover my own thoughts at the time I wrote these responses. Relying on memory and reflection as part of my evidence further complicates this process, but also provides an important look at teacher responses which have generally been left out of journal analyses.

My responses to these first journals entries were fairly consistent. I tended to affirm the validity of their experience while also encouraging them to consider other perspectives. To Elizabeth, the student who wrote about her lack of identification with her Irish background, I responded:

> I think you describe the situation for many Euro-Americans. I never identified myself as Italian until I went to live in Italy in college! I guess now your work begins: so what do you identify with? What does your family value? What things do you do together? What things are important to you and why? "Ethnicity" can be approached from so many different angles!

With Kimmy, I focused on the difference between race and ethnicity, and then moved to group versus individual identity:

> We have to separate "whiteness" as seen by others from what it really means for each white person as an individual. Can we not be defensive or feel guilty, yet pledge ourselves to learning who we are so we can promote social equality? Can we know that to be white is a privilege, but that it can be positive as well as oppressive? How do we move beyond guilt and defensiveness?

This became my most repeated response. My activist agenda was clear, perhaps too strong for a first reply, and as I reflected on my responses, I wondered about the space I was creating for the young women to safely question their assumptions, experiences, and stereotypes. However, my response to Mary, the young woman who had the incident with the Hispanic men, seems too gentle upon reflection. I remember reading this journal and thinking, "What do I say to this student?" I wanted to make her feel safe so she could explore her issues, but I might have been overly cautious, pointing to the difficulty whites have interrupting the bias of other whites:

> Yes! great point here. We all make assumptions about all groups, and our "groups" carry stereotypes, and some truth, whether we like it or not. So, the question becomes how we come to terms with how whiteness is perceived while also working on our own, specific identity. "White" is a vague, huge term like "Black" that doesn't really tell us much. So how as a white person can we help promote a view of "white" that doesn't mean "racist"? How do we be white and privileged AND work to promote equality?

I was eager at the onset to support her, but I really did not confront her assumption about the Hispanic men directly. I could have been more specific. I faced a similar issue with Christi and her experience as a "typical white girl." It was difficult to respond to narratives infused with racism and denial of white privilege. I was not sure of how to best address these issues, and my response was similar to what I wrote to Mary:

> Wow! Great and important thoughts. You are really thinking critically, and you are experiencing what all people of color go through: being judged by the color of

> one's skin. Now, I want to see you push back, Move from defense to offense. How can "whiteness" be positive? How can you use your race to promote justice and equality? Yes, you are part of the majority, but you don't want to abuse your privilege – you want to use your privilege to help others, esp. other white people. As you look closely at your own ethnicity, you will see that whiteness is color, not ethnicity. So what does it mean to be "ethnically" white? Get a hold of your culture and share your identity.

Great thoughts? Critical thinking? My discomfort is evident in my over-inflated opening sentences. Is it possible that Christi was not really thinking critically at all? Instead, was she reifying her position as a victimized white girl? McIntyre (1997) writes about the idea of white talk," talk that serves to insulate white people from examining their/our individual and collective role(s) in the perpetuation of racism. It is a result of whites talking uncritically with/to other whites" (45). Sometimes my students used defensiveness, fear, and powerlessness to protect themselves, and I, too, found it challenging to confront them in an appropriate way. My thinking was too far ahead of where Christi was. I did not meet where she was; I immediately imposed my position on her. There was also the echo of paternalism: the idea of using her privilege to "help others," implying people of color could not help themselves. She needed to just help herself, to do her own work in order to participate in a multicultural society, and my job was to scaffold her learning. I posed questions for her, but would she have been able to hear them at all?

Finally, my response to Stephanie was very different, probably due to my comfort with how she expressed her identity. I went with her to the summer institute she described. Although we did not talk a lot while there, I knew it was a transformative experience for her. What stands out to me now upon reflection is that I affirmed her narrative, as I did with the other students, but I did not challenge the fact that she wrote about her race and not her ethnicity. I never mentioned it, and my only directive was to continue her own inquiry:

> What a wonderful, thoughtful entry! I'm glad your feelings changed, and you should be proud of your willingness to really change your perspective WITHOUT changing who you are! As you describe, white is a color depending on the context! Your insight puts you at a real advantage, and you can really help others, both whites and people of color, understand the situation in a more in-depth way. Keep thinking and pushing yourself.

I repeated the notion of "helping," which highlights the position I was putting Stephanie in: was she now the model white girl? She, too, needed to be supported in her identity process, and due to her understanding of her racial identity, she could turn her attention to her ethnicity to see how race relates to her ethnic identity. Yet I did not offer her much direction at this time.

Overall, these initial writings and responses show the high level of discourse possible when posing a relatively simple and straightforward question about ethnic identity. These texts are multi-faceted and, because I literally wrote in their journals, multivoiced. Together we were constructing a narrative of our joint exploration. Before moving on to other issues raised in the journal entries, I want to return to the concept of white privilege. Since my white students seemed so involved with race, it seemed appropriate to delve deeper into whiteness and white privilege to begin to understand the connections and differences between race and ethnicity

Race, Ethnicity, and White Privilege

Once I realized that I needed to determine what being a white woman meant for me, I began to look for some narratives that might help my own exploration. Frankenberg's study (1993) of forty white women significantly impacted my understanding of whiteness. She wanted to see how race shaped the lives of women, and she offers a very helpful definition of whiteness with three dimensions: "First, whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a 'standpoint,' a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, 'whiteness' refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed" (1). This definition establishes an important frame that locates privilege as one central aspect of whiteness. In addition, whiteness is a standpoint or perspective, a lens through which we view the world, which means that our experience as a white person directly affects how we see and understand our surroundings and interactions with others. Finally, whiteness is

positioned as the norm, so it has not been necessary to look explicitly at whiteness, leaving it as undiscovered territory.

Once this understanding of whiteness is established, different moments or paradigms of racial development become evident. Frankenberg offers her own model for thinking through race. She begins with the essentialist mode which refers to biological inequality or the idea that people of color are different, inferior, less human, less civilized than white people. The second mode is color evasiveness, also known as color-blindness that says we are all the same under the skin so any failure to achieve is the fault of people of color themselves. The final mode is race cognizance or the autonomy of culture. Any inequality here refers not to ascribed or essential characteristics, but to the social structure. Looking at the history of racial discourse in the US, these three phases of racial development emerged chronologically in this order, but in today's society given different contexts, one or all of these phases might rise to the surface.

Of the three phases Frankenberg examines, color evasion, the second phase, offers great insight to those of us trying to come to terms with a white identity. As she interviewed women from across the country, she found that most of the women expressed a desire not to see race, or at least not to acknowledge racial differences. Frankenberg probed this issue and found that this was a way for these women to distance themselves from essentialist racism. If they didn't notice race, then they couldn't be racist: "Very frequently race privilege is a lived but not seen aspect of white experience, given socially segregated material environments and discursive environments that militate against conscious attention to racism" (135). This then suggests that noticing color is a bad thing to do, suggesting that non-whiteness or "color" is bad. Here is where color evasiveness becomes so perilous:

> The sharp cutting edge of color-blindness is revealed here: within this discursive repertoire, people of color are 'good' only insofar as their 'coloredness' can be bracketed and ignored, and this bracketing is contingent on the ability or the decision – in fact, the virtue – of a 'noncolored – or white– self. Colorblindness, despite the best intentions of its adherents, in this sense preserves the power structure inherent in essentialist racism. (Frankenberg 1993:147)

To deny difference is to deny the impact that race has on people's lives. As opposed to saying there are no differences at all between people, color evasion is a selective attention to difference, saying that color does not matter. In this way, a white woman who is not comfortable talking about race can selectively avoid the topic and instead focus on differences that she is comfortable with. This is simply another kind of oppression disguised as a polite discourse. It is this selective engagement with difference that exposes color-blindness as a way of maintaining the power and privilege of the dominant group. Here, these white women had the privilege of not seeing their color, and subsequently, denying others their racial identity.

Color-evasion can play a role in a subtle but insidious kind of racism termed "aversive racism," and as Tatum (1997) notes, aversive racists have "internalized the espoused cultural values of fairness and justice for all at the same time that they have been breathing the 'smog' of racial biases and stereotypes pervading the popular culture" (118; see also Dovidio1997). Color-blindness masks itself as non-biased, but since one group is free to ignore the racial identity of another, discrimination exists. Thus, a seemingly nonprejudiced stance has major power implications. Here the denial of race locates a desire to be fair next to the power to discriminate. If it is clear what the right thing to do is, aversive racists will act in a way that supports their non-prejudiced view of themselves. However, if a situation is not clear and an action can be justified on the basis of some factor other than race, prejudiced feelings towards African-Americans will surface. Tatum gives an excellent example of how this subtle form of bias manifests itself. White college students were given transcripts and asked to evaluate candidates for admission to their college. When the transcripts were presented to the white students, all of the qualifications were equal; the only difference was the race of the candidate. The study found that when the students were not qualified, black and white students were both rejected, irrespective of race. When the candidates were somewhat qualified, white students were favored over black students by a slim margin. However, when the candidates were highly qualified, the white students overwhelming

choose white candidates. So, even when all qualifications are equal, applicants were not perceived as equal, especially when both black and white applicants were highly qualified. Blacks were good, but whites were better.

Paul Kivel (2002), a social activist and writer from the San Francisco bay area, states, "We must begin here – with this denial of our whiteness – because racism keeps people of color in the limelight and makes whiteness invisible" (9). To turn our attention to whiteness using Frankenberg's definition, we must begin by acknowledging that whiteness is a privileged way of seeing the world that is usually not talked about which makes our task more challenging. In 1988, Peggy McIntosh published "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," and still to this day, it is one of the best pieces I have ever read on the topic of white privilege. Her central thesis is that white people have not had to acknowledge how they benefit from racial discrimination. We might understand the disadvantages of racism, but we deny the advantages we receive because of white privilege. It is disconcerting to realize that privilege and prejudice exists side by side; one informs the other. As I elevate myself, some else is disadvantaged. As with racism, whites are taught not to see their privilege, but nevertheless, we carry around an invisible knapsack filled with unearned privileges. McIntosh lists over forty ways she experiences white privilege on a daily basis. She includes examples such as she usually does not have to speak for her entire race; she can move and be assured of finding fair housing; if she is pulled over by the police, she can be relatively sure she was not singled out due to race; she can swear, dress down, or not return a phone call without people attributing her choices to the poverty, illiteracy, or bad morals of her race. It was difficult for McIntosh to recognize her white privilege, and she literally had to keep a tape recorder next to her bed in order to capture the semi-conscious thoughts that helped to illuminate her privilege.

Since McIntosh's work was important to my own understanding of white privilege, I decided to have my Ethnic Voices students read her essay. When we finished the immigrant

writing assignment and *Bread Givers*, we started *Ellen Foster*, a novella about a poor white girl and her relationship with her father and an African-American friend. This work highlighted the connections between race, class, and ethnicity. Along with McIntosh's essay, this work of fiction would provide a context for looking at white identity that would, hopefully, give the students several perspectives on what it meant to be white. After reading the article by McIntosh, several of my white students commented on their total ignorance of white privilege and how it affected not only their lives, but the lives of people around them who may not have the same racial privileges: "I never thought about my whiteness as being a privilege" (Kimmy, journal #6). They could read McIntosh's list of unearned privileges and begin to construct their own list, and this impacted the way they saw themselves because they began to see with different eyes: "After reading that essay, however, I realized that much of how I am treated is attributed to my skin color and is in fact a privilege...We are taught to ignore these advantages as well as the fact that other races are not allowed to enjoy them" (class journal, entry N). Some even began to comment on a concept I refer to as the "double-edged sword" of white privilege that cut two ways. As students were granted their privileges, they were often denied aspects of their identity. Kimmy wrote:

> Society treats me well because I am a white, upper class girl. When I say "in general," I mean the people I interact with at school and often outside of school. When a police officer pulled me over for speeding on Marsh road, he took a look at me, asked where I lived and said I could be on my way. Yes, I'm white and I live in PALO ALTO. I put that in capitals because there is an assumption when you live in an affluent neighborhood that you have everything you want. Unfortunately, people who judge others like that will never get to know the person they are judging. (journal #6)

White privilege isolated Kimmy; the police officer judged her, and even if there was an inherent benefit to that judgment, she felt that she was never really known in the process. Often, when she said where she was from, people just assumed she was rich, snobby, and spoiled. Yes, this provided her with a kind of privilege, but at the same time, the person judging her might not be able to really know her because of her privilege. Kimmy also pointed out the relationship

between race and class. She was not just white; she was *rich* and white. Stephanie wrote that she often had trouble "distinguishing between what I think of myself and what I think others think of me. It's interesting that the labels other people put on me can become a major part of my own identity" (journal #5). For these white students, their identity was partly constructed by their racial privilege, and they had to struggle against that label to assert who they were beyond who they were perceived to be. This leads to the question of what happens to the white student who receives the benefits, but is not seen for who she really is. Where does she have the opportunity to move beyond assumptions, especially if the assumptions are incorrect?

The issue of envy – seeing others as having what one does not and the associated feelings– was evident in Elizabeth's first journal entry when she talked about wishing she could feel her ethnic background and envying those friends who did feel a strong connection to their ethnic culture. Kimmy expressed similar feelings when we were studying Native American culture: "I am so amazed and jealous of the traditions, ceremonies, and stories that the Native Americans have. Their culture has survived for such a long time and has such a rich history" (journal #10). The jealousy raises concern because Kimmy came from an ancient Scandanavian culture, but she had no sense of her own history and culture. This illustrated a second aspect of the "double-edged sword" of white privilege: cultural disconnection. Some of my students talked about the guilt, embarrassment, and shame they felt when they thought about their racial and ethnic identity. Kimmy wrote: "I feel like I have to apologize for going to [my school] when I tell other people where I go to school... [it] is where the "rich" people go...So every time someone raises their eyebrows and makes that kind of "ooohhh" sound, I feel ashamed of the way I live, the school that I go to, and things that I have" (journal #7). Her social class status, as perceived by others, intersected with her racial privilege, and she expressed shame for her entire culture, the "way" she lived.

Where did these feelings come from? The first recognition of white privilege can bring on intense feelings of guilt, but there was something else present: a feeling of loss, of not having a culture to celebrate during multicultural week. There was no counterbalance to the privilege, no firm identity to return to – only feelings of emptiness, sadness, and shame. McIntosh (1998) writes that "white oblivion about, and acculturated denial of, privilege acts as a psychological prison system that costs white people heavily in terms of preventing human development. Walking obliviously through our own racial experience may perpetuate the imprisonment of the heart and intelligence in a false law-and-order of tyrannizing denial about who, what, and where we are" (215-16).

One way of combating this cultural disconnection is to explore whiteness in a way that affirms identity without conferring racial superiority. On a visit to Europe to explore his own background, Howard (1993) found handprints made by ancient Europeans in the same style as the Anasazi and the aborigine. He made a profound connection to his own identity as well as discovering a sense of the universality of human experience: "What does my experience in Europe mean for us as white Americans? First, there is no need to look to other cultures for our own sense of identity. Any of us who choose to look more deeply into our European roots will find there is a rich and diverse experience waiting to be discovered" (41). After expressing her shame with regards to her way of life, Kimmy did realize that she should work on her own self-perception:

> It's kind of like this vicious cycle in which no one is justified in what they think about whoever they are judging. With these preconceptions and pre-formed judgments no one ever gets to know anyone that they think is on a different level. I don't know how to change what other people think of me, but I can always change how I perceive my privilege, as something I work for. (journal #7)

Although the idea that she worked for her privilege countered what white privilege really was, unearned advantage, she began to understand that she had to begin with herself, to look at her behavior in order to make a difference in the treatment of others.

Other students struggled with their white racial privilege. Mary talked about her confusion and the ambiguous nature of trying to identify herself by her race, ethnicity, or even religion: "For now, I am happy not to identify myself with any ethnicity in particular. I think that if I was identified with any group in particular, I may have lost a part of my individual identity. This is because I believe that labels put tremendous limits on what one sees in someone else because of the simplicity labels provide" (journal #2). Mary could not recognize the fact that it was her racial privilege that gave her the choice of either embracing or denying aspects of her identity. Others who were not white do not have the same choice. She wanted to preserve her individuality because, again, she did not have to attend to her group membership. She could simply ignore it. When I asked students to write about what privileges they had and how privilege worked in their lives, Mary listed a long list of privileges, but she never mentioned her race or ethnicity. She focused on her class privilege, and it was not until a friend said he could not visit her because he could not afford the plane ticket that she realized her economic privilege:

> I lead a very privileged life. I can afford to travel and buy nice things. My parents both live in nice houses. I am very well provided for. I do not think that my parents have spoiled me because I appreciate everything I have and am aware that somebody worked hard to earn the money to buy it. I have paid for my own clothes and recreation for the past three years with the money I make from work. However, I have always taken my privileges for granted. I always knew I was lucky to have "things" but I was not used to hearing "no." (journal #4)

The idea of being lucky also emerged in one of Stephanie's journals (#6). As opposed to explicitly naming privilege, either racial or economic, white families often told their kids they were lucky or fortunate. This further obscured the source of the "luck," and key aspects of one's position remained unacknowledged. Mary's entry also set up a major contradiction: on one hand, she did not see herself as spoiled and appreciated what she had; yet she also said she took it all for granted. This seemed to refer to her new coding of her life as "privileged." Until her friend told her, she did not really understand: "This experience gave me the reality that I had thus far

lived without truly understanding or being affected by. I now realize how lucky and privileged I am" (journal #4).

Mary did see her language advantage. As a class, we read an essay that critiqued the idea of "standard English," stating that the standard had been created by a group people in order to raise one group up and distinguish it from others. It was not a neutral, objective term. Referring to the essay, Mary noted:

> There is also a prejudice masked by language. It is more likely that positive judgments will be made about my character if I speak in standard English than in broken dialect of "substandard" language. This is because of the many things that are implied by speaking "proper" English. Assumptions about education, socio-economic class, race, etc. are made and based on the type of English a person speaks. (journal #6)

Yet in her next journal entry, she resisted any notion of unearned advantage, be it race or class privilege. While speaking with her neighbor, she was asked if she liked school. She said she loved it, and her neighbor, a public school teacher, commented that she would be doing just as well if she was at a public school:

> He said that people like me will do fine regardless of our situations. However, I am not sure that I agree with that statement. I think that even incredibly motivated students can fail to live up to their potential when they are deprived of a good education. I am sure that there are many students much smarter than I who simply are not able to fully concentrate on their school work because their priorities must be elsewhere. (journal #7)

Did she understand her neighbor? She seemed to believe that someone, just like her, could fail at public school, when her neighbor meant most like her could not fail because of their position of relative privilege. She did not identify with the phrase "people like me," nor did she see how much she had to support her education beyond the fact that she attended an elite independent school. And what did she mean by their priorities have to be somewhere else? What is this code for? poor students? students of color? lazy kids? And, by further implication, did she mean that students in public school could not live up to their potential because they were not getting a good education? It is difficult to decipher her meaning, but it is clear that she only saw her school as a

privilege, not her racial identity or class status that allowed her to attend the school in the first place.

Christi was clearly able to articulate her privilege. She described it as "something I was born with, something I experience daily, and something I will always have" (journal #6). She was very direct about her racial privilege: "A big part of my privilege is being white, or being part of the majority. This makes it so I don't have to go through every day, or even my whole life, thinking about my skin color. People notice other things about me rather than just categorizing me for my race" (journal #6). She mentioned her family, their unconditional love, and the gift of a college education. Yet she was also clear that she would not take these things for granted; she was motivated to do well:

> None of these gifts or privileges make me want to just sit back and not try hard in life, however, just because I have a lot provided for me. I think it makes me try even harder knowing I am expected to do well in school and expected to "go far" in life. Those expectations push me, and without them, who knows how hard I would strive or if I would just give up. (journal #6)

The implication here was that her privilege was really nothing without the fact that she worked hard. Yes, she had a lot, but it was what she did with what she had that made her successful. She tried hard and pushed herself. Again, individualism, and not group membership, was her focus. She did not mention the value of her majority status and relied on a kind of meritocracy that did not exist for many Americans who found themselves on the outside of mainstream culture.

Her next entry was more specific. With regard to standard English, she felt that we needed a "uniformed way of communicating" (journal #7). There was a brief reference to the fact that:

> learning the "normal" and expected way to speak requires education and not everyone has access to the highest level of education. Yet, we already know that education is what puts some people ahead of others...Only people who go to med school are doctors...We cannot change the way of practicing medicine just because everyone doesn't know how. The English language is something anyone can learn if they try. (journal #7)

She never questioned the idea that there should be a norm for language; she expected all to try to learn English. And the only barrier was effort. Even the recognition that all may not have the same opportunity to learn English was trumped by effort: if one tried, one could learn English – folks were just not trying hard enough. There was also complacency with the fact that some were just going to be "ahead of others," and she seemed resigned to this inevitability.

It is important to note that Christi missed over a month of school due to illness, and so she was absent for many class discussions. She also identified as, and was defensive of the fact that she was, a devout Christian. I believe this impacted her feelings about white privilege. Perhaps she did not feel racially or economically privileged at school because her main identifier, religion, was deemed inappropriate from her perspective. During a discussion in her advisory about celebrating the holidays, she felt insulted:

> One girl went off on how stupid Christmas is, what an awful thing it is, how it is pointless, and how much it offends her. I consider myself very religious. I still look at Christmas as the birth of Jesus and it is an important day, where I always go to church. This one girls word, and the other people who agreed with her, insulted my religion and seemed to believe that because it is popular and the majority that they can cut it down and disregard it. People also talk about how we should decorate for Hanukkah, Quanza, and other holidays to educate and enrich peoples lives. I completely agree with this. But why is it that if I ever wanted to talk about my religion and my holidays it is considered offensive. I don't want to sound angry, cause I'm not. I'm just confused and a little hurt. (journal #12)

It made me think about her feelings in class and about others who held views that might not have been popular. She had always been a shy student (I taught her previously), and she never mentioned her religion during discussions. In fact, she rarely spoke in class. Was there a safe place for her to talk about this aspect of her identity? The goal ought to be to create a place where all voices could be heard. Christi felt marginalized, but it was puzzling because her religion was affirmed even at school during the holidays: a "giving" tree, stockings stuffed for homeless shelters, Christmas carols, etc. Yet for her, there was no space where she felt respected for her religious views.

I do not know how helpful my response was. I tried to help her see the situation from another perspective, but that may not have been what she needed:

> The holiday celebration issue is tough! I think minorities have been hurt for so long that it is going to take a few more years of "trying" by the majority to get things on track. Oppression over time does so much damage – it takes a while for the pain to go away. Of course, no one should feel bad or hurt. We need to create safe places where we can discuss this stuff. Christian "bashing" doesn't help, but it does indicate a high level of frustration.

Christi seemed unable to see her position relative to others, and this might have pointed to her own lack of identity awareness in some key areas, namely race and ethnicity. Religion was a defining identifier for her, but she could not see how, relatively, she was affirmed everywhere in the culture. I found her reaction surprising, but not when considering how unable she was to identify with her group membership in so many other areas of her life.

The recognition of white privilege seemed to help some students clarify their racial identity because they could separate their individual identity from their group membership. They could recognize their privilege and begin to think about ways of sharing their power, of giving up some of those privileges to gain something greater: a better sense of community, less prejudice, and a clearer sense of who they really were beyond the color of their skin. Stephanie wrote:

> However, these are not privileges that I should feel guilty about. Instead I need to recognize that I have them, and go through life always with the realization that these privileges are working for me... I remind myself not to take my privileges for granted as well. If I were to walk blindly through the doors that my privileges have opened for me, I would be blind to other people's needs as well. In order for me to recognize when others are being hurt, I need to first recognize why it's not happening to me. (Stephanie, journal #6)

She realized that she had to move through her guilt, recognizing the larger process she was undertaking. With her realization came understanding, a new level of awareness, and the ability to change her behavior, to act in a more self-conscious way.

Elizabeth struggled with her white privilege before being able to move through her sense of guilt in a non-racist way. In her third entry, she was quite defensive about the guilt being expressed by her classmates:

> Throughout my educational career and life I have experienced this same feeling of guilt. However, now I'm beginning to realize I personally was never involved in any of these instances of cruelty the white race inflicted. The guilt I feel comes along with all the stereotypes of being white. Just as many people see white as powerful, they assume the entire white race is responsible for these acts of Cruelty... I am not responsible. The guilt will do nothing for me. I just know that I need the strength to do what is right and avoid these former mistakes even if it means going against society. (journal #3)

Although she recognized the guilt as non-productive, her reasoning showed she was still struggling with the privilege conferred by her group membership. She asserted her individual identity in order not to be branded a racist, yet she was responsible because she benefited from her racial identity on a daily basis. She might not have personally attacked Native Americans, but she benefited from the fact that whites systematically oppressed people of color to their own advantage. Her fourth entry delved further into the issue of privilege regarding SAT (a standardized test for admission to universities/colleges) scores. She knew that if colleges recognized the fact that all students did not have the same access to advanced courses, it might affect the validity of SAT scores that tended to reflect economic class status and not academic ability. Yet she was troubled by a new proposed scheme would not penalize students, especially minorities, for courses their schools did not offer:

> I know this may sound horrible, but this new formula, won't it in a way penalize the students who were allowed these privileges? I was under the impression that because I was white and went to a school with an extensive curriculum, the Board of Education is assuming I will do well on my SAT's. Now, what if I don't? Won't I be hurt because a student of a minority gets a boost in scores while I don't? And what about white students who go to schools without these educational privileges? Do they get the same formula applied to their scores? (journal #4)

Elizabeth did not seem aware of the irony of her statement: her privilege would hinder her? I wrote in the margin of her journal, "But how could you not do well? Given your privilege, is it even possible for you to fail?" But her fear was real. Did her insecurity not allow for a clear

vision of who she was and what she had accomplished? There was the suggestion that someone else might be getting something she did not have: a boost. She went on to deny any responsibility for the injustice, echoing her earlier comments: "Now, don't get me wrong, I understand that schools without these courses hinder students. But that is not my fault. It is the school's fault" (journal #4). She expressed no sense of her relationship to the institution or her larger connection to and place in a society that favored whiteness.

But then her consciousness began to shift after reading the McIntosh article. She slowly understood her group membership and the larger system of institutionalized racism: "I have many of the same privileges that McIntosh had. This shocked me because this article was written ten years ago, yet I can still relate to everything she says. It amazes me we have changed so little" (journal #5). Her use of the pronoun "we" was significant here because she was no longer separating herself out from other whites or the past; she was asserting her group membership within a social context. Speaking about her economic and racial privileges, she wrote:

> It seems as though we are taught to ignore them as if they are a secret and only those of the white race are allowed to enjoy them, but they must be kept "under wraps" for fear that other races will protest. It is almost as if society wants to secretly advance the white race through allowing these privileges. (journal #5)

In her next entry, she continued her exploration into the larger workings of privilege and the role of societal norms. Regarding the article about standard English, she wrote:

> By being able to follow grammar rules, society has given me power and recognizes me as superior to someone who may not speak as I do. This is absurd. Simply because of how I speak, I have gained power and influence. This power, in turn, grants me access to all sorts of opportunities I may not necessarily deserve...It seems as though our society refuses to put in the effort to understand someone and simply writes them off of they cannot speak or act in a "normal" way. (journal #6)

Here "normal" became oppressive and divisive; Elizabeth recognized the power of language, its ability to exclude and discredit based on white notions of normalcy and appropriateness. She had moved from defending herself as an individual to realizing that she had been taught by, and was part of, a much larger system of discrimination.

White Responses to White Privilege

My responses to the journals on privilege often revealed my own discomfort with confronting students on their racial privilege, yet at times I did feel comfortable enough to ask students to look more closely at their relative position. However, Christi and Mary presented distinct challenges for me. After her response to the questions of how privilege worked in her life, I wrote to Christi: "Yes! You are motivated to put your 'privileges' to good use. It is scary to think what our lives would be like without the privileges we have." I made no mention of the fact that she was actually denying her privilege and saying that she did well by working hard, almost in spite of her privilege. Her "trying" was a way of saying that others did not have as much as she did because they did not make as much of an effort. Her privilege, therefore, was only as good as she made it, again asserting a sense of meritocracy, not unearned privilege. And to her response about people being able to learn English if they just tried harder, I wrote: "The access to language is what I worry about." I offered little to no interruption of her prejudice and her assumption that "some" people were just going to go further than others.

In reply to Mary's desire to move away from labels and to focus on her individuality, I wrote:

> We need ways of helping clarify our own identity, and group membership is part of our identity process. Also, as white people, we have been left out of conversations about ethnicity. The assumption is only people of color have an ethnicity, and that is not fair to either group! Whiteness functions as a race, an ethnic identity (maybe Euro-American) as well as a class signifier. Hopefully the class will help to sort through some of this.

This response did offer Mary something to consider regarding her group membership, but when she wrote about privilege and never mentioned her race, I responded: "A very thoughtful entry – I think you will find the article on 'white privilege' interesting." Should I have mentioned her racial privilege, or was it better to let her discover it? Regarding her comments about the privilege of standard English and the fact that people were judged and stereotyped if they did not speak "proper" English, I replied: "Yes – you really get the point here! And why do some know

'the rules' and others don't? You can make a choice and work towards something you know about – what if you didn't know the rules of standard English? How would you be perceived?" This seemed like a more productive dialogue: her growing awareness and my ability to pose more critical questions. Finally, in response to her conversation with her neighbor about the privilege of education, I did not challenge Mary at all. I actually agreed with her: "Yes, many make the assumption that good education is a given or a right for certain people." But it is! Upper-middle class white students are virtually guaranteed a good public or private education in the US. Here I missed the assertion of white privilege completely. I want to say it was because I was reading too quickly and did not give myself enough time to respond, but the truth is, it is hard for whites to interrupt other whites. McIntyre's notion of white talk is accurate, and it was hard to see it even when it was right in front of me.

Elizabeth's early entries on privilege were defensive, asserting her denial of responsibility for any past wrongs committed by whites. I wrote:

> I guess that we as white people share a kind of responsibility because even if we did not commit the crimes, we still benefit from white privilege. As we all know, you have to take the good with the bad. But as you note, we are not stuck in one position as "white oppressors" – we can resist and show people that whites can be committed to social justice even if our collective track record is not that great.

I also included a note of encouragement at the bottom of the page: "Great job so far, E – keep pushing and challenging." Why did I so this? Did I feel I was being too hard on her? Her next entry picked up the same theme: some getting a boost while she might be disadvantaged by her privilege. She concluded by stating since it was not her fault the inequity existed, the Board of Education should be watching schools to make sure they all had advanced courses available. I countered:

> Yet even if something is not your "fault," you still get the benefits! You get white privilege whether you want it or not. Also, the playing field is not even close to even. So, I don't know if a "formula" will really help because like you note, how can it really be applied in an equitable fashion? The problem is that the SAT is racist and biased towards white kids with money – so what we really need to do is get rid of the SAT. Yet, does anyone suggest that? No – we only come up with

> problematic, "band-aid" solutions that really don't address the heart of the problem.

And again, I wrote a note of encouragement: "Very interesting entry here, E!" And when she wrote specifically about white privilege, I wrote a few notes in the margins and concluded with, "YES! What insight here! You are really starting to deconstruct some very difficult issues."

I sounded like a cheerleader in some ways, really needing to encourage and support these white students as they waded through white privilege. Empathy? I know how hard it is to deal with my racial identity, especially when I work on a project with a faculty and I am the only white woman, and sometimes the only white person. This reminds me of Cochran-Smith's (1995) assertion that it may be easier for white teachers to explore race with white students: "I have been worried...that I am most effective at getting White students to explore issues of race and teaching because I am more able to locate them within the context of their own references, and because I come at these issues from perspectives and experiences that are more similar to theirs than to those students of color" (563-64). As I noted in my introduction, this study arose from this central concern, my inability to respond in an authentic way to students of color, and I will look at this issue in more depth in the next chapter. Suffice it to say that I was critically aware of my use of ready anecdotes that could affirm white students identity based on our shared affinity.

Kimmy's story about being stopped by the police and let go because of her class and racial privilege prompted this response:

> I agree! What I benefit most from white privilege is the very thing you described: people assume I am good, honest, helpful, etc. "Palo Alto" is code for so many things whether we like it or not. Usually, it is just a privilege, but at times I feel bad and shameful, especially if I am with a group of people who live somewhere else. Then, I don't like the assumption that I am a spoiled, rich white woman! I don't want to be grouped. Yet, I take the benefits everyday – ugh! It is so confusing. Your story here is quite poignant.

It is helpful to reflect on my willingness to share my own story and my feelings of shame and guilt that were so similar to what many of the girls, especially Kimmy, were expressing. When

Kimmy wrote about being ashamed of her whole life, and her desire to focus on her perception of her privilege, I wrote:

> Yes, we have to start with ourselves...but something has to change, doesn't it? We can't feel bad for being at [our school] because the guilt will eat us up inside. What could we do to expand [our school's] image? How could the kids at [the public school] start to see [our school] differently? What are we willing to do to help others see us differently?

This was an attempt to push through the guilt, to start to develop some kind of action plan. My goal was to try and empower Kimmy to see her role. I did not want her to be so overwhelmed by the enormity of the problem that she became paralyzed.

I continued to affirm Stephanie, usually agreeing with her, but not offering much to challenge or push her thinking: "Yes! Instead of guilt, you utilize your power to share your privilege– to find ways of challenging others to enter the fight for equity." This caused me to think about my reaction to the different students, depending on where I perceived them to be in their understanding of their identity. Stephanie spoke a language that was familiar to me: her insights on social power, privilege and discrimination were in accord with my thinking. So is that why I never challenged her to really take on the issue of ethnicity? Obviously, a uniform response would not be appropriate, but it is critical to look at my position relative to these young women and how our identities intersected in the dialogic journals.

Revisiting Ethnicity

About eight weeks into the course, I asked the students to write about where they were in their ethnic identity development. Were they gaining a better sense of their ethnicity? The responses were quite varied. Stephanie felt her understanding had not changed much, and she focused on her racial identity again: "On some level I'm always very aware of my whiteness...At the same time, it is not an identifier that I would choose to describe myself" (journal #11). She said there were other things that were more important to her even though she was always

filtering her whiteness through her experience. This was an interesting comment: because she has confronted her whiteness in a significant way, it remains a constant for her even if her focus is somewhere else. My response to this entry was a bit different from my earlier writing. This time I actually posed a question to her that related to her own identity, as opposed to just agreeing with her: "Now you can begin to figure out what role whites can play in diversity – how should white kids approach the topic? What kinds of info do they need? What info do you think YOU need to further your own understanding of the issues – where are your 'gaps'"? To me, this is the essential question for all of us trying to promote multiculturalism. It is a continuous learning process, and there is never an arrival point, a place where we can say we have "done" multiculturalism. As far along as Stephanie was, she still needed guidance and support to continue her growth.

Kimmy wrote that she was not really more in touch with her Norwegian descent, but she was "further along in understanding what it means to be of the white race" (journal #12). She was more cognizant of her privilege and the problem of racism: "I have learned not to restrict my mind to as many stereotypes as I had before. Knowing is half the battle and through this class I hope to begin to start fighting the other half, that of change" (journal #12). Kimmy was moving from awareness to action, and my response, "Sounds like a good plan," was a way of validating her new consciousness and desire for change.

Similar to Kimmy, Mary continued to feel more of a connection to her race than to her ethnicity:

> I still feel very confused about my ethnicity. I am unsure as to the degree that my ethnicity plays a role in my identity. I feel that my whiteness means more to others than it does to me. I have a better understanding of how I am viewed in the eyes of others. However, my whiteness is only a part of it. My socio-economic class, my education, and other identifiers play large roles in distinguishing me and how I appear. (journal #11)

Since she felt she was being socially constructed by others as white, Mary was less aware of her own racial perceptions. But then she did start to approach her ethnicity, focusing on herself and her understanding:

> I feel that my only option is to describe myself as American. I trace my ancestry back to the Mayflower, so I have no other culture to draw from. I know that I am nothing else but American by process of elimination. I guess the next thing I need to figure out is what I define "American" to be, By describing myself merely as American, I feel that I am leaving something out. (journal #11)

As Mary was taking in information from the class as well as from her peers and family, she was trying to make sense of that input in light of her own experience. And she began to see the work she had to do to construct her identity in a meaningful way. Her confusion continued, "I think I could do a much better job explaining my culture than my ethnic identity," but then she went on to give a great description of her ethnicity. The problem was she thought she was describing something else. So even when whites do have a cultural background to draw from, they may not always code themselves as ethnic:

> My ethnicity may be vague, but my culture is richly saturated with details, traditions, etc. I am part of a huge, traditional and very conservative New England family. I cherish our annual family reunions where I visit with cousins, second cousins, step-relatives, and more, My father's conservative values and manners have been instilled in me by my paternal relatives. However, I have also been influenced by my liberal mother and small-town, country childhood. Part of my culture involves country music and ranching, while the other side involves political discussions, "proper behavior," and summer camp in Vermont. I am able to define my cultural identity far more easily than my ethnic identity – or are they the same? (journal #11)

As she finished her description, the awareness came. It was as if through the process of writing about her American-ness, she began to see a more complete picture and to connect her own story to others who described their family cultures.

Citing both greater awareness and lack of identification, Elizabeth wrote a thoughtful and complicated response: "In some ways I have a more clear view of who I am and what I believe, but in other ways, I realize I don't truly identify with any one ethnic group...I feel that I can only truly identify with the white race" (journal #11). Her growing sensitivity to her ethnic identity

might not have answered any questions for her, but she was engaged in a process of trying to figure out an aspect of her identity that had not received much attention in the past. At this point, race remained a more salient identifier for her. Elizabeth also made an interesting correction in her entry:

> After taking this class and discussing all the negative connotations which go along with being white, I feel as though it is not good to be white and it is even worse to only identify with the white race. Actually, I take that back. I realize through our discussions that the white race can be viewed by others as negative or "bad" and there is a lot of guilt which often goes with being white. (journal #11)

The distinction she made was important. Otherwise she was left guilt-ridden and paralyzed by inaction. Once she framed her discomfort in terms of her group identity, it gave her room to move as an individual:

> On the positive side, Ethnic Voices has taught me a lot about my individual belief system and how radically different my views can sometimes be from others – no matter what their ethnicity is. This class has also taught me to dig deep within myself and grapple with tough issues. Finally, Ethnic Voices has taught me to evaluate my behavior and watch how I act because actions speak just as loudly as words. I have learned that who I associate with and what choices I make determine how others group me, regardless of how I view myself. Nevertheless, instead of being more aware of my ethnicity and what group I associate with, I have become more aware of my individuality and who I am personally. (journal #11)

In response to Elizabeth's assertion of her desire to focus on her individual identity because her ethnicity and group membership were not so clear to her, I wrote:

> And isn't this the way to really figure out what being "white" means to you? Yes, there are some negative images, stereotypes and realities that come with whiteness, but isn't it our responsibility to really explore ourselves so we know what the term means for us? I think that if more whites come to terms with who they are, then "whiteness" will cease to be just "normal" or "racist." It will begin to mean something more substantial.

I was able to share with Elizabeth part of my own experience coming to understand my white identity.

Conclusion

Overall, these students had a very difficult time seeing themselves as ethnic, and even when they did attempt to discuss ethnicity, they were usually describing race. Thus, it was necessary to look at whiteness and white privilege because the girls were confusing race with ethnicity. Yet even after discovering and/or probing white privilege, their ethnic identity development remained in a nascent stage. Mary was the only one who really wrote an account of her ethnicity when she described her father's family and her mother's background. Why were white students finding it so difficult to identify their ethnicity?

The classroom created a space where these white students could look critically at their group membership while asserting their individual identity. Yet the tension remained, and our exploration of racial privilege was challenging. For students who generally saw themselves as only individuals, it was difficult for them to connect with a group identity, especially when there were negative stereotypes associated with a particular group. Overall, I found it demanding to meet the students where they were because so many of them had never even considered aspects of their identity that were central to our course discussions, readings, and writing. As the next chapter will detail, the students of color were much further along in their considerations of race and ethnicity, and this presented a dilemma for me as teacher.

These entries demonstrated that even though my white students were not aware of what whiteness signified, they were very cognizant of Blackness or other racial identities. Since certain white cultural norms dictated that any acknowledgment of race could possibly identify them as racist, it was no wonder that they were uncomfortable discussing race. At the same time, it became clear that they needed to reflect on the experiences they had had with people of color and on their own stereotypes and fears. Years of silence on the topic might have contributed to this lack of awareness and inability to locate themselves as "ethnic," yet when asked, they certainly had a great deal to say about what race and ethnicity meant to them. I, too, had to

confront my lack of identity development that enabled me to respond in some cases on a very personal level because of my experience. This became clearer to me as I read my responses to students of color and saw that I could not draw from personal experience in the same way because we did not share similar ethnic or racial backgrounds.

Students of Color and Ethnic Identity

The narratives from the seven self-identified students of color (see Appendix B for a complete class list) shared an important similarity with the white students: for most, school was the first confrontation with difference. They located school as a critical site for negotiating their identity and understanding difference. Another similarity was confusion over the term "ethnicity"; both groups struggled to find a clear definition and interpretation. At times, the differences were apparent, and at other moments, the line was blurry. Yet students of color tended to relate stories that more closely described their cultural background, such as language or family values, than the white students did. Also there was not the sense that these students were raised color-blind; they saw color even if they wrestled with its meaning.

As noted earlier, by addressing the issues raised by whites and students of color in separate chapters, I do not intend to offer a comparative study of these two groups. Rather, students of color recounted themes that were not addressed by the white students. I consider their responses here because their experiences were notably different and required their own analysis. Looking at their entries as an aggregate body of knowledge allowed for a more nuanced and multi-layered examination of how these students interpreted their ethnicity.

One of the most important distinctions between the entries composed by white students and those written by students of color was the presence of whiteness in the stories and experiences of students of color. They learned that they were different because they were not white. Unlike the white students, they had to understand their own background while, at the same time, interpret and master the cultural requirements of mainstream students and teachers. Due to this position, students of color also had a unique engagement with systems of privilege. They worried about what was happening to the white students as we looked at race, racism, and white

privilege. This was noteworthy because none of the white students wrote about concern for the students of color and what they might be experiencing over the course of our time together.

Who is a Student of Color?

Discussions in class about the readings and journal assignments made it clear that my one Jewish student and one bi-racial student shared experiences with both the white students and the students of color. One example was our work in racial affinity groups, opportunities for people with the same racial background to meet and discuss their experiences. Affinity work has been well-documented as an effective way of affirming identity and easing isolation, understanding the systemic nature of racism, and brainstorming ways of working across racial lines to end oppression (Tatum 1997). Affinity groups can meet separately or in a "fish bowl," a dialogue exercise where one self-identified group sits in the middle of a circle and talks about a topic while a different group sits around them and listens (thus, the image of looking at fish in a fishbowl). The group on the outside cannot interrupt or speak until it is its turn in the middle. It is a powerful listening exercise, and I had the class break into two groups: whites and students of color. I was not surprised that the Jewish and bi-racial student decided to join the group of students of color because they understood discrimination due to experiences with racism and anti-Semitism. Yet I was also aware that they both could pass for white. They both looked white and knew that most students assumed they were white unless they shared their ethnic backgrounds. Because they did not consistently self-identify as white or as students of color, I will consider their responses in a separate analysis.

Awareness of Ethnic Identity

It is important to stress again that the memories and experiences the students recounted in their journal entries were recollections that were composed or constructed in the context of

families and past histories. Using stories and compositions of their already-worked-on or recently recovered experiences, they were representing the past and writing their representations in a social space that was the classroom.

Students of color addressed the same question I posed on the first day of class: "When did you first become aware of your ethnicity?" For many of them, this first journal assignment brought up painful memories of their ethnic awareness (all the following quotations are from journal #1 unless otherwise noted). Questions of authenticity and assimilation were present in most of the entries, and the students had varying reactions to assaults on and questions about who they were. On the second day of class, I asked students to share their entries if they wanted to. Almost all of the students of color read their entries, but only one white student, Stephanie, read hers. When Sue shared her piece, the class was rapt with attention. It was as if many of the students had never heard such a story, and the class's reaction was powerful. Sue became tearful about halfway through her reading; she paused and then finished (and she wrote about what she was feeling in a later journal entry). Her classmates were very respectful, but dumb-struck in a way, especially the white students, and we all sat in silence as the weight of Sue's narrative settled over us.

Sue began with this preface, "I'm not sure when it was that I realized exactly what being a Korean-American meant. I think my ethnicity revealed itself to me over time and in layers, my first vague realization that I was considered different form others being when I was three or four." Several interesting points emerged here. First, the concept that identity was a process, a series of steps or moments that contribute to who we are (Tatum 1997; Nieto 1999; Phinney 1996, 1993). Second, Sue located ethnicity as *difference*. Finally, she represented the process of identity development as beginning at a very early age. Sue then recounted an experience from her preschool:

> I attended a preschool filled with blond children and cliques of friends. I didn't realize that I was friendless because a Persian girl would come sometimes and she

> would play with me. Otherwise, I'd make my own games up or play G.I. Joes with the boys. Two fair little girls didn't like me at all and sometimes went out of their way to exclude me from their play. One time, it escalated into them fighting over a toy phone with me and a fair little boy joined their ranks, quitting his chalkboard to scratch and claw at me while managing to draw on my skin and my shirt. It hurt my feelings when he called me black because I didn't think I was black at all. In fact, my skin was creamy white when I didn't play out in the sun too much. I looked at the boy and I looked at the girls. They stared at me with a hostility only little children can muster, and I let go of the phone.

The presence and power of whiteness was a central theme; the irony of Sue's use of "fair" was important as she constructed the narrative. On her account, difference was socially constructed, meaning Sue did not know she was different, or even excluded, until someone told her she was. As with most of the white students, Sue realized her difference at school. Her pain was both physical and emotional, the literal drawing on her skin to show she was not white and then the verbal comment that confused her and caused her to question who she was. Whiteness had a dual meaning here: actual skin color and the power to include or exclude others. The bullying ceased when Sue surrendered the phone, but her struggle did not end there.

As she sat in the car waiting for her mom, the episode returned to her thoughts days later:

> I examined the back of my hands, slowly acknowledging that they were ever so slightly darker and tanner than the skins of the children at my preschool. Quickly, I turned my hands over and reassured myself of my whiteness by indulging in the soft peach of my palms. I turned my hands over and over again, trying to convince myself that the color difference between the tan backside of my hand and my near-white palm was not all that much and in fact I was white in color. Finally, I opened the door to the car and examined my palm in the direct midday sun. My palms fairly blinded me as they reflected the sun's rays. Deciding that my blinding palms settled the matter of my color and who I was, I shut the door again and waited for my mother to finish pumping the gas.

Here we could see Sue's process of learning about her identity. Sue learned from the world, her immediate social setting, that she was different. And not only was she different, she was Black. She then had to wrestle with this information, trying to fit this new information into the categories she had for herself. Essentially, the problem was she had no category for Black, and so her own reasoning and examination produced contrary information. She had to reconsider what the words "Black" and "white" meant to her. Up to the moment she wrote about, the two

terms had seemed unproblematic. Then she was forced to reconsider what Black meant when applied to her. Behind the words "Black" and "white" lay historically constructed discourses about race. She did not recognize herself in either of these two discourses. Therefore, she reached for an alternative and a new category took shape for her. She decided for herself that she was closer to white. She then put this understanding back out into her social setting by asking her mom when she returned to the car, "Mommy am I am Black?" This dialogic process was constructing Sue; she was interacting with her world in order to understand who she was, and that understanding was being produced through discourse, either with another student, herself, or her mother.

Her narrative continued with her mom's response to her query:

> Her astonished look and her definite, "No, of course not," should have made me feel better, but I still wasn't sure. I knew now that the blond boy and the two blonde girls at my preschool did not consider me one of them. I was also fairly certain that I wasn't black. Then what was I? After a good minute or two of a toddler's puckered concentration, I decided that I was closer to white than black, and I was what my mommy was, and whatever we were, she was with me, so that made it okay.

Her mother's response forced her to reconsider her earlier conclusion that she was white. Based on the exclusion by white children, she realized she was not white, but she also knew she was not Black, which her mom confirmed. A new category emerged, one that was not Black or white, and she could settle in this space because of the identification with her mom. As long as she looked like someone she knew, she would be fine. Yet it is important to note that according to her recollection, neither Sue nor her mom mentioned her Asian identity. She knew what she wasn't, but she remained unsure of who she was.

The narrative poses more questions than it answers. What if there were other Asian children, or an Asian teacher, at her preschool? Would she have experienced the same exclusion? A more heterogeneous setting could have created more categories for her. Crucially, she needed a place to be able to explore her identity and a forum to discuss who she was. Obviously, her

classmates were keenly aware of color and difference. Sue's experience might help teachers to see the value of directed and supervised discussions around identity. Teachers have a responsibility to help children negotiate who they are by providing safe spaces of inquiry (Banks 2002; Nieto 1999; Tatum 1997). Indeed, teachers need to begin with who kids are, as opposed to starting with a deficit model of what they are not. Emergent identities need to be affirmed by teachers, other children, the pictures on the walls, the syllabus, and so on. Otherwise, white hegemony will be preserved, and it will be incidents like the one Sue described that will define who children of color are: not white.

Other students shared descriptions of ethnicity that were closely tied to notions of whiteness. Keisha discussed her ethnic consciousness as opposed to one defining moment:

> My mom says that we've always talked about it, my being black or African-American. From the time I was a baby and she had to prove to my brother that we were related even though I was much fairer than he was. Right on up to Montessori school at age two when people asked why I was so many different colors. There was confusion about the difference between the palm of my hand and the back of my hand.

Like Sue, an awareness of ethnicity was located in difference, but by her own account, Keisha also carried an understanding of who she was through family dialogues. Again school interactions provided early memories. She then mentioned that she could tell about all the things that happened to her at school, but she said, "Those episodes weren't the first time I was aware of my ethnicity. Those were just the times it stung." She made an important distinction between knowing one is different and being judged for who one was. She ended with her own analysis of her ethnicity and the role it played in her life: "So I come to the conclusion that I just knew it all along because the [her family name] do things differently than Mr. White and family. I eat different food, attend a different church, usually have more rhythm than those around me. There was no first time, no poignant episode. Just a consciousness that I carry with me like everybody has fingernails, I am black." Unlike the white students, Keisha's ethnic consciousness was ever-present; she could not remember a time she did not know that she was African-American.

Alicia, who immigrated to the US from Japan, noticed her "identity" when she moved. She thought back to comments made by a friend, Erin, in first grade: "[Erin] must also have, without realizing, been 'taught' to think a certain way. One day, she all the sudden didn't want to play with me anymore because I was 'different.' Up until then, we had been very close. It was after Erin started to hang out with another blond (white) girl. Given my inadequate English abilities, I couldn't understand very well." Alicia pointed out the fact that discrimination was learned, almost in an unconscious way (Tatum 1997; Derman-Sparks and Phillips 1997). Her confusion was understandable when her friend's behavior changed, and it was significant that she remembered the connection between the end of her friendship with Erin and Erin's new relationship with another white girl. Whiteness was again a backdrop. It offered a way of gauging what was happening, but language was another critical aspect of this narrative, focusing more on ethnicity than race. By her account, her status as an immigrant and her home language had a strong effect on her ability to negotiate encounters with difference and/or exclusion.

Here is another immigrant's perspective. Rasika spent four years in India before coming to the US. Her definition of ethnicity started out as quite broad: "Ethnicity can mean so many things – gender, race, social class. My first experience with my 'ethnicity' had nothing to do with my Indian-ness as one might suppose." As I read these first few lines, I remembered thinking, so what was ethnicity to her? Her entry actually addressed her "Indian-ness," including her language, so the opening sentences served as a confused preface, echoing the struggle many students had when asked about their ethnicity: the definition was not clear or fixed.

Rasika began by describing her life in India where her neighbors all attended the same temple and her religion, Hinduism, was not looked down upon; even her name was a normal by Indian standards. She continued with this assessment:

> All in all, in many ways, for the first three years of my life, I wasn't aware of my ethnicity or anyone else's. We were all one, I thought, we all belonged. It was only at four that I noticed that our new neighbors and many others at P-KG [pre-kindergarten] spoke a different language at home. It was only when I went to visit

> my best friend at home that I realized that her mother didn't sing her a lullaby in Tamil like my mother did (at school, we all talked in English).

Here ethnic identity was associated with a sense of belonging, of feeling accepted and part of a group. There was also a sense of normalness to Rasika's entry; in India she was normal. In the US, suddenly she did not fit in. Language and her entry into school served as a defining experience, one that marked her as different, and thus "ethnic." And yet this was not expressed as a deficit in Rasika's description. She simply recognized that her friend had a different experience. Even though she began with a non-specific idea of ethnicity, her entry focused on critical aspects of ethnic identity: language and country of origin.

Nina, an Indo-American student, started her entry with this interpretation of ethnic awareness: "The first time I was ever made conscious that not everybody was the same would be in kindergarten." Even though she wrote down in her journal the question that I gave the class to direct their writing (When did you first become aware of your ethnicity?), Nina immediately wrote about difference. As with Rasika, her defining moment centered around language:

> I gave my teacher a glass ornament from India. I tried to explain to her without revealing the present, the contents, but quickly recognized that the words that clearly made sense in my mind were foreign to my teacher. The language we spoke at home was not pure English, but a mixture of both Punjabi and English. And now when my teacher asked me for a translation of this foreign explanation, my tongue faltered me.

This exchange was notable for several reasons. Her teacher asked her for a translation which was inappropriate because Nina was trying to explain using all the words she had. Intriguingly, Nina used the word "now" in her description which implied immediacy. She was back in the moment, feeling the same sense of frustration. It was a striking fact that these students could represent such events with such vividness given that for most of them, they were recovering memories over ten years old. After this initial recognition, Nina shared another memory:

> It was not until fourth grade that I began to recognize how different my culture was from those around me. It was by no means that my culture was any richer, but each friend was so deeply rooted within their own ways that to me it seemed like the line that separated me from them was blurred. A close friend had a culture that

> resembled mine. She made me aware of the holidays and customs and I was convinced that we had thoroughly exchanged worlds. Today I realize that I cannot recall whether she was Korean or Chinese, a simple fact that I failed to learn. I also know that although she knows I was from India that she doesn't know from what part.

These young girls identified with each other because they both shared strong ethnic identities. Although different ethnicities, there was enough commonalty that connections were built. There was no judgment, as indicated by Nina, but rather a feeling of being a part of something larger that themselves. In addition, Nina now saw that the knowledge was partial (Yuval-Davis 1997), that some of the details escaped her, but that did not necessarily take away from the friendship they shared. Yet as Nina grew up, the tension between her family's world and her school life became difficult to bear:

> I slowly began to recognize that I led two different lives that produced pure chaos when brought together. I began to form my school circle of friends and my Indian-family friend circle. At first I never realized how vastly different my school life was from my weekend life. I assumed everybody lived a life in which two different communities expected two completely contrasting things from you. The values in each of these groups were as different as night and day. I tried to do the impossible by bringing, or more so attempting, night and day together. Whenever I had a party or brought both school and outside friends together, the two worlds never touched. Although I was a part of both of these worlds, I failed to provide as a connection, linking the two...I still try over and over again to bring my two worlds together. I want to share each special one with the other. But some barrier keeps me from bringing anyone from one side to the other.

As I read her entry, I sensed her frustration and also the enormous weight of responsibility she carried with her. She assumed it was her responsibility to unite the two cultures she lived in and between, and her sense of failure to become the bridge that would provide the connection was disturbing, too much for a young woman to try to take on.

What was the barrier she referred to – prejudice? fear? In *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. DuBois (1994) wrote about "double- consciousness," also referred to as psycho-social code switching (Ervin-Tripp 1996):

> It is a particular sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness – an

> American, a Negro, two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder... this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. (DuBois 1994:2)

Although Nina was Indian-American, she faced a similar struggle: how to be Indian, in a culture that was dominated by whiteness, and American coming from a family with strong Indian cultural roots. The "chaos" she felt was her two-ness, and she was looking for a way to bring her two worlds together. As far as her learning was concerned, as a teacher I needed to know that this process was happening for Nina because it impacted her ability to participate fully in school culture (Arrington, Hall, and Stevenson 2003; Ogbu 2003). She was negotiating difficult terrain, and I could only support her if I was aware of the dimensions of struggle. For many students of color, their double-consciousness was with them all the time, something my white students did not write about or ever refer to in their writing.

For Alison, her first awareness of her ethnic identity came from mockery. She wrote about when she was about five years old playing with a friend:

> She decided that we would be a Chinese family where she was the mom and I was the daughter. While we were playing, she would start prattling in what she thought was "Chinese," but in reality, it was just nonsense. At the time I was too young to be offended, but old enough to know something was wrong. I probably did not know how much my Chinese heritage played into my life, but I knew that what Heather was saying was not Chinese, nor anywhere near it.

Alison made a fine distinction here, and the memory stayed with her, a preview of feelings to come:

> As I grew older in this "white" country, I began to deny my ethnicity because of all of the stereotypes placed on me (i.e. I live with the pandas; I was born in China and my eyes have a distinct Chinese look because of the way it curves). But my denial would only surface when I was in large crowds with other Chinese in places like Chinatown. I always made it a point to speak really loud in English so others would know I'm American.

Whiteness emerged again, serving as the standard by which all things were measured. Unable to speak up when she was in the minority, she found strength with members of her own ethnic group, but it was still a denial of who she was, a rejection of those around her. She felt she had to

claim her Americaness by speaking English, but she did this as a direct refutation of who she was. In other words, she could not be both Chinese and American.

Alison's story was further complicated by her family's history so that her search for an authentic sense of self, as well as a means of expressing herself, was not clear.

> Coming from a family who is Chinese from the Philippines, I was not brought up speaking Mandarin. I knew various phrases to get by when one day I said, "Thank you, *xie xie*, with a slight American/English accent and the waitress repeated what I said and walked off laughing. That moment made me feel so terrible, but then I realized that Mandarin was not my native dialect so I should not have gotten so upset about the waitress's reaction.

By taking the opportunity to reflect upon her experience while she was writing this entry, Alison tried to rationalize her reaction. Yet the pain was undeniable, compromising her ability to be authentic. At every turn she was thwarted if she did not fit the stereotype or perceived norm. How was she to be a Chinese-American from the Philippines? Where was the space for her to discover and nurture who she was?

Mariah, an African-American, recounts the story of growing up in Hawaii with her older sister and their first day of school:

> Our mom who sews made both of is nice, new outfits to wear, so of course on the first day of school we felt special...We walked down the walkway to our classes and we heard from the crowd, "Snakes...snakes. They've got snakes in their hair," referring to our freshly braided hair. Thinking to myself I wonder who they are talking to – not at the time realizing they were talking about me and my sister – until one of the taunters came closer and pointed and repeated, "Snakes, they've got snakes in their hair."

Like many of the other narratives, this story told how Mariah and her sister were made aware of their difference at school, a consciousness derived from verbal taunts. Yet she had a different reaction to the teasing she received because she did not look like all the other kids: "When this happened I looked at the person who was saying these words and noticed they did not do their hair the same way my mommy did...is that why they called me names? That was when I realized I was different. But at that time I did not realize that these differences were what made me special." As with Sue, it was critical that there was someone she could identify with, be it her

mom or another family member – someone who looked like her. Mariah, in the face of intense humiliation, tried to figure out why she was the source of their teasing. Here the awareness of difference came from a negative context; who she was became a way for the mainstream kids to assert their privilege and power. Thus, Mariah's identity development happened in conjunction with the other kids. As she was constructed as different, the "taunters" were positioned as normal.

Interpreting Initial Memories of Ethnic Identity

There was an extreme contrast in how the students of color reported experiencing difference. In these stories, awareness often came from a negative interaction, but unlike the white girls, they were on the receiving end. A few white students did recount stories that associated racial difference as negative (see descriptions of Christi and Mary), but it was generally not their whiteness or their ethnicity that was clearly under attack. For students of color, *who they were*, be it their skin color or culture, was being questioned fundamentally. The role of race in these instances reflects Derman-Sparks and Phillips (1997) definition of "race" as a political construct that "plays a key role in how people are treated in our society" (13). Another important distinction was the level of consciousness these students had about their backgrounds that the white students lacked. As the white students discussed a lack of knowledge about their ethnic backgrounds, these students were generally able to identify and share aspects of their ethnicity.

It is critical to note the way white students represented whiteness: usually it was portrayed as something negative or bad, possibly reflecting their self-perception and means of internalizing their racial identity. Although students of color might have been told their culture had less value, only Alison wrote about a negative self-perception. The others valued their cultural and racial identity even in the face of rejection from the mainstream culture. Whiteness

was a critical part of the students of color's narratives, highlighting the dialogic relationship between whiteness and "colored"; students of color knew who they were because of whiteness.

Overall, the students of color were more bi-cultural; they had to know their own cultural background as well as the mainstream culture. The white students could remain monocultural, or even non-cultural by representing themselves as lacking an ethnic identity. Finally, the issue of double-consciousness should not be ignored by educators. There is a professional responsibility to make the transition between home and school culture easier to navigate by finding a way of reflecting other cultures along side the mainstream culture. Nieto (1999) clearly articulates what teachers ought to do to be most effective:

> Research in the past two decades consistently has found that students who are allowed and encouraged to identify with their native languages and cultures in their schools and communities can improve their learning... However, maintaining them is also problematic because the identities of bicultural students generally are disparaged or dismissed by schools... Consequently, teachers' role as cultural mediators in their students' learning becomes even more urgent. (70)

This notion of teachers as mediators is both important and challenging. As opposed to just presenting material, teachers can look to students as rich sources of information and use their authority as teachers to make sure each child is valued for what she brings to the classsroom.

White Teacher Responses

As with the white student responses, I usually began by affirming these entries (all of my responses here are to journal #1 unless otherwise noted). With Sue, I thanked her for sharing her story and reflected back to her the strength of her narrative: "Your images are brought to life with rich description. And your message is so important. How others perceive us can really affect our identity development in such profound ways. I hope the class assists you in your own journey for healing and understanding." Upon reflection, this response seems woefully inadequate. I use Sue's narrative in the seminar I lead for teachers, and every time I read her story, I am struck by the depth of her perception and the crafting of her narrative. It is the kind of

piece that has revealed itself to me over time, just as Sue said her identity emerged in stages. So as to not be overly critical of my lack of response, I acknowledge my own learning as I work with this piece. Yet I am still pained by my response because it did not seem to meet Sue where she was (Banks 2002; Nieto 1999). It feels safe to me now – thoughtful, but only on the surface.

My response to Alicia seemed more engaged. I posed questions to her about the awkwardness she felt, where it came from: "What do you think that 'awkwardness' means? Is it the prejudice? Or is it just a desire to try to be Asian and American at the same time? It seems like your Asian clique was necessary for your own survival." After noting how brief my response was, I thought the questions were good, but still something was missing. What was not there was me, my story, my experience. With the white students, I shared my own stories, anecdotes about my life. Those kind of responses were absent in my writings to students of color. And yet these students included whiteness in many of their entries; I just chose not to respond to the issue of my position and color being raised by these students.

This leads to a larger issue that is at the heart of my own identity: why is it so difficult for a white woman to engage with students of color on issues of race and ethnicity? After looking over all of my responses, my general feeling was I was not relating to these students to in the same way I was interacting and responding to my white students. Perhaps I could not engage with these students of color because I was not clear on my ethnic and racial background. I had, and still have, a lot of work to do. I have to make up for about 25 years of inattention to my own cultural roots, and like Sue, my position will continue to reveal itself over time and in layers. In some ways, my process mirrors what was happening for many of my students. As I struggle to create the conditions in which students learn how to understand themselves better, I must also be engaged in my own process of identity exploration if I am to respond to them authentically.

For Rasika, I made a general comment about the direction of her preliminary journal entries: "Overall, your entries are thoughtful, and you certainly are challenging you own history

and assumptions about India. Work on pushing your ideas and exploring your issues in more depth. Try to 'excavate' your feelings and impressions by digging deeper into your thoughts." Rasika struggled with the journal assignments and my responses. She would often talk to me after class saying she didn't know what I wanted. It was not until the end of the course that her entries began to show the depth I was looking for, and I must take part of the responsibility for inhibiting her progress. She needed something from me I was not giving her; she wanted more explicit instruction. Although I had handed out sample journal entries to give the girls a sense of what I was looking for, Rasika needed a different kind of explanation, and my response was not helpful. I should have pointed to examples in her entries, places where she was approaching what I wanted and others that were just skimming the surface. Again, I did not really deal with her on a more substantial level. I remember thinking how she was a strong math and science student and maybe this class just wasn't for her. Instead of meeting her where she was, I was frustrated that she was not where I wanted her to be. I began to question her maturity and ability to really access her feelings. I could not have been proven more wrong. As I will discuss later, Rasika's entries were very powerful by the end of the course. My stereotypes and assumptions directly affected the way I responded to her (Banks 2002; Nieto 1999).

I did offer Nina more feedback and advice. After commenting on the thoughtfulness of her entry, I tried to respond to the dilemma she was facing trying to bridge her American and Indian cultures:

> What you describe is SO common, and the solution, as you know, is not clear. I guess the best you can do is continue to explore your own identity so you can help others to see how inter-connected we all are. Maybe your friends can follow your model, and by looking at themselves more closely, they may then be able to reach out to others because they will be more secure in who they are.

This response seemed to meet Nina where she was. It was my attempt to offer her some kind of relief from the pressure she was facing. But I certainly could have been more explicit about the really difficult position she occupied as a boundary crosser. Anzaldúa (1987) writes in

Borderlands/La Frontera, "Borderlands are physically present whenever two or more cultures edge each other... Living on the borders and in margins, keeping intact one's shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element" (preface i). Nina occupied a borderland, and as she tried to bring her two cultures together, she experienced what Anzaldúa calls a "cultural collision" that creates the consciousness of the borderlands, "living in a state of psychic unrest" (77-78). The two worlds merge to form a third country – a border culture: "This assembly is not one where severed or separated pieces merely come together. Nor is it a balancing of opposing powers. In attempting to work out a synthesis, the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts. That third element is a new consciousness" (79-80). Trying to negotiate a hyphenated identity, such as Nina's struggle to be Indo-American, put Nina between two cultures, and her narrative captured her emerging consciousness, this third element that came from her hyphen, her position at the crossroads.

In response to Alison's narrative about the waitress who made fun of her when she tried to speak Chinese, I chose to discuss the position of the waitress and ignored what was happening for Alison: "Yet, it still hurts! Why did she need to laugh? Perhaps her own insecurity surfacing – usually racists, or people who are prejudiced, have a very limited sense of their own identity. They choose to focus on others – defining themselves by what they are *not*, not what they are. You learned a hard lesson early on." This last sentence was most troubling. What lesson did she learn? Don't try to be who you are because people might mock you? In my attempt to disclose the perspective of the waitress, I completely ignored Alison. Often in schools we address and punish the perpetrator of an indiscretion or an act of cruelty, but we tend to forget that the victim needs attention as well. My brief affirmation at the beginning of the response needed to be expanded to relate back to Alison and to explore where she was.

Finally, Mariah's story about being taunted because of her hairstyle received this response: "Wow! What a story! I'm so glad you can frame the story in a positive light now – your

difference makes you special. Yet I still can't help wondering how you felt at the moment the kids said what they said. It must have been really hard. I admire your ability to turn something with such potential for pain into something constructive. But I am sure it is not easy." I had mixed feelings about my response. On one level it seemed appropriate, as if I was meeting Mariah where she was. On another, this also felt distanced, removed in a way. The incident was not about turning pain into affirmation. It was about living with the pain next to a positive sense of self. The pain did not go away but rather co-existed with other experiences. I missed the subtlety of Mariah's narrative, and my response felt like a cliché upon reflection. Again, I was struck by my own inability to really respond to these young women in what should be an authentic manner.

The most critical difference I noticed between my responses was that I did not challenge these students on their points of view or ask them to consider another perspective as I did with many of the white students, except when I asked Alison about the waitress's response. I also did not raise the issue of race versus ethnicity, challenging the students of color to be more cognizant of the differences between the terms. So what does it take for a white teacher to respond thoughtfully? One has to wade in, to accept ambiguity, to make the implicit explicit (Delpit 1995). White teachers cannot be afraid of color, and this will only come as we become clearer about what it means to white. The issue of sympathy versus empathy seems important here. I will never feel what it is like to be a woman of color, but I can know what it means to be white, to be clear about what that feels like. Yuval-Davis (1997) refers to a group of Italian feminists who used two key words, "rooting" and "shifting," to describe an effective dialogue process:

> The idea is that each participant in the dialogue brings with her the rooting in her own membership and identity, but at the same time tries to shift in order to put herself in a situation of exchange with women who have different membership and identity... It is vital in any form of coalition and solidarity process to keep one's own perspective on things while empathizing and respecting others. (130)

From a rooted position, I can then hopefully listen more carefully to the stories of those who are different form me and to construct more knowledge about myself in the process.

Reflections on Privilege

In a directed journal response, I asked students to respond to the following question: "What kinds of privilege do you experience?" Students of color wrote a range of responses. Since they had just read McIntosh's white privilege piece and were reading *Ellen Foster* (for a full description of course texts, see Appendix D), they wrote mainly about racial privilege. Yet socio-economic status and class privilege were often woven throughout their responses. In her immigrant essay, Sue wrote about leaving Korea when she was two years old and growing up in a mostly Asian community with only a few white neighbors:

> I sometimes noted how the whites in my community were more of a minority than the Chinese, Koreans, or Indians. It was a little amusing, and it comforted me. Upon entering [her private school], however, I encountered a totally different situation where for once, like other places in the world other than my hometown, white people were the majority and Asians were a minority. I had a hard time relating to the mostly slightly-richer-than-me white girls who had grown up attending private school. I did not share their culture nor participate in their particularly privileged lifestyle. (immigrant essay)

This description highlighted the intersection of race and class: the "slightly-richer-than-me white girls" comment pointed to both economic and racial distinctions. It was not that Sue was poor; these white girls seemed to have an edge, an advantage that gave them more social power. Although they were now attending the same school, Sue did not see her cultural values reflected in the school culture, and she became an immediate outsider:

> When I invited myself to sit with some of the more established social circles, no one would move over to make to room for me nor acknowledge my presence. This rejection was not only hurtful but hard to understand; what made me so different and excluded like this? I hated not knowing what was going on, how the social hierarchy worked, and being condemned to befriend only the collection of new students. After some time, I decided that I was not included primarily because I looked different, and with that outward appearance and genetic dissimilarity came all the history of me which was different from theirs. (immigrant essay)

Here her color and ethnic background override any economic concerns. Even if she was just as rich as the other girls, Sue realized that something else was keeping her out of the "established" groups. And she was savvy enough to realize that it was not just the way she looked, but rather her entire cultural heritage that was being rejected. Her "history" set her apart.

Sue represented what it felt like to be on the receiving end of privilege, meaning that as these young white women invoked privilege to elevate themselves by creating an exclusive group, there was a counter movement that put Sue down. This is why prejudice and privilege can be thought of as two sides of the same coin. This captures one of the insidious consequences of white privilege. Often, white people may feel they are just hanging out with their friends and being with people who like the same things they do. They fail to see the exclusive and segregated nature of their social interactions as well as the pain inflicted on others who are excluded. Yet whites are often quick to realize when a group of Asian kids are sitting together or a group of African-Americans (Tatum 1997).

Sue's second journal entry was entitled "The White People," and she expressed some concerns for her white classmates:

> I hope the white people in our class don't feel uncomfortable for being white. It's like they were so comfortable being who they were and ruling the world that they knew no struggle and were ignorant to real America. Now it's revelation time and they're to blame. I can see them, squirming, not understanding, not believing. Well, maybe not quite. Maybe they try but the expression deviates. (journal #2)

This was written after the students shared their entries about when they first became aware of their ethnicity. After completing the first journal assignment, I told students that they were welcome to read their entries aloud to the class, and as noted previously, almost all the students of color shared what they had written while only one white student read her piece. Sue commented on the level of tension in the class as the students of color shared their experiences. The white girls did seem uncomfortable; for most of them, I was fairly sure the stories they were hearing were completely outside their realm of experience. Sue's tone reflected her own reaction,

her feeling that perhaps the white girls did not believe her story. She then went on to describe what it felt like for her:

> It was harder reading my story out loud than I thought it would be. When I was writing it I knew that I wanted to share it. I wrote it so that I could share it, re-reading it and re-reading it. But I wasn't moved. When recalling the memories I was sad, but not quite. I remembered being sad. I kept on squirming in my chair, having to pause or else I would cry. I couldn't believe it. My emotions hit me quite unexpectedly, but I didn't feel them. The symptoms were there, but I was trying not to feel them. I realized just how painful the memory was when I heard it through the class's ears. I was a victim. (journal #2)

Through the sharing of her story, she came to understand her own level of emotion and pain. The reading was revelatory, and even though she wrote it knowing she would share it, she was still unprepared for the power of the class interaction. The idea of listening to her own story through the "class's ears" reflects Bakhtin's (1984) notion of the multivoiced quality of language. Words or concepts only have meaning when we enter into dialogue with someone else; a word in a dictionary has no meaning until it is negotiated and discussed. The meaning is produced in the interaction. Sue did not realize the full meaning of her story until she entered into a dialogue with the class. In essence, her identity was produced by her story, and she had a better sense of who she was, albeit painful, because of the opportunity to share her narrative.

In response to Peggy McIntosh's essay on the workings of unearned white racial privilege, Sue expressed new awareness as well as frustration:

> Peggy McIntosh's list had some pretty revealing stuff. Some of it I knew of or realized myself before having read the article, but some of it I had never thought of ... Sometimes reading about her experience as a white woman made me upset for my ethnic group. There were things that were unfair that I did not even realize were going on. Could this all be true? (journal #6)

Just as the concept of white privilege could be new for white students who had not thought about their racial identity, students of color gained new insight into social power when they were finally given a name for things they might have experienced, but never fully processed. Sue's question raised an interesting point: if it is all true, what do we do? Once we know of that level of injustice, are we not compelled to address it as quickly as possible?

Alicia also expressed concern for the white students and our discussions about race and ethnicity. She was afraid that expressing true feelings and thoughts might increase friction, misunderstanding, and hatred: "I have discussed this issue of race and ethnicity with many others, but I am not sure if many of the 'white' girls have been exposed to this kind of direct confrontation with prejudice, racism, etc. Of course, that could also be one more assumption that I am making, but I noticed that they were quite silent in class" (journal #2). Alicia was not alone in her worry among students of color, but it is important to note that none of the white students raised similar concerns about the students of color in their journal entries. Her own consciousness and critical questioning were evident in her comment about her assumptions. Alicia wrote frequently about her desire to confront her own stereotypes and prejudice, and certainly, she was highly engaged here.

For Alicia, privilege had to do with unconsciousness and ignorance:

> The first thing I noticed when I came to [school] is the difference in privilege that all these fortunate girls had. What amazed me most was how unconscious they were of the position. Coming from a public jr. high school where there are all sorts of socio-economic levels and classes, I was very aware of how these girls spent money like water; how they didn't have to think twice about leaving their stuff somewhere. These girls, I thought, must be a part of one of the most privileged societies in the US and the rest of the world, and it seriously disgusted me at first to think that they were so ignorant and so arrogant. (journal #6)

She equated privilege with being fortunate regarding socio-economic status. Due to her experience, she had a different vantage point, another lens. She could see a larger social picture and was troubled by the lack of awareness of many of her classmates. Yet these young women were not just unconscious; their arrogance indicated privilege and the undisclosed nature of her school culture. All of these behaviors were happening that no one ever talked about. These assumptions, along with taking economic advantages for granted as if they were just normal, reflect a critical aspect of whiteness as defined by Frankenberg (1993): white is usually unmarked and unnamed.

Like Sue, she did not write about the privileges she had. She focused on the discrimination she faced because of the existence of white privilege:

> Responding to the literature about white privilege, nothing in it was too new to me, obviously because I'm on the other side, and it's easier to see others than seeing yourself. I was surprised that [McIntosh] was able to write that 10 years ago. I wish that all white people, or any other majority group, will realize all the privileges that they receive and the discrimination that in turn is the cause of such unfair advantage (or should I say "fair" advantage because they are all light skinned?). Like [Stephanie] was saying, I'm sure barely any of the girls at [school] have ever experienced being a minority or being discriminated against. I hope that people will make that extra effort, like you do, to try to understand the "other" person. (journal#6)

Again I saw Alicia's insight into her own position; she was keenly aware of her ability to see others more clearly than herself. Yet her critical thinking revealed how privilege cuts both ways, and her comment about "fair" advantage pushed her argument to another level. She was also very aware that she was writing for her white teacher and spoke directly to me at the end of her entry. Thus, her understanding was being produced in a dialogue with me. Together, we were constructing a narrative of whiteness, privilege, and power.

In a later entry she recounted an incident that happened in the senior lounge, a space reserved for seniors to relax and work in between classes. She overheard two girls taking about issues of trust, and ultimately, they decided they had to rely on themselves. Alicia was surprised by the comment because she felt she had learned that lesson at a very early age. She then began a comparison of public versus private schools and her experiences in two very different worlds:

> It must be, once again, the difference in the environment we grew up in. Public school kids are often referred to as more "hardened" compared to "sheltered" private school kids. I can confirm that difference seeing the two very different worlds. I was very surprised when I came to [school] for many reasons. Didn't people take your stuff if you just leave it there? Won't someone come after you if you talked smack behind their back? You guys don't have fights? I'm always "wow-ed" by the difference between these girls and the girls that I've always known. [Our school] girls are much nicer, but much less weathered. They break many rules and receive no consequence for it. Or rather, maybe they just operate on a different set of rules because after all, they do live in a totally different society. (journal #10)

These were startling comments not only for their insight, but for their ability to finely discern how racial and class privilege works. There was a code of niceness at the school, endemic to every independent school I have worked with, that may mask issues that are not so "nice" (Arrington, Hall, and Stevenson 2003). Alicia could cut through all of the surface elements to reveal the heart of the matter. Ultimately, the playing field was not even because she was playing on an entirely different field, and the rules were different.

Negotiating Language, Socio-Economic Status, and White Privilege

Mariah wrote about the role of white privilege in her life, pointing to both positive and negative effects:

> At times it is hard to point out because it is intertwined in daily life so much, and at times the divide is so evident that it makes either one or both parties uncomfortable. At times I have noticed that my friends or I have tried to reach to become part of the white privilege, and this has both good and bad outcomes. At times people will look down on you if you try to attain white privilege, and some other times people will say nothing of your reaching for so-called "whiteness." (journal #6)

The ever-present quality of white privilege in her life was interesting, and the power struggle around privilege was disconcerting given the uncertainty: she never knew how she might be treated. Having to "reach for whiteness" further exposed the dominance of whiteness; it was the norm that had to be followed. Yet the underlying reality that she would never really have white privilege pointed to a critical difference in the lived experiences of students of color. How would the white students have felt if they were constantly being held up to standard they could never achieve? How would that impact their learning? Mariah then posed an important question: "But at the same time, what does whiteness mean? In some cases it just means being treated like a human and treated justly. At others it means having all the things you want and not having to work as hard as others to get them" (journal #6). Another poignant aspect of white privilege emerged: "white" meant human, basic decency, and the right to be treated as a worthwhile

person if one was white. It also could mean unearned advantages, further exposing the insidious nature of a social construct that denied equity in order to make life easier for a select group (Kivel 2002; McIntosh 1988). Of course, the ultimate irony was that any system based on the subjugation of others only served to deny the humanity of the oppressor (Berry 1989).

Keisha offered a critique of media images. After watching a video on MTV of an all white male band, she was overcome with loathing: "As I was watching, I became completely disgusted at all the white people I saw. Here was a pseudo Abercrombie and Fitch commercial that was very hard to watch. The white boy group was singing about their summer flings and reliving them. Why did this one video incense me so much when there are so many others like it?" (journal #4). Keisha's anger was justifiable given the nature of the images in the video in relation to her own process of identification. Tatum (1997) cites psychologist William Cross's model of racial identity development: "The basic tenets of such [a model] can be applied to all people of color who have shared similar patterns of racial, ethnic, or cultural oppression" (132). Cross identifies five stages, and Keisha might have been in the second stage referred to as the encounter stage. In the first stage, pre-encounter, one is not aware of the personal and social significance of one's racial group membership. The second stage, encounter, is usually precipitated by an event or series of events that force the adolescent to come to terms with the personal impact of racism:

> As a result of a new and heightened awareness of the significance of race, the individual begins to grapple with what it means to be a member of a group targeted by racism... The issues of emerging sexuality and the societal messages about who is sexually desirable leave young black women in a very devalued position... Resisting the stereotypes and affirming other definitions of themselves is part of the task facing young Black women in both White and Black communities. (Tatum 1997:55-7)

In the absence of any Black faces, Keisha was struck by the video and wanted to see young people who looked like her. Abercrombie and Fitch was a trendy and expensive clothing store for teenagers, and most of the models reflected a white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant norm. Keisha

also wrote about the pointless lyrics and the fact that she only saw one Black face amidst a sea of white. She concluded, "Maybe it's Ethnic Voices or personal growth manifesting itself through this video. Either way I don't want to see the video again" (journal #4). Her consciousness was shifting, and so she was affected by the visual assault of an oppressive white norm that did not include her.

Keisha then explored the relationship between language, race, and privilege. We had a discussion in class about an article I gave the girls on standard English. She talked about the way she tried to speak properly in order to not sound "Black." She then posed a critical query: "Would I be asked to be featured in the view book if I didn't speak proper English?" (journal #6). The view book had pictures of all the students, and often one student or another was highlighted. Keisha was beginning to recognize the relationship between language and power (Delpit 1995). Her next entry hit the subject head-on as she examined prejudice within her own racial group. In response to a Native-American writer who wrote about her need to speak to whites in order to show how articulate she was, Keisha wrote:

> What a punch in the stomach and light bulb in the brain! But now I am confused. Why? Why do I look down upon Black people who by wearing baggy clothes and low caps provoke fear in myself and sales clerks? Why do I sigh with disgust when yet another black person is working at McDonalds because he doesn't have the sense or opportunity to get a white, Standard English education? I am disgusted with other blacks because they can't speak properly. It is a bad showing on me personally and on my race. (journal #7)

There was a socio-economic class dynamic here as well as a language issue. Yet, again, a norm that privileges one kind of speech over another drew clear boundaries that were divisive and dangerous because false dichotomies were put into place.

Another concern was internalized racism (Derman-Sparks and Phillips 1997). Although Keisha was trying to make a distinction between herself and these other Blacks, she was still African-American, and the "bad showing" indicated that the negative messages about her ethnic group had been internalized even if she was receiving a good education. "Standard English"

caused her to question her identity as well as other members of her race. In the second half of her entry, Keisha exposed how standard English has been used as a weapon to include some while excluding others:

> There is no standard English. There should be no need for me to change the way I speak in an interview. It is the dominant majority who makes me hate myself for hating the stereotypes of my race. Who says that using big vocabulary words is considered articulate? What the heck is correct grammar? I cautiously say that we need to distinguish between English grammar and African grammar and Spanish grammar, etc. (I say cautiously because I 'm not sure I'm up to learning millions of new languages and dialects.) The author of that excerpt...has summed up how pathetic and futile it is to try to maintain your race and heritage and still kiss up to the white people. You end up betraying one or the other (usually your race). (journal #7)

Keisha revealed the power dynamic, and her pronouncement, "There is no standard English," was a way of standing up against what she might have perceived as a threat to who she was. In order to be true to her experience, Keisha had to begin to unpack some of the dominant language by questioning the authority of certain norms. She offered a powerful means of resistance to white privilege (Derman-Sparks and Phillips 1997; hooks 1994).

She defined white privilege as "the ability and the power to bring some up and to push others down" (journal #8). Her sister told her she was able to work within white society and to gain from their privilege: "I have learned to work a system of sorts. I have been shaped to perform tasks that merit rewards from the privilege basket labeled whites only. Superficially, white privilege has helped to get me where I am today. However, I think the major lesson that I have learned is how to work within and benefit from white privilege" (journal #8). This was an interesting perspective, but her comment about being "shaped to perform" showed that as she felt she was using white privilege to her own advantage, she was also being used. She had to meet certain requirements in order to play the game, and what were the costs to her?

After acknowledging that whites took many of their advantages for granted, Rasika focused on heterosexual privilege: "The heterosexual privileges also, though we didn't go into detail about them, were things that I took for granted. My parents are heterosexual and I am too.

So, I don't have to worry about the clear and latent discrimination that gays and lesbians face" (journal #6). Here she was able to take a concept she did not experience, white privilege, and equate it with a privilege she could identify. It was an important parallel for her. She concluded with the comment that what was missing from McIntosh's list were middle/upper class advantages. Her next journal entry was her own inventory of middle class privileges. She pointed out some interesting observations that included cultural as well as class stereotypes and norms: "Middle class are seen as hard-working and the 'typical' American citizens, the 'normal' American" and "The majority of Americans are middle class. Middle class way of life – a house, two children, dog and cat, working parents – is the norm" (journal #7).

In a later entry, she delved in to the issue of class privilege at school:

> I thought about privilege and [school] today and how my economic status affects my [school] experience. I never thought that economic status had anything to do with my life during my four years as [school], but I realize that I was wrong. As a member of the upper-middle class, I haven't had to be on financial aid, but in a school where almost all the students are upper class and upper crust, I felt like a member of the lower class. (journal #12)

This echoed Sue's comments about the exclusion she faced from the white "slightly-richer-than-me" students. Although Rasika did not refer to race, the unconscious privilege distorted her own self-perception and made her feel as if she was not as worthy as others. And, again, it was not that she was poor. She made the critical distinction between being upper-middle class and being upper class, or "upper crust," and she clearly recognized and experienced the pain of these distinctions. She mentioned the cost of events and her discomfort: "One of the reasons I have never gone to Winter Formal or to Prom last year is because of the cost. Spending several hundred dollars for one evening seems outrageous to me" (journal #12). She talked about the pressure to wear designer clothes on free dress days and how much she liked the uniform. She concluded, "I don't think that students at [school] even think about economic background. We are all too busy with all the work that [school] gives us" (journal #12). Rasika had clearly

delineated that class functioned as an unspoken and just below the surface school norm, invading certain parts of her consciousness at different moments.

Alison focused on her upper-middle class family and actually read this entry to the school as her senior talk. (Each graduating student is asked to speak in front of her peers to share some aspect of her life with the school community.) She felt so intensely about the issue that she wanted to present it to a wider audience to see how other students would react. She began by listing her economic privileges and the way she often took her status for granted, and then she told a story about going to a mall she visited infrequently and feeling out of place because she was of a different class than the other shoppers. When passing through lower income cities on the train, she was told to stay away from these "strangers." She then questioned the messages she was taught about people who were not raised the way she was:

> But what did that innocent passenger do to make me associate him with being bad? He didn't do anything nor did he even glance at me. Society has conditioned me to think that anyone who is not like me is dangerous, but this perception is not true. Through all of the diversity work that I've done, I've learned more about mine and other's identity. Learning about other people's situations, I've learned that just because someone was brought up differently than I was, it does not make me any better than him/her. (journal #7)

Alison's emerging critical consciousness was necessary for her to truly understand who she was. Only by questioning her assumptions and unconscious beliefs was she able to really know the young woman she was and hoped to be.

Alison also wrote about how a conversation with a white student helped her to better understand white ethnic identity. While she was talking with a friend about the difference between regional cultural differences in India, a white girl joined their conversation. She was frustrated with the conversation, feeling like Alison was just promoting stereotypes:

> The white girl was saying how she is so anti-diversity. She was not against it because she is prejudiced, but she said that people should just accept each other for who we are. Just because she is white does not make her a racist, and she also said her German-Jewish background should put her as more of a minority because she is not from a "slave-holding" family from the south...I learned how this girl who I thought was completely white with no ethnic identity actually will admit to being a German Jew. (journal #8)

This raises an interesting question: to what extent do white people who have not really explored their racial identity tend to get defensive when race is discussed? Alison noted how the white student positioned herself as "anti-diversity" so as to distance herself from any kind of divisive movement. Frankenberg (1993) and Kivel (2002) note that most whites cannot have a discussion of racial difference with out some kind of negative connotation, i.e. noticing race equals whites are racist:

> Saying "I am white" may make us feel guilty of being racist or traitorous toward other whites. We don't want to be labeled or stereotyped. Talking about racism has often occurred in the context of angry words, hostility, accusations, and divisiveness. We may also have fears about people of color separating from us if we are clearly identified as white. In any case some of us are quick to disavow our whiteness or to claim some other identity that will give us legitimate victim status. We certainly don't wan to be seen as somehow responsible for or complicit in racism. (Kivel 2002:8-9)

Although Alison learned something about the student, the exchange was troubling because of the way whiteness remained unmarked, and white privilege allowed this student the right to think she was not implicated in racism just because her family did not own slaves.

Finally, Nina looked at class privilege and the status of her family. She focused on economic and financial security, and within her social circle, her family was in the highest income bracket: "I have the 'privilege' (not exactly a good thing) of knowing that people will quickly recognize this by the city I live in, the school I attend, or the Indian attire I am wearing" (journal #6). For Nina, her ethnicity was closely tied to her socio-economic status, and she wrote about the respect in the community for her father's name and occupation as well as the comfort of having a family reputation that carried with it immediate acceptance.

Because she came from a school where white students were not a majority, Nina had to adjust to our school. She discussed the segregation at the school and a culture of niceness that often masked the fact that whites and students of color led very separate lives at school:

> Because [school] is a very strongly knit community that challenges and promotes students to be different, it is rare that I have ever seen/heard of any direct or open racism. Everyone is "friendly," "understanding," and "to be different is good." As

> if to say by ignoring that nearly all white people are a part of one group while all colored are a part of the other group. Is it possible that this just happened by chance that all those that clicked together were colored? Yeah, maybe, but very unlikely. So if we all just keep telling ourselves because there is no open racism, no "I won't accept you because you're of 'x' race," that we can all pretend everything's OK? That's suppression! And denial because if white students only really get along with white students and the other way around, there is definitely a problem. (journal #10)

Nina got to the heart of aversive racism, the modern form of racism discussed previously. There were not overt signs, but rather subtle currents indicating whites were not comfortable with people of color (Dovidio 1997). As the school promoted the acceptance of diversity, it failed to attend to major cultural issues that indicated that the segregation that existed outside of the school walls had become a part of the school dynamics as well. Nina was looking for a space for dialogue, some way to name what was happening, and without that recognition, she clearly described how white privilege functions: quietly and unseen, but full of power. Nina also wrote about the subtle messages of social exclusion: "Something unsaid, but still loud and clear enough for everyone to hear, is telling us that the group we 'fit in' with has to look like us. Maybe nobody said anything, but the message is obviously being sent from somewhere, and nothing can be addressed until we recognize that there is this hidden transmitter somewhere in each of us, tuned to the very same station" (journal #10). Nina was aware of the larger social context that we were living in, and she recognized the institutional nature of the messages. Like Alison, she was beginning to see how social stereotypes and assumptions could influence behavior.

In another account of a senior lounge incident, Nina observed the intense divide between whites and students of color:

> Me and my friends of color were sitting on one side of the room while all the white students (with 2 exceptions) were sitting on the other side. The white side was extremely overcrowded with people overflowing onto the ground. Our side might have had only 5-7 people. One student entered, looked in our direction, and headed to the other side expressing how incredibly overcrowded the lounge was and there was no room. Yes, that side had no room, and our side made her so uncomfortable that she chose to ignore it entirely. I realized that although no one from that side of the room would say or act even minutely different if I went and sat on that side, I could not sit on that side. It was not a matter of comfort; there

> was simply no way I could penetrate that wall between us that we had built together. I was stuck on my side of the room. (journal #10)

The acknowledgment of the co-construction of the barrier between the two groups was insightful. The two groups were intimately connected and, at the same time, a gulf existed between them. This tension was palpable from Nina's point of view, yet how was she to remedy the situation – what skills and support did she need? And most importantly, what would need to happen at the school to break through this invisible and yet highly visible barrier? Nina's story raised more questions than answers, yet it did help to illuminate the structure of white privilege, prejudice, and the cost of denial and ignorance (Kivel 2002).

Giving students of color a chance to talk about whiteness and privilege was painful and, at times, cathartic. It gave a name to something covert and hidden, something that oppressed but was never revealed. Recently, I was working at a summer diversity institute, and there was a discussion between whites and people of color about what it means to be white in our schools. There was such power in the words that were shared by both adults and students, giving voice to an experience that was seldom mentioned. The experience was moving, upsetting, and ultimately healing, and it showed what is possible across racial lines when we begin to make the implicit explicit.

Overall, these students of color seemed aware of and able to recognize privilege, both economic and racial, but they were also beginning to understand in a new way the wide reaching nature and depth of white privilege. There were breakthroughs in awareness, seeing patterns for the first time and feeling the power and frustration of their new understanding, and students of color wrote more frequently about privilege than the white students did. The entries pointed to the importance of knowing that ethnic identity does not exist in a vacuum. Present in most of these narratives was an awareness of whiteness and white privilege that directly informed how these students saw themselves. This highlighted the dialogical relationship between whites and students of color. One group's understanding could not exist without the presence of the other.

Similarly, by their accounts, their ethnic identity was closely related to other aspects of their identity, especially race and class. Nieto (1999) describes the complex nature of a culture like this: "The ever-changing values, traditions, social and political relationships, and world view created, shared and transformed by a group of people bound together by a combination of factors that can include a common history, geographic location, language, social class, and religion" (48). As these students recounted stories related to their ethnicity, they began to construct a larger vision of their culture and to explore their own interests, contradictions, values, and beliefs that all came together to form their identity. Nieto also addresses the dialectical nature of culture:

> Culture is often thought of as a seamless web of interrelated and mutually supportive values and behaviors, yet nothing could be further from the truth. Because they are complex systems that are created by people and influenced by social, economic, and political factors, cultures are also dialectical, conflicted, and full of inherent tensions. A culture is neither "good" nor "bad" in general, but rather embodies values that have grown out of historical and social conditions and necessities. As individuals, we may find elements of our own or others' cultures uplifting or repugnant. That culture is dialectical does not mean that we need to embrace all of its contradictory manifestations in order to be "authentic" members of the culture. (58)

These young women were actively engaged in a process of negotiating their own conflicts as well as the friction between privilege and prejudice.

Responding from a White Perspective

As with my responses to the white students, I usually affirmed and agreed with the students of color. The most significant difference was my ability to respond critically to the students of color. With many of the white students, I wrote fairly strong responses that questioned their perspective and challenged them to think differently. However, I only had two or three responses to students of color that I felt were really creating a dialogue between me and the student. What I mean by "critical response" is the ability to engage with the student's writing beyond just mirroring back to the student what she wrote. Although it was important to affirm their perspectives, I also wanted to be able to co-create an interaction with them that would

further our understanding, to have a dialogic response that continued the exploration of the topic. If I was just reflecting back to them, where was my development happening? To simply agree or say "yes" did not feel like a dialogue to me; it felt like a one-way process.

Freire and Shor (1987) describe the kind of dialogue I was looking for: a space to reflect on our experiences, and in the process of interaction with another, to create new understanding. In discussing pedagogy, Lather (1991) points to a notion of interactivity between teachers, students, and the knowledge they produce together. Thus, the production of meaning and understanding is an interactive process dependent on many sources as opposed to just one idea or person as the transmitter of knowledge. As the teacher, I occupied a powerful space and knew that my responses were laden with my authority in the class as well as my privilege as a white woman. Yet I also wanted to share that power with my students, and I was both successful and unsuccessful in my attempts to engage in dialogue with my students of color.

With Nina, Mariah, and Rasika my seven responses to their entries on privilege tended to be brief and offered no significant critical engagement. In response to Nina's piece on the privilege she gets because of her family status, I wrote: "It is amazing how privilege works in so many visible and invisible ways! Yet your point that your privilege gives you instant respect means you have to live up to some very serious expectations – I'm sure that is not always easy" (response, journal #6). Here I offered a bit of feedback, but it was really just a rather obvious observation. For her story about the senior lounge and the "wall" that existed between the students, I praised her for the story and offered an observation about whites: "Whites think they should be color blind or else they will be seen as racist. So, we get aversive racism instead of overt racism. It is still fear of difference...and we have to unlearn it! But we need help – we need others to help us break through" (response, journal #10). Again, I was speaking from my perspective and offering information I had, but I was not really engaging Nina or her experience. My responses to Mariah and Rasika were all brief and direct affirmations of their entries: "Yes –

I think we need to look more closely at whiteness as well as privilege" (response to Mariah, journal #6), and "Yes – what we get just because of our economic status" (response to Rasika, journal #6).

With Keisha, I did offer a critical response to one of her four entries that addressed privilege. After affirming her insights, I wrote a more pointed response to her comment about how she had benefited from privilege: "You make a critical distinction, but as your previous entry states, this 'privilege' comes with a pretty high price tag! It costs a lot and we all pay (in a different way)" (response, journal #8). Yet upon reflection, this seemed like a very inadequate response. She was trying to find a way to play the game and be who she was, and she probably needed more support and guidance.

Similarly with Alison, I did offer one response to her conversation with the white student about diversity and ethnicity that seemed to be about dialogue as opposed to just affirmation or agreement: "Yet, did she ever understand that diversity is not just highlighting difference to make people feel bad? I hope so – it sounds like you stayed in it with her – well done! She needs to understand that diversity is about acceptance. It is still so strange to me that people are still afraid of the d-word (although I shouldn't be surprised!)" (response, journal #6). Similar to Nina, I offered a more engaged response because whiteness was at the forefront of the interaction. It was as if I could speak with a certain authority if I was talking about white people and their reactions or perspectives. Although I also find this response lacking, it was stronger because I was not just reflecting back to Alison what she had written.

When Sue ended her piece on "The White People" with the comment that she was a victim after sharing her ethnicity story with the class, I wrote: "Yes, you are a victim, but you need the white people to heal. We all need to work together because we can't do it alone. I am white because you are Asian, so we have to solve it together. Really, we don't exist without each other. So your stories help us to understand" (response, journal #2). Although I am not entirely

comfortable with my response, it did seem to interact with Sue's narrative. Again, the topic of whiteness might have improved my ability to respond. Similarly, at the conclusion of her entry on white privilege, she wrote that she thought whites were "compelled to be more sensitive to people of color" (journal #6) now than when McIntosh wrote her piece. I had a strong reaction:

> Yet I question what it means to be "sensitive." Yes, whites can be more aware or more PC [politically correct], but that does not make them less racist! Yes, she wrote this 10 years ago, but I find almost everything on the list to be very present and active today. So, what to do? How do we help people recognize their privilege? And, more importantly, how do we begin to share and distribute that privilege? (response, journal #6)

Here I responded in a way that recognized Sue's experience while, at the same time, offered another perspective. Together we were creating a more detailed portrait of white privilege from two different points of view.

Alicia's entry on privilege spoke to me directly at the end, and that may be why I was able to respond to her on a more in-depth level:

> And we have to continue to think of ways to help those who are so privileged and so unaware to see what their lives mean. We have to try to make this stuff VISIBLE, to mark it and name it in a explicit ways so people have to talk about it! Yet, I am always uncertain of the best way to do this – and I often feel like I am not doing enough! I wish I could teach Ethnic Voices to everyone!! (response, journal #6)

My vulnerability at the end was not present in any of my responses to the students of color except this one. I inserted myself in a way that I did not do with other students of color. It might have been Alicia's direct comment to me that created a space for me to respond more authentically.

With several of the white students, I was able to speak from the "I" perspective more frequently, and the issue of identification was probably at the core of my responses to all of the students. Was it more difficult to tell my story, to insert my own narrative, with students of color? Each time I responded dialogically, I was speaking from my own position as a white person. Overall, there was less "pushing back" than with the white students, but that probably

makes sense given the topic. I am not trying to be overly critical of my responses; of course, teachers cannot always respond perfectly. My goal here is to notice the differences and to think about ways I could improve my engagement with these students.

The Complex Nature of Race and Ethnicity

When I asked the students to reflect on their ethnic identity about midway through the term, I was unprepared for the depth and insight these young women were able to convey in their writing. What emerged for the students of color was actually more questions, not answers, although most said they had realized more about their ethnicity since the semester started. Derman-Sparks and Phillips (1997) describe this process: "Students' uncovering of contradictions– between their stated principles and practice, between inherited ideas and new information, between self-image and feedback from others – sparked the search for new ways to think and act" (5). Their responses pushed our working definition of ethnicity, challenging both me and the class to think more deeply about culture and context.

Sue first defined herself as "Korean-*American*," (immigrant essay) with an emphasis on the American side of her heritage, yet she still possessed both cultures:

> In reality, I do not feel only American. I could never reject my Korean heritage, but I will never be fully American. Being American represents some debris that I do not care to be identified with, such as the drunken woman who last year yelled at me to go back to my own country as I roller bladed past her on the street. Rubbish and all, I am glad I am here and not in Korea...America best suits my disposition, which would be at odds with the traditions in Korea. (immigrant essay)

She not only had to contend with two radically different cultures, but also had to face racist slurs in the midst of an already complex development. In a later journal entry, Sue made an interesting distinction in her awareness: "I have realized that being Asian-American is a large part of what I perceive to be my identity. What I am still not sure about what it means to be Asian-American" (journal #11). A concept emerged for her that still needed to be explored. Although she might be

able to identify Korean aspects of her life or American cultural influences, the idea of being hyphenated, Asian-American, was still uncertain. As discussed earlier, she was in a borderland and was in the process of constructing a third element, her hyphenated existence, that would be a synthesis of both her Korean and American identities.

Although she struggled with some of her family traditions and relationships, her ethnicity was not only about how she saw herself; a big part of her identity was the way others saw her:

> What is harder for me to figure out is how I am perceived for being Asian-American and how I want to be perceived. I don't want to be clumped with all the Asian-American writers and their laundry-imperious mother rebelling and marrying white men stories. My story is different, and I'm not sure if people know that... I think it's much mote complicated than just bridging both worlds or floating in the uncomfortable space in-between." (journal #11)

The conflict between her individual and group identity and the role of context emerged in this entry. Her identity was not solely dependent on her own experiences and perceptions. Perspectives of her family, friends, teachers, and the media also played a role in her development (Banks 2002). Therefore, she not only had to attend to her own thoughts and feelings, but she also had to navigate a complex social terrain that might send her varying messages depending on the situation. She concluded by returning to the general concept of ethnicity and offering her own interpretation: "I am something other than my ethnicity, too, and ethnicity is not just trying to find a place for myself between two cultures. It's more individualized than that" (journal #11). Again, she wanted to acknowledge her individual identity and to resist any kind of category that might fail to see her as a unique young woman with both similar and opposing experiences.

In her final entry, Sue returned to an assessment of her ethnic identity:

> I like it here and I am comfortable, but not quite comfortable, as if I am still new and not quite American because I am Korean-American. I guess it's still confusing...I do not know what to say, but I want to say something, because it is of importance since it is my last hurrah to Ethnic Voices and Mrs. Ackerman and her research. I guess even after all I've learned this semester, I still have a long ways to go before defining myself, and even then, that definition will always change since I will always be experiencing new things and changing myself. Being Korean-American isn't all that I am after all....Ethnicity isn't the only thing that defines a person, even though it's the first thing that a lot of people see. (journal #16)

Sue was very aware of her audience, and her struggle to try to "say something" pointed to her engagement in the class. She articulated the process she was undergoing, acknowledging the role of context and the changing nature of identity, as well as the fact that her identity was complicated. There were things about her that her ethnicity did not encompass; it was simply one lens. In my response I praised Sue and told her how she had impacted my learning: "You are so wise! I have loved hearing/reading your stories and experiences. I have learned so much from you. You have so much to offer the world, and your passion for social justice is exemplary. Keep striving and growing, questioning what you see and hear. It has been great working with you." In my mind, it was important to create a mutual learning environment, to practice dialogic pedagogy that was simultaneously teaching and learning: "Both teachers and students need to open themselves to the possibility of otherness so that the particularity of individual being can become visible in relation to larger relations of power and privilege" (McLaren 1994:214). I wanted Sue to know that I, too, was engaged in a process, that none of us had figured it all out and knew exactly who we were. We all had more to learn.

In contrast to Sue, Alicia was very intent on preserving her Japanese identity and did not necessarily see herself as American: "Another misleading term is 'Asian-American' or ... 'something American.' I dislike them very much. Though one may feel 'American,' generalizing American as meaning white, one may not always look white, and therefore, is not truly 'American' from the perspective of... a majority of white people. It seems to me as if that person is an outcast to both cultures, not accepted as a 'whole' person in either place" (immigrant essay). The perception of others, especially the dominant group, established for Alicia who could be American, and race was the defining factor. Since she could not be white and, hence, American, she focused on her Japanese heritage:

> It is more beneficial for me to present myself as "Japanese" from Japan; that way I will not be compared to another "white" American. Unfortunately, I have lived here for a greater part of my life, and I am much more familiar with the American

> culture than I am with the Japanese culture. Still, I do not like to call myself "Japanese-American"... My values and beliefs are very Japanese though I may not be familiar with our customs. I feel as if I will lose a part of my identity by calling myself "Japanese-American" because the added "American" is not enough to fill what is lost through assimilation. (immigrant essay)

Although her American identity was strong, and she was very much an American teenager, she received a different message that had to be reconciled with her own experiences. Yet she also raised the danger of assimilation and the fear of losing a piece of her that could not be filled or recovered with an American hyphenated identity.

Over the course of the semester, Alicia felt she gained a stronger understanding of her Japanese identity, and unlike Sue, she did not feel her individual identity was constrained by her group membership: "[Being Japanese] explains so much about me in just one sound-byte. On the other hand, it's arguable that that is the problem, judging by just race alone. Yes, every individual is different, but I think that so much of who I am fits the category 'Japanese' that it wouldn't be to imposing or restrictive to call myself that" (journal #11). Here again was confluence of the term race with ethnicity, probably another reason why she equated being American with being white. Regarding American identity, she noted that she "saw no meaning in the term 'American' because America itself is still trying to define its own identity and culture (and perhaps it never will because it has such a diverse and unusual beginning). The only thing that could identify America, or the US specifically, would be things such as 'majority race'" (journal #11). Again, white privilege served as a defining factor, and Alicia made a critical point about the uncertainty and complexity of the term "American" and its usefulness as an identifier. She concluded with a vision of where she would like to see herself: "I would like to stand on neutral ground, have a flexible identity, because maybe it's not all that important or essential to understand one's identity. After all, our identities are influenced by our surroundings, which are constantly changing. Therefore, wouldn't our identities be at least somewhat transient?" (journal #11). Alicia was revealing the critical role of context along with the theory that we were all socially

constructed, and it was her desire to exist in a place where the negotiation of her identity would not be so difficult.

I gave a very brief and inadequate response to her: "Yes – flexibility is key because identity is very fluid! A very thoughtful entry!" I could not recover what was in my head as I responded, but my words felt meager compared to the weight of Alicia's insight. What would have been an appropriate response? What did Alicia need to hear from me in order to both affirm her understanding and encourage her to continue her exploration and thinking? In their work with students and the search for new understandings of race and racism, Derman-Sparks and Phillips (1997) note that "a delicate interaction between challenge and support stimulates the search and thus facilitates students' learning" (5). From my perspective as a white teacher, this is what I want to know. How can someone like me, who does not have to continually negotiate her identity, offer support and guidance to those who do?

Confronting Prejudice, Defining Self

I began to regard Mariah as "the philosopher" because while reading and re-reading her writing, I began to see her ability to see the bigger picture. Often I asked her to include more details, to be more specific, and I realize now that I missed an important part of the way she was making sense of the class. Sometimes I was so busy looking for what I thought should be included or what needed to be there that I missed what was right before me. Of course, this is not to say that adolescents do not need writing help; it just means that if I am operating from a deficit model and not looking first for what is present, all the suggestions in the world may not help a student to improve because I am not meeting them where they are. I am imposing where I am on them (Nieto 1999).

Music was one of the key elements of Mariah's ethnicity: "I like to listen to a type of music called hip hop and also a type called R & B or rhythm and blues. This is what I consider

part of me, part of my ethnicity. I think if this aspect of me was taken away, I would be a different person" (journal #2). She went on to describe the complexity of ethnicity:

> We as "Americans" try to group things into nice tidy boxes and close the lids. But that cannot be done with the richness of ethnicity. Because it overflows the box and the "safe lid" cannot be put on. When you describe yourself, do you say I am tall and leave it at that? No, you want to explain exactly what you look like, what you think like and how you feel... Even those of us who are considered quiet and standoffish will, if given the chance, describe themselves in detail. You don't want to miss one drop of your essence. It needs to be savored and relished to the last detail. Becauseyou are who you are and you have many dimensions. (journal #2)

She made a compelling reference to herself here. Mariah was a quiet student, yet as her entries show, she was filled with ideas and opinions as well as great poetic talent. She concluded with an interesting comparison of the categories of race and ethnicity:

> Race is part of ethnicity and also can be separated. Race can too commonly be grouped into what society calls people who are not the majority, like a little kid who has to have a name for everything, making everything have its place. But everything will never have its own place. We have been mixing for generations, which some will admit and others will not. Race is an identifier and should not be a barrier builder. (journal #2)

Mariah described a key difference between identification and judgment. A category could be a means of distinction, but as soon as it was used to divide or discriminate, a boundary had been crossed. On only the second day of class, Mariah had a grasp of the larger issues we were to grapple with all semester.

She went on to define ethnicity as "my experiences from the moment of birth on up to now and until I die...experiences from the world including family and friends will make up your ethnicity. You will make your decisions on what you are taught and what you are not taught when you are treated like you have snakes in your hair" (journal #11). This reference back to her first journal entry was like a red thread; she began with a specific incident and then built out an entire description of the scope of ethnicity. And she pulled together the entire practice of social acculturation: we made decisions and acted based on our experiences and treatment in the world. She concluded with the metaphor of an "overflowing container of ethnicity" (journal #11), filled

with positive and negative experiences that together, made us who we were. I cringed when I read my response to this entry: "Great points here! You could even move this to a more personal, emotional level by exploring the experiences that make up your own ethnicity." Although I gave her a suggestion, it was inappropriate. Not only was her entry both personal and emotional, but she also made a reference back to her earlier story, a poignant specific example. So, why did I respond this way? Why could I not see what was before me on the page? Again, I cannot return to that moment in time, but I am troubled by my lack of engagement and inability to see Mariah and her insight. I could only imagine how she felt after reading my response. The message I sent was, "Thanks for trying, but you did not quite make it," a message cloaked in niceness that was really about inadequacy, the same kind of message in content (not tone) that she received from the taunters back on her first day of school. It was a response steeped in white privilege (McIntosh 1988). My intention was to help, to offer advice and instruction. The outcome was quite different.

Keisha was surprised at our class discussions about ethnicity: "Today we just jumped right in. It was kind of funny because it just hit me that doing things like defining ethnicity is what we're going to be doing everyday. I always have this picture in my mind of when it's appropriate and when it's not, so now I am a little shocked" (journal #2). The class created a new space, opportunities to explore parts of her identity that may have not been "appropriate" in other settings. She then shared something that happened to her that had a profound affect on her racial and ethnic identity:

> When Rasika said that someone had innocently asked whether she scrubbed or washed herself well enough, I knew exactly what she was talking about. Except this person did it on purpose to be mean to me. It escalated into a parent-student conference and all which makes it different from Rasika's experience. You're so impressionable at a young age, and when someone says that you will never be clean, well...you remember that. (journal #2)

This story reminded my of Sue's experience while rollerblading and being told to go back to her country or Mariah and the comments made about her beautiful braids on the first day of school. I

did not think the fact that Keisha's parents were involved changed the nature of the pain or humiliation for either girl; the comment was meant to hurt. I responded by writing, "The pain is kind of inscribed on our bodies, always there and a part of us." It was overt racism, so even in a school where the perception is that everyone is nice and caring, racist behavior exists (Banks 2002; Nieto 1999; Derman-Sparks and Phillips 1997). As Nina said, if we ignored it or pretended it was not happening, this was the price we paid. These stories needed to be told so these children did not internalize the racism as some kind of personal failing (Adams, Bell, and Griffin 1997).

Keisha then talked about another part of her ethnicity, her hair. Any changes in style brought a barrage of questions from white students:

> My hair is a bit of a show at this school. First the braids, now this. People get really confused. It's funny because from my stand point, they ask ridiculous questions. It's a constant joke between black folk. We compare queries. Is that your real hair? How did it grow so fast? Where does your hair end? and it goes on... It's also funny when white people want to do their hair this way. I have read many articles about it not being professional for the work place, and how it is a blatant showing of race. Funny, huh? Like any hair is more prominent than my skin color. Are some people jealous? I am proud that I can do so many things with my hair. Others can't or don't know how to. (journal #5)

Segregation and cultural isolation created a situation where girls who spent all day together really did not know each other. And Keisha was highly aware that her hair was a political statement as far as white culture was concerned. Even though she expressed pride in her appearance, she concluded with another troubling point: "Everyone wanted to touch my newly straightened hair, but how do you tell a line of white girls that you NEVER touch a black person's hair even if it looks busted. I don't know and I haven't figured it out" (journal #5). She was involved in a constant struggle to maintain her dignity in the face of ignorance and rudeness. I wrote:

> Hair! You raise really good points. Yes, I think the whole "braids are not professional" is BLATANT racism! Do we ever hear about white people and their hair? Does anyone ever say whites can't wear their hair a certain way – no! Yes, people are jealous. People in the majority get jealous when a "minority" starts getting some attention. I think it is a power thing. Whites are so used to being at the center of everything! We are not good at letting others in or dealing with difference. (response, journal #5)

The forcefulness of my response seemed directly related to my ability to speak from a white perspective. I could address Keisha's concerns by trying to provide some insight into why she was being treated so poorly. Yet I was also venting my frustration with white privilege and the level of hypocrisy and racism that Keisha had to confront. This was a result of my ongoing development of an anti-racist white identity, the process I had to engage in to come to terms with what it meant to be white for me and how I could confront my privilege (Helms 1992).

Keisha also explored her black identity and its role in determining what kind of future learning environment would be best for her:

> My close friend said, "You're acting more black now!" I acted surprised, but I knew what she meant. When I began at [school], I allowed myself to be absorbed by the community, and then I extracted a comfortable niche in which to create myself. I wasn't a new person, I was me in a new environment. Now, in my senior year, when I'm planning to move to a new environment, I look at where I will fit in with a different eye. I look at how being an African American will affect my experience. In order for me to understand what effect my ethnicity will have, I need to understand what being black means to me. I am closer to my black friends now and I realize the critical role they play in my life. (journal #12)

The issue of assimilation created an interesting dilemma: how did Keisha be who she was and fit into a new setting? At school, she had to do the accommodating, and she realized that her transition to college might require a similar concession. Given her rising awareness of the importance of having friends who shared her experiences in the world, she had new considerations. She focused on her self-awareness, being clear on who she was in order to best assess an appropriate college environment. Nieto (1999) raises a critical question in *The Light in Their Eyes*: who does the accommodating? She challenges the prevailing notion that students who are from marginalized groups should have to conform to dominant school norms to achieve: "I propose an alternative perspective: that in order to advance student learning, teachers and schools also need to change in substantive and significant ways" (72). She suggests "institutional transformation" (72) because school practices tend to favor some groups of students over others. As Nieto states, "Accommodation needs to be shared by everyone" (102).

My response to this entry mirrored my disappointing response to Mariah detailed earlier. After reading about her struggle to be black and authentic in different environments, I wrote to Keisha: "Sounds good! You present a good overall picture here, but I would love to have a more in-depth look at some of the issues you raise here" (response, journal #12). I am intrigued by my calls for more "in-depth" responses. It sounded like teacher-speak, and I wonder if either Mariah or Keisha (or any of the other countless students who have read a similar comment in the margin of a paper) knew what I wanted. Upon reflection, it struck me as vague and somewhat condescending. Why not pose a specific question to guide her? Why not point to a specific part of her entry to provide a concrete example? I needed to engage, to respond and interact with Keisha's text. Instead I offered a nebulous direction and, at the same time, dismissed a thoughtful, revealing, and sensitive reflection as a "good overall picture." Again, it is not that students did not need critique; it was the nature of the critique, the way it was offered, that made the difference.

In one of her final entries, Keisha shared a very personal look into the way she interacted with the world, highlighting her ability to see the inner workings of people and places. Yet her ethnicity set her apart in ways that were not always comfortable. In fact, the weight of her difference was, at times, overwhelming:

> The weight of my world view is not always a welcome one especially when it's in my face. Each day I arrive at my small bubble [school] and try to glean as much information from class discussion as from the lunch table. I take all this Information and see where it fits with the values and lifestyle of home, and there you have my worldview. I try to reconcile any conflict by expanding my world view... Sometimes, though, when I'm feeling really sensitive and maybe have had too much time to reflect, I hit walls and closed doors and I see darkness in others. These things don't just suddenly spring up, they're there all the time, but some days I am keenly aware of how small school is. Of how small minded people can be. Of the fact that I'm not getting an accurate world view from this place. Of how different I am. I lead two different lives! (journal #15)

Keisha raised a critical concern for students of color in predominantly white schools: what is the price they had to pay for such an access to privilege? Was it worth having a double-

consciousness, code switching from home to school, and possibly sacrificing parts of their identities in order to attend a great college? Her psychic stress was acute, and yet she was thriving, making it all work on the brink of exhaustion. Her opening comment for this journal entry began with "I'm tired," no doubt caused by having to be constantly vigilant and under surveillance because she stood out both literally, her color, and figuratively, her insight.

Turning to my failed response, I missed the essence of what she was conveying and replied with a pat response that perhaps made her more anxious by putting more pressure on her. I think I missed the reference to her color, her face, and so I did not address the weight of racism she was feeling. After she concluded by saying that she would work it out by stretching her own perspective because "it is my world view which is definitely dissimilar to everyone else's" (journal #15), I did not point out that she was trying to take responsibility for the racist environment she was learning in: "You are a great observer, but that comes at a price – the price of awareness and knowledge. Yet it serves you well because you have insight and maturity that others don't have. It is also why you are such a capable leader" (response, journal #15). School was constricting, and she was not getting what she needed: other faces who looked like her, multiple perspectives, varied approaches (Gay 2000). This lack of diversity seemed to affect her self-perception. I chose to keep the spotlight on her as opposed to pointing out that this was an institutional, not individual issue. I did not disrupt white privilege, but helped to keep in firmly in place despite my good intentions (Derman-Sparks and Philips 1997).

Nina's growing awareness of her ethnicity, along with a recognition of prejudice, caused her to reflect on her own Indian community. She had assumed that her community was so tight-knit because of shared interests and culture, but she began to realize that there was a "close mindedness" that also held the group together (journal #2). There was an ease she felt moving among people from her community that often made her reluctant to start new friendships with someone who did not share her background. Regarding some of her close friends who were not

Indian, she wrote: "There are many things I want to share with them but cannot. Although we have connected at all levels on the inside, the fact remains that we are not the same. The only apparent difference would probably be our skin colors. It is such an insignificant thing that makes our worlds so different" (journal #2). The irony was striking, and Nina was facing the fact that although it shouldn't matter, race was significant. Color made a difference in this country, and she could feel it even if cognitively she knew that color was only superficial. Yet her ethnicity had shaped the way she lived and what she knew to be true, and that knowledge could not be shared by a white person or even maybe by other people of color: "They cannot experience the culture that defines me. It makes me feel as if they can also never fully understand me because of this" (journal #2).

I wrote marginal comments throughout Nina's response. When she wrote that others could only be "observers" of her culture, and thus, she would never really be known by those outside her ethnic group, I challenged her: "But what can we really expect? All we can hope for is for people to know themselves. Then they can know others" (response, journal #2). When she said that she could tell them about her culture, but it would only be her story, not theirs, I responded: "But the sharing of your story does bring them in. In fact, it may only be your stories that they can see and hear... Share yourself not in the hopes that others will 'get it,' but rather to clarify the issue for you. Your non-Indian friends will have to come to your culture on their own, not because of you, but because of their desire to know others as they know themselves" (response, journal #2).

As the class went on, she broadened her definition of ethnicity which seemed almost too encompassing to be useful: "Now I can define my ethnicity as me. Anything that makes me who I am is included into this definition" (journal #12). Yet she was recognizing the fluidity of ethnicity, and she was clear that for her, family was at the center of her ethnic identity. All of the inquiry had not resolved issues for her, but rather had made her more uncertain how to define

herself: "I guess I thought I knew who I was (or at least had a pretty good idea), and if someone asked me to define myself, I could say x, y, or z. Now, I wouldn't know where to start" (journal #12). Her notions of what it meant to be ethnic had expanded allowing her to see her experiences in broader terms.

Alison also struggled with a definition of her ethnicity: "How does one define themselves as something-American? Does it mean that you are a mix of both cultures? For me, I am still not sue what it means or if I can/should include the hyphen. I guess I consider myself Chinese-American just because I was brought up with two sets of traditions and cultures" (journal #12). In her next entry, she reiterated her confusion, and she raised the issue of pride in one's ethnicity:

> Do I take pride in being Chinese? Maybe I feel I don't have any pride or not much pride because I am such good friends with Indians who have such a rich culture to share. I've also seen all of the people who claim to have lots of Asian pride by walking around in big groups which are very intimidating. I don't feel that I'm on the extreme where I have to shout out, "Look at me, I'm Chinese and proud of it!" I guess I take pride in my culture in a way that I celebrate all of the holidays and follow superstitions an cultures, but I still sometimes feel ashamed of who I am. Not many people around here are Chinese from the Philippines so I guess I just don't have that safe community to be free in. (journal #13)

This entry echoed Keisha's feelings of being culturally isolated at school. Without a community of her peers, Alison was unsure of herself and even ashamed of her background. She did have pride in her culture based on her desire to celebrate holidays and experience her culture, but she needed her own way of expressing her identity that was different from how other Asians might show their pride. Yet with no other Chinese from the Philippines at school, she was in a difficult position. She concluded by returning to the question of the hyphen: "I just wish there were some way that I could express that I am not just Chinese-American, but Chinese from the Philippines-American" (journal #13) Here her journal, and perhaps class discussions, gave her the space to consider her options and to proclaim her identity on her own terms. In her final entry, Alison was preparing to return to the Philippines to celebrate her eighteenth birthday with a big party, an important family tradition: "I'm really excited because now, I can truly experience the little bit of

Filipino heritage I have" (journal #17). It seemed as if Alison was finding her culture in a way that would be meaningful for her, and I was thrilled that she was going to be able to have this experience because I knew how much it meant to her. It was a fabulous conclusion to her semester in Ethnic Voices, an affirmation of who she was.

Cultural Expectations and Ethnic Identity

Rasika experienced a notable transformation over the course of the semester. When she first began to write about her Indian culture, she was very clear and seemed as if she was secure in who she was. As the semester progressed, I saw how Rasika began to struggle with the complexity of being Indo-American. As I mentioned earlier, Rasika was not comfortable with the journal assignments. Although she seemed very confident, she was quite insecure and asked me repeatedly what she was to write. She was directed and focused on one hand, but quite disorganized and unsure on the other. She lost her journal half way through the class, and she often forgot to do her journal assignments. She was the kind of student who revealed herself over time, and it took me awhile to figure out what was happening for her.

In her immigrant essay, she was very clear about her identity: "I realize I have the best of both the Indian world and the American world, as my parents intended... I have the freedom here to do whatever I want and become whatever I want without my relatives constantly interfering... I am free to gain knowledge in any subject that I choose without oppressing familial pressures" (immigrant essay). Yet she also recognized the issue of race and the role color played:

> At the same time, I must pay the dire price that all émigrés must pay. I am neither accepted as an Indian in India nor as an American here... My American identity met with early success... In my later grades, however, when I identified myself as American, people would object. In an essay I was writing for my fourth grade class, I referred to myself as American only to have the girl sitting next to me inform me that I was not American. I had brown skin, and only people who had white skin were American. (immigrant essay)

Although Rasika self-identified as American, her schoolmates told her something different, echoing Sue's experience with white children. And soon all of the contrariety changed her self-perception, especially when her teacher questioned her identity:

> I wrote another essay on patriotism in America, identifying myself as American again. This time, my opposition was from my teacher, who suggested that I write with my Indian roots, not my American present and future. Later that year, when a group of white students told me that I was not and would never be an American, I stopped identifying myself as such. I would say what people already knew, that I was Indian because my skin was brown. From then on, I associated whiteness with Americaness and realized that I could never be American as long as I wasn't white. I was Indian and proud of it. I would never be American again. (immigrant essay)

This transformation was startling because of the racism and the power of the majority to oppress Rasika. Yet she was still defiant, embracing her Indian heritage with a newfound intensity. And her ethnicity was constructed alongside whiteness; she had to be Indian because she was not white. Writing about the worthlessness of understanding whiteness without Blackness, Morrison (1992) states: "If we follow through on the self-reflexive nature of these encounters with Africanism, it falls clear: images of blackness can be evil *and* protective, rebellious *and* forgiving, fearful *and* desirable – all the self-contradictory features of the self. Whiteness, alone, is mute, meaningless, unfathomable, pointless, frozen, veiled, curtained, dreaded, senseless, implacable" (59). How her race was perceived served as the deciding factor in her ethnicity, constructing her as an Indian and, at the same time, deconstructing her as American. She then concluded with this summary: "I was both Indian and American and was neither Indian nor American at the same time. I had a part of both worlds and was missing a part of both worlds. I was one of the few, the proud, Indian-Americans that belong neither in India nor in the United States and belong in both India and the United States" (immigrant essay). Her hyphenated identity embodied the dialogic tension she faced. She was neither one thing nor another, but rather a third identity was emerging, a synthesis of two extremes.

In a later journal entry she reiterated the point that she got "the best of both worlds" (journal #11), but then she also talked about the cultural inadequacy she felt:

> My family is not involved in the Indian crowd. We are just on the outskirts of both the Tamil crowd and the Bengali crowd. Most of my mother's friends are Chinese, and most of my father's friends are white. Sometimes this isolation bothers me because I am the only full Indian that I know who does not have friends my age that are from my community... When I am in Indian gatherings, I feel rather uncomfortable, partly because of the crowd. (journal #11)

Her main connection to her Indian culture was through dance and religion, and it was important to stay in touch with her heritage through holiday celebrations. As she talked about the fact that the "American part of my identity like the Indian part is omnipresent," she began to contradict her earlier statement by saying she was more Indian than her cousins in India because she kept more of her family traditions (journal #11). This seemed to disavow her feelings about being culturally isolated. She then immediately jumped to her American identity:

> I am allowed so much more freedom because I am in the United States. I have the freedom to choose my destiny to an extent. Though I am allowed to major in whatever I want (provided that it is not in humanities because my parents won't pay for my college education if I do) and I can choose what I want to wear, my husband must be approved by my parents. And throughout my life, I will continue to have the pressure to be that good Indian girl who studies well, obeys her parents, never does "bad" things (like dating or having pre-marital sex) or says anything controversial. (journal #11)

This contrasted with her earlier characterization of her relationship with her parents detailed in her immigrant essay. Here her "freedoms" had major caveats, but she did not seem aware of the contradictions. Perhaps it was a result of her hyphenated existence; being of both worlds raised its own disparities.

Although she might have wanted to believe both her Indian and American identities were omnipresent, the full weight of her Indian culture rested on her shoulders when she heard from a prestigious American college. She titled this entry, "Some of what my ethnicity entails":

> I was deferred from MIT. There. It is said – simple. I was *deferred* from MIT, and chances are very slim that I will actually be accepted come April. I knew this going into break. Surprisingly, I was okay with it, and I generally don't deal with rejection very well. Until I had to go home and face my parents and relatives...

> The entire family unit and all its members are affected by what happens to one. And that is what happened. I was not deferred from MIT; the Sreeramans, Rengarajans, L. Narasimhans, Srinivasans, Rajendrans, and the Ragavacharis were deferred my MIT... It was as if I tainted the "family honor." (journal #16)

Here opening lines were intense, suggesting the need for a safe space to try and process what was happening. By "saying it," writing it on the page, it seemed to make the rejection more real. To me, the simile was not correct; it was not "as if," but rather that she *had* tainted the family. Her individual and group identity collided, and all of her belief in her American "freedoms" was no match for her Indian pressures of family:

> Instead of just dealing with what being deferred entailed for myself alone (not much, since I don't even know if I want to go to MIT), I was forced to think of what it entailed for my role in the family. I was no longer up to the mark, not good enough. All my elder cousins had been accepted wherever they applied; they had been excellent role models. They had been successful. My little cousins would be forced to work harder than ever, but that is what we have all been taught since the day we were born – to study well. That was my mission in life, what I needed to contribute to my family. Throughout my high school career, I have failed. Failed myself and failed my family. (journal #16)

I found this heartbreaking; I could feel the rawness of the experience through her description and her vulnerability. Her culture had come crashing in on her head, and I made a meager attempt at a response: "Yet you will be and ARE a success! I understand the pain when the expectations are so high, but where does this leave you? You are good enough – the question is what do YOU want to be good enough for? Yes, you have to accept the family implications, but can you, at the same time, create a space for you, where you can know what you want?" I tried to reassert her individual identity, her Americaness, but would that even make a difference? This was a kind of cultural expectation I had never faced, and I would never know how she felt. As I reflect, I am not sure what I could have said. Perhaps she had said it all, and I just needed to bear witness to her struggle.

Conclusion

Students of color were often confronted with two very different sets of values that the white students did not seem to encounter. Having to negotiate a hyphenated identity was complex and often painful given the discrimination many of the girls had to endure. With their identity constantly being questioned, these students of color were involved in an ongoing process that started before the class began and certainly would continue for the rest of their lives. White students could have a more selective engagement with their racial and ethnic identity. They did not have to make daily choices or to move between radically different contexts that influenced the way they interpreted their ethnic identity. Also, there were great variations in the way students of color viewed and identified themselves, and there was tremendous power in their ability to define themselves on their own terms and to wrestle with constricting labels and feelings of insecurity. Ultimately, there was a continuing negotiation of the term "ethnicity": what it meant, what it encompassed, and what factor it played in determining identity.

Taken as a whole, the stories from students of color explored race and ethnicity on many different levels. This was not the case for the white students. Their exploration was at a nascent stage whereas the students of color had begun a process of ethnic and racial identity awareness at an early age. Given their differing engagement with their ethnic backgrounds, it is no surprise that their responses were so different. It was as if the students of color were in the middle of the marathon while the white students were just leaving the starting line.

These entries unfolded for me each time I read them, like the proverbial onion becoming more pungent as the layers were peeled away. The more time I spent with these young women, lugging their entries from the library to the cafe and back to my office, I learned something new or saw something I had not seen before. Therefore, one of the greatest lessons of this project was the value of reflective practice (Schon 1983). I needed to spend more time with these voices. As I did, I could see these students differently and could understand them and myself better. Perhaps

a role for teachers is to create spaces where students can write *their* way, not like everyone else or the way teachers think it should be. My frustration with my inadequate responses could have been alleviated by realizing the critical role journal writing played in the education of the *teacher*: "All critical educators are also learners" (Giroux 1998:73). As I searched for what would make me more effective, I realized that the answer was sitting before me every day of class, in every paper I read, in every journal I responded to.

Boundary Crossers: Multi-Ethnic Constructions of Identity

There are many studies that stress the need for recognizing the unique situation of multiracial adolescents (Poston 1990; Wijeyesinghe 2001) and the importance of teacher support in the refinement of multiracial identity development (Reid 1995). Maria Root (1996), a professor of American Ethnic Studies who has written extensively about multiracial identity, identifies several ways people experience, negotiate, and reconstruct borders between races and ethnicities. Some bridge a border by having both feet in both groups; others highlight the shifting of foreground and background as they cross between and among social contexts defined by race and ethnicity. Root calls this latter border crossing "situational ethnicity" (xxi), showing how aspects of identity can change according to context. Root's definitions are particularly helpful for the way they shed light on the experiences represented by two students, Tara and Marissa, who in their different ways were both boundary crossers (Anzaldúa1987).

On the second day of class I made the following observation of Tara, the only Jewish student in the class: "She is a 'border figure,' allied with kids of color, a foot in both worlds" (research journal, 9/2/99). Tara, along with most of the students of color, shared her first journal entry with the class, and her comments gave me the impression that she occupied a slightly different space. She looked white and could recognize white privilege, but during our fishbowl exercise (described previously), she said she was not white because she was not a WASP – white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant. She did not fit the category for the "ASP" part (research journal, 9/30/99). Tatum (1997) notes the same phenomenon with many of her Jewish students; they do not think of themselves as white "because for them the term means White Christian" (103). Similarly, Marissa, who looked white but whose mother was from the Middle East, had a unique perspective because of her biracial background. Tara and Marissa challenged our notions of whiteness and expanded the definition of "white" by moving beyond skin color and including

other identifiers, such as religion and ethnicity. They also necessarily complicated our larger notions of race:

> The qualitatively varied experiences of multiethnic/multiracial people simultaneously contest and reify the very structure of U.S. race relations, confirming that "race" is a sociopolitical construct, not a biologically based, scientific reality. Hence the layers of social meanings that accompany racial matters – whether during interpersonal interactions or within and across institutional arrangements – seem only to become more entangled as multiethnic/multiracial people enter the racial equation in the United States. (Williams-Leon and Nakashima 2001)

The issue of how to name oneself, either racially or ethnically, has a long, troubled history in the United States, most notably because of the "one drop" rule. In *Racially Mixed People in America*, Root (1992) writes:

> Historically in the United States, due to the legacy of slavery, any person with a known Black ancestor was considered black, which resulted in stigmatization and discrimination...As the numbers of biracial people have grown and their consciousness has developed, they have begun to challenge the practice of labeling themselves as Black rather than as mixed, biracial, or some other nonracial designation. (224)

Some have pointed to assimilation and the desire to join the American melting pot as a reason why American culture has often suppressed its multicultural roots. Anti-miscegenist laws and sentiments also contributed to the silence on the topic of interracial relationships and multiracial children. During the last decade, historical and demographic changes, along with new understandings of the social construction of race and ethnicity, have broken down some of the barriers, and multiracial people are finally finding a way to give voice to their true identity:

> Whereas one of the breakthroughs of the civil rights movement was empowerment of American racial minority groups by self-naming, this process is just beginning among multiracial persons. In essence, to name oneself is to validate one's existence and declare visibility. This seemingly simple process is a significant step in the liberation of multiracial persons from the oppressive structure of the racial classification system that has relegated them to the land of "in between." (Root 1992:7)

Both Tara and Marissa struggled to name themselves on their terms, and their context often determined how they saw themselves. Thus, they needed several categories in order to fully

explore their ethnic and racial identity. Mengel (2001) notes that " the life experiences and histories of mixed race people do not adhere to the racial constructions defined by dominant groups. Instead...their experience is more accurately expressed as 'triple' for it reveals the existence of a 'third space' which multiracial people inhabit" (100). For this study, I considered Marissa biracial and bi-ethnic; Tara seemed bi-ethnic, yet their was also a biracial dimension to her experience because, unfortunately, being Jewish included having to confront anti-Semitism which might have more closely allied Tara with students of color. Root (1992) offers these helpful definitions:

> *Biracial* and *multiracial* are sometimes used interchangeably. *Biracial* refers to someone with two socially and phenotypically distinct racial heritages – one from each parent... *Multiracial* includes the case of the biracial person and persons synthesizing two or more diverse heritages, such as the person with African, Indian, and European heritages. It is also a term that acknowledges that the suppression of multiracial heritage in this country may limit people's knowledge about their "racial" roots; subsequently, *multiracial* may be a more accurate term than *biracial.* This term is inclusive of all racially mixed persons. (11)

As Root points out, the legacy of racial and ethnic "passing" in the US has created a situation where many Americans do not know their true racial and ethnic backgrounds, but assume a homogeneous history by passing themselves off as members of the dominant group. Marissa and Tara offered new insight into being multiethnic and expanded our understanding of the complexity of identity development by serving as "the subjects of their own stories" (Parker and Song 2001:3)

Defining Oneself, Being Defined by Others

Marissa, who I assumed was white on the first day of class, immediately defined herself as Assyrian in the first journal entry. She described the tension between her mom, who was Assyrian, and her American (white) father, and they both told Marissa about their ways of life based on their cultural heritage. She was confused about their need to self-identify so strongly:

> Who cared if I was this or that name? I would always ask my mother and father separately, although sometimes simultaneously, as to why acting so completely Assyrian or completely American was so important to each of them. My mother would always explain her theories by saying that her people always stay as a close-knit community and never forget about their elders once they're old enough to stand on their two feet. And my dad says that nothing beats being American because they are hard-workers and due to their hard work, the United States has been able to become what it is today. (journal #1)

Marissa's father equated "white" with being American, and he attached a specific value, hard work, to his racial identity. "American" also functioned as kind of ethnic identifier for her father, and although there was conflict, cultural identity issues were discussed in her household unlike most of the white students. Her mom also held certain values as part of her identification, establishing community as a central belief of her ethnic group.

At this point, Marissa identified more closely with her mother and said she considered herself "100% Assyrian":

> For some reason, I never bought my dad's explanations because they seemed so general and phony, much like a history textbook. My mother proved her culture to be far more interesting due to the time that she and her mother spent raising my sister and I to appreciate the language, the close-knit comfort of the Assyrian community, as well as all the cultural events we could go to or partake in, which even enhanced my desire to learn more about my mother's culture. Assyrian even happened to be my first language. (journal #1)

Although she acknowledged her bi-racial background, her sense of herself at this time was clearly formed by a close identification with her mother's heritage due, in part, to her exposure to Assyrian culture. She talked about seeing her mom's relatives all the time whereas she would only see cousins on her dad's side "once every four years" (journal #1). Marissa detailed an important aspect of the social construction of her identity: she did not buy into her father's culture. In contrast to her mother's culture that she could see, feel, and speak, her dad's descriptions and actions seemed more contrived and abstract. As with many of the white students, whiteness was nebulous at best, usually unidentifiable, and although Marissa's dad tried to attach a value system to his notion of being American, it did not translate. This raised

interesting questions about just what was a white or American identity: could it be felt and seen as a distinct culture? According to Poston's (1990) stages of biracial identity development, Marissa was in the second stage at this point called "choice of group categorization," a time when an individual chooses an identity usually of one ethnic group. One parent's culture tends to dominate until the individual develops a more multicultural view of herself.

Tara always knew she was different, but that did not mean she felt divided or disconnected from the dominant culture:

> Although I cannot recall a specific date or incident, I have always had the sense of being different from mainstream WASP society. Not necessarily separate or isolated as a young child and adolescent, I took pride in being among a religious minority, one of a select few. I was special. However, my religious identity had completely superceded my racial and regional background. I always wrote my personal diversity papers on my religion. (journal #1)

Here Tara made an interesting distinction: she was unlike the mainstream culture, yet it was clearly positive because her uniqueness had value. Her description was very different from the stories written by many of my students of color. For them, to be different generally meant some kind of event that marked them as less than, inferior to the dominant culture. In *How Jews Became White Folks*, Karen Brodkin (1998) describes the ethnic and racial construction of American Jews:

> The history of Jews in the United States is a history of racial change that provides useful insights on race in America. Prevailing classifications at a particular time have sometimes assigned us to the white race, and at other times have created an off-white race for Jews to inhabit. Those changes in our racial assignment have shaped the ways in which American Jews who grew up in different eras have constructed their ethnoracial identities. Those changes give us a kind of double vision that comes from racial middleness: of an experience of marginality vis-à-vis whiteness, and an experience of whiteness and belonging vis-à-vis blackness. (1-2)

Tara experienced this sense of "middleness," meaning she was not quite white, but she definitely was not black. And her sense of being different was formed by her religious identity, pointing to an important intersection of race, ethnicity, and religion. She did not see herself as ethnically diverse, but rather religiously diverse.

Tara then shifted her focus to how others perceived her. Brodkin (1998) establishes a distinction between ethnoracial *assignment* and ethnoracial *identity*: "Assignment is about popularly held classifications and their deployment by those with national power to make them matter economically, politically, and socially to the individuals classified. We construct ethnoracial identities ourselves, but we do in within the context of ethnoracial assignment" (3). Assignment relates to how we are socially constructed, echoing Bakhtin's (1984) theory that as selves we are produced in the interaction with others. Tara noted that mainstream people could often identify her as Jewish when they might have difficulty locating others as biracial; her difference was easy to see and classify:

> Many people I've met can more comfortably define my ethnicity than that of a mixed race person. When my religious background enters into a conversation for the first time, I'm met by nods and assertions that they "thought so." I find myself wondering: is it my inflections? My speech patterns? The sturdy peasant build? Is it the nose? Was I brassy, strident, a "character"? Half aware, I search for stereotypes to match what I know of my personality and bearing despite the fact that I have often identified my fellows in a similarly intuitive manner. These experiences have left me with a sense of ethnicity but little ability to define it. (journal #1)

Tara was searching for a way to reconcile what she knew about herself with the messages she received from a larger society that was categorizing her as Jewish. Thus, there was a co-construction process happening. As Tara put herself out into the world, she was evaluating who she was according to the messages she was sent. And she, in turn, was involved in her own categorization process, attempting to locate her peers in a similar manner. Again, there was an intersection of ethnicity and religion, and she was using the terms almost interchangeably here. Finally, like many of the white students, she found it difficult to specifically describe her ethnicity even though she was quite sensitive to her religious and racial identity. Obviously, these categories are not fixed, but rather flow between and among other social identifiers (Tatum 1997).

My responses to Marissa and Tara were direct and affirming. To Marissa, I wrote: "Good for you! You need to hang on to the parts of your identity that are important while at the same time keeping your eyes open to other possibilities. Identity is never 'fixed' – it changes as we grow and do new things, meet new people. Ethnicity is personal – it is all about you, and you need to be clear about how you feel and where you see yourself" (response, journal #1). This response was similar to the responses I gave to most of the white students. It was fairly directed, commenting on her need to focus on herself, yet it also validated Marissa perspective and her position between her two parents.

To Tara, I also wrote that identity was not static, but I asked her questions about her comment regarding intuition: "As I said when you shared this with the class, your insight here is compelling. What is the role of intuition? Where do we get it? How does it work? I think 'ethnicity' as a working term will become clearer as we work through the semester, but it is never a fixed term. It is always shifting and twisting" (response, journal#1). Looking back, I wish I had posed a question in each of my responses. My replies felt less monologic when I spoke back to the students and created room for more responses.

Conceptions of Privilege

Tara was very clear about her family's position and her relationship to privilege: "I am definitely the child of privilege (although I cannot truly separate 'privilege' from 'good fortune'). I am the oldest daughter of an upper-middle class white family. Both my parents have well-paying office jobs and have had steady work for almost my whole life. I live in a safe suburban neighborhood, go to an excellent school, have good medical care" (journal #6). Here privilege was first located as racial and economic privilege; Tara was quite conscious of her socio-economic standing. She also described her family as white and did not mention being Jewish, and she made an interesting point about privilege and good fortune, not recognizing any

difference between the two terms. Yet she concluded that what had impacted her most was the privilege of having parents in a secure, loving relationship: "Although these have all facilitated my passage through life, I consider myself most fortunate in my family itself. My parents have been happily and stably married for over 30 years. Few of my friends have parents whose marriages have been so successful. This more than anything has eased my life" (journal #6). Locating privilege as a kind of easiness was insightful. She could recognize an important factor in her life for what she did *not* have to contend with, and as I read her entry, I wondered about the connection between her class status and her parents; she knew that her family had given her something valuable beyond their material comfort.

I made a brief response to Tara: "Yes! But do think about the difference between privilege and good fortune – are these really the same things?" (response, journal #6). Tara was an incredibly strong student; she participated frequently, and her writing ability was excellent. Yet I was often frustrated by her journal entries. It seemed that at the moment she was really starting to get to the heart of the matter, she stopped writing. I tried to push her thinking, encouraging her to consider finer distinctions. Unfortunately, I was not very successful, and looking back, I realize that I should have spoken to her directly. To have such a fabulous student, one who could write and college-level paper in a couple of hours and get an A on the first draft, was great, but it was also hard to find ways to raise the bar for her in a way that felt fair. I struggled with how to push Tara, and although she was always respectful of my feedback, I am not sure how well I really connected with her. In retrospect, I can see that the teacher's role and responsibilities only became clearer to me as the dialogue emerged.

Unlike Tara, Marissa had not thought about her racial privilege prior to reading the Peggy McIntosh piece: "To be honest, the whole privilege subject never really made me stop and think until I entered Ethnic Voices" (journal #6). Yet her growing awareness of the complexity of her bi-racial identity was stunning:

> I, being bi-racial, have never encountered situations where I have been put at a disadvantage due to being part Assyrian. I have come to the distinct conclusion that the reason I haven't felt any sort of discrimination on behalf of my race is due to the fact that I look white. Therefore, people automatically [assume] that I'm white and therefore I come to the conclusion that I have white privilege. (journal #6)

It was important that Marissa first locate herself as biracial, and her ability to then assess what that meant for her was revealing. Because she looked white, she was treated a certain way even though she did not identify as only white. Her new understanding of her perceived group membership was unfolding as she wrote, instigated by the reading, but realized in her writing.

She then took her understanding to another level when she began to question the true nature of her privilege:

> It's not something I've really noticed before, but this paper has definitely opened my eyes to this advantage and disadvantage. In actual fact, Peggy's accumulations made me create extreme sympathy for those that fall under the unbearable weight of white privilege. I'm not sorry that I haven't felt this discomfort because I know I've done my best to tolerate all different ethnicities... I do resent the fact that there's a separation at all. These certain "privileges" don't seem like an advantage if you feel that sometimes you have to walk all over someone else's identity to feel more superior. (journal #6)

This echoed some of Stephanie's (white student) observations about her privilege, yet Marissa went a step further. Rather then just recognizing her privilege and trying to use it to fight discrimination, she was actually inverting the paradigm. Privilege was the *disadvantage* of elevating oneself at the expense of someone else. If privilege was actually something negative, then it was hurtful to those who experienced it. And Marissa expressed sympathy for those afflicted with white privilege. Berry (1989) writes in *The Hidden Wound*:

> If white people have suffered less obviously from racism than black people, they have nevertheless suffered greatly; the cost has been greater perhaps than we can yet know. If the white man has inflicted the wound of racism upon black men, the cost has been that he would receive the mirror image of that wound into himself. As the master, or as a member of the dominant race, he has felt little compulsion to acknowledge it or speak of it; the more painful it has grown the more deeply he has hidden it within himself. But the wound is there, and it is a profound disorder, as great a damage in his mind as it is in his society. (3-4).

Berry's description of the reflective nature of racism captures Marissa's sentiment. The dialogical relationship between racism and privilege cannot be ignored, and its internal manifestations function as a psychological wound to the oppressor (McIntosh 1998).

Yet Marissa still struggled with her own white privilege and tried to console herself by making a distinction between herself and those who actively seek white privilege: "Since I don't relate to white privilege in the fact that I don't enforce it, I feel better that I know that I'm definitely not directly taking a part of this moral bashing" (journal #6). It remained difficult for her to see the insidiousness of white privilege: even though she did not want to benefit from it, she got it no matter how sensitive she was to the issue. I wrote in my response, "Yet you said that you do benefit from white privilege even if it is 'indirect' or 'unwanted' – so in a sense, we are implicated if we get some of the benefits. So, how do we keep from oppressing others with our whiteness? What do we do to help raise awareness?" (response, journal #6). This illustrated one major reason why white privilege and racism are so difficult to combat. For whites, white privilege is not a choice; they cannot give it up because it is conferred by larger societal norms that value whiteness and discriminate against people of color. As much as an individual may want to cast off her whiteness, it is ever-present (Kivel 2002; McIntosh 1988). Thus, my response was an effort to direct Marissa towards ways of living with her whiteness AND fighting to end racism. Another issue here is the school's responsibility: how do students learn about how normative systems are configured and reproduced? How do students understand how to challenge these norms and figure out why they feel the way they do? Somehow they have to learn how to take responsibility for their part in it all as individual citizens.

Marissa helped me clarify white privilege as both active and passive, similar to the way Tatum (1997) describes the cycle of racist behavior. She sees it as a moving walkway, and those walking fast on the conveyor belt are active racists, "The person engaged in active racist behavior has identified with the ideology of white supremacy and is moving with it" (11).

Standing still on the walkway would be passive racist behavior: "No overt effort is being made, but the conveyor belt moves the bystanders along to the same destination as those who are actively walking... Unless they are walking actively in the opposite direction at a speed faster than the conveyor belt – unless they are actively antiracist – they will find themselves carried along" (Tatum 1997:11-12). Of course, not all whites are actively racist, and most are probably passive racists. The goal then is to find a way to move more whites from being passive to being actively anti-racist: "The task of interrupting racism is obviously not the task of whites alone. But the fact of white privilege means that whites have greater access to the societal institutions in need of transformation. To whom much is given, much is required" (Tatum 1997:12).

Marissa concluded with a quote from McIntosh (1988) that continued her questioning of the real nature of white privilege:

> I'm glad that Peggy states, "In some groups, those dominated have actually become strong through not having all of these unearned advantages, and this gives them a great deal to teach others." This insight leads me to believe that people who lack white privilege are not necessarily at a [disadvantage]. They hold the knowledge about the world in their hands, and all they have to remember is how much more superior they really are knowing they hold a key to understanding society. (journal #6)

Because she was the only student who made this observation, I wondered about the role of her bi-racialness in her ability to see white privilege through a different lens. Did her perspective allow her to see the issue more critically? Here Marissa made the best argument for diversity in schools. We need other people who see the world differently than we do because our vision is limited. Factors may keep us from experiencing certain aspects of society, but if we have a great variety of people around us, we have a better chance of learning and seeing the world as a more complex whole.

Constructing Ethnoracial Identities

Tara tended to address the relationship between ethnicity and other big concepts, such as multiculturalism, capitalism, physical disabilities, and sexual orientation (Wijeyesinghe 2001). She was a strong philosophy student, and the majority of her writing posed larger questions: "I'm still wrestling with the idea of multiculturalism. In America, we always prided ourselves on being a medley of different cultures, but do we have any real culture of our own?" (journal #5); "What do economic differences mean if they only determine your situation part of the time?" (journal #9); "I realized that all of my gay and bi friends are white. What I'd always thought of as the teen sexuality experience was, in fact, the white teen experience" (journal #11). She was also an involved theater student, and after seeing a production of *Othello*, she struggled with certain connotations of race. Referring to the interactions between Othello and the Italians, she said, "They feared his differences, saw him as 'barbaric,' but his race did not have the connotation of inferiority/servitude so much as 'otherness'" (journal #10). In a marginal note to Tara, I questioned this distinction because by labeling him "barbaric," they were conferring a sense of inferiority on him. She then went on to make an important observation about her own experience with race: "I have always studied African-European interactions from the guilty perspective of the oppressor. I can't recall having ever before seen a treatment of these interactions that did not have these overtones" (journal #10). Again, Tara positioned herself as white here, identifying with the oppressor as opposed to the oppressed. But her observation led to this insight: "Perhaps, in our attempts to 'raise up' the blacks from the stereotypes of servitude, we are still not eliminating that idea from our collective consciousness. We forget that their culture/civilization did not pre-determine slavery" (journal #10). She could sense the paternalism of race relations and could see how deeply imbedded racism is in our culture.

In response to my question about where she was with her ethnicity, she wrote another philosophical response, detailing the process of fixing identity in time and space: "To name

myself or others smacks of reification, assuming that people have set qualities and therefore constants. I share an opinion with Sartre that any quality you can name in yourself becomes somewhat separate from you in the naming. Also, every word has a definition. To assign a word to a person seems inherently problematic" (journal #12). I wrote a marginal "yes" next to these comments, but pushed back at her analysis in my response: "Yet isn't identity inherently fluid? Try to stay with your feelings surrounding ethnicity – the philosophy is helpful, but it can pull you away from a more personal, emotional exploration of identity" (response, journal #12). Reflecting on my response, it felt too proscriptive. Perhaps if I had engaged more with Tara on the philosophy, as opposed to dismissing it, I might have moved with her to another level. Again, I am reminded of the need to meet the students where they are, not where I want them to be or think they should be (talk about paternalism!). Were the journals really a place to be directing them or dialoguing with them? Perhaps if I had responded and then set up a meeting with Tara to talk about my concerns, I would have been more effective.

One of her final journal entries returned to the subject of religion and the December holidays, an ongoing source of tension at the school:

> Christmas decorations don't bother me much – I don't feel threatened as a member of the Jewish community. I am a little miffed that the administration feels I need them to support and validate my religion for me (although it was nice that they did think of the non-Christians). There was also a sort of hidden hypocrisy that annoyed me. If we're going to have Christmas symbols, just put them up. If we're not, get rid of the red and green trees on the dining room tables, don't make us stuff stockings, take all the tinsel and balls off the giving tree. (journal #15)

Tara made an important distinction: she did not need school to tell her how to be Jewish or that being Jewish was OK. What she did appreciate was being *included* in the process. Students can see quickly through inconsistency, as Tara did, showing that students will respect, yet not necessarily agree with, what a school decides if the decision process is inclusive and consistent. She then pointed out how easy it would be to make a compromise if people were really interested in equity: "Do have decorations put up in the main area. Greenery, white and silver – that's

traditional winter, non-denominational. No red or gold. Let the students decorate their own lockers, religiously if they like, for that month. We're big girls; we ought to be able to deal with someone else's personal expression of personal space" (journal #15). I appreciated her sentiment while recognizing the need for adults to model and guide this process. The problem was the adults were scared to death of the topic. Again, the process would have significantly impacted the outcome.

Marissa struggled with some serious issues at home that she addressed frequently in her journal entries. As she described in her first journal entry, her parents came from very different backgrounds, but her father's racist attitudes were especially troubling:

> Unfortunately, I've always had to deal with racism at home...The main force promoting such vulgar ideas is my father. My father grew up in a WASP atmosphere in Oregon. He had one brother, two sisters, and parents that promoted nothing other than respect, class, discipline, religion, and strong caucasian blood...I never thought my mom to be racist because she herself is an immigrant from Iran and was vulnerable to racial slurs when she immigrated to the US by herself at the age of 18. Which always made me wonder as to why dad could have the courage to continue his bashing when he's married to my mother. (journal #2)

Marissa faced a significant problem: how to reconcile her identification with her mom, her own biracial identity, in the face of her dad's racism. Her description of his background was interesting, especially her consciousness of how her father was raised and the value of whiteness in his home growing up. Yet the issue had another side, her mother's own internalized racism and a cycle of oppression (Adams, Bell, and Griffin 1997):

> Sometimes my father would even make fun on my mother's culture and ancestry, complaining about the way the Assyrians act, talk, and live. It never seemed to bother my mother; she always remarked by saying the same thing, "Yes, Mike. Whatever you say." But as I grew up, I noticed that my mom has started bashing other ethnicities as well, much like my father. It was hard enough putting up with my father's rude comments, and now, my mother's. (journal #2)

In addition to the gender issues present in her mother's deferral to her father, Marissa could see how her mom was beginning to pass on the discrimination she experienced to others.

The racism in her own home began to affect Marissa's social life:

> This especially became a problem where my friends were of all different cultural origins, and I had to not let them come into my house for fear that my parents would verbally attack them. I was and continue to be ashamed of my parents. I repeatedly school my parents telling them that times have changed, they need to change or just not let their racism ruin my life. In some aspects it has: my dad, especially argues with me when the school has to promote some "multicultural" assembly or class, much like Ethnic Voices. (journal #2)

The presence of shame and the risk she took taking the class were both surprising to me. It was also a good reminder that the work we do in schools to promote inclusion has to include the parents (Nieto 1999), or we leave students in situations like the one Marissa confronted. She had to walk the line between the racism she faced at home and the work she was doing in my class that was distinctly anti-racist.

Marissa wrote that all of her boyfriends "have to come from respectable, wealthy, white families" (journal #2), further indicating how pervasive her father's racism was. Yet she remained defiant:

> I've taken matters into my own hands and have made several choices for myself, whether my parents like them or not. They just have to deal with them. For instance, I chose all my classes these past four years and I've managed to pack as may various culture related classes as I felt I needed... As far as my friends go, I have many Assyrian friends that I see quite frequently, and two of my closest friends are [Mariah] and [Nicole]. I don't think I've had more love for any two people in my life... I'm not racist and I'm proud. (journal #2)

Mariah, another student in the class, and her sister were African-American. Marissa's declaration was significant as she tried to distance herself from her family. She was able to construct her identity in a different way that would both include her Assyrian background and other cultures (Poston 1990). Tatum (1997) writes, "Though pressures to choose one monoracial identity at the exclusion of other possible identities are most intense in adolescence, some young people are able to successfully maintain a multiracial self-concept even as they affiliate with one group or another" (184). For Marissa, it was not an either/or choice; she was going to forge another way.

In my response to this entry, I referenced my own father: "My dad was the same way, and his parents immigrated form Italy and were totally discriminated against. Racism is irrational

because it is based on fear, fear of others, fear of difference. Your example is the best way to combat racism. Also, as you explore your own identity and stay sure of who you are, you can help others to look at themselves" (response, journal #2). My whiteness created a space for me to respond to Marissa in a more personal way. At the same time, I wanted to acknowledge her struggle to be who she thought she was, both a part of her parents as well as a very distinct individual.

A few weeks later, Marissa returned to the subject of ethnicity, her family and marriage:

> My mom, coming from Iran and all, has a strong sense of who she wants her daughters to marry, I should start by saying that her strong Middle-Eastern nature subscribes to the world of arranged marriages. What options does this leave for me and my future? My mom's heart is set on me marrying an Assyrian... If I don't, I'll have to face eternal apathy from my mother until my dying day. (journal #5)

She was not unaware of the irony of her mother's desire for her to be with an Assyrian: "Why is she the one to talk when she was the one to quickly marry an American" (journal #5). As far as Marissa was concerned, she did not think that marrying someone of her own ethnic group would guarantee happiness, and she decided to marry "the person of *my* choice" (journal #5). I found the situation between her and her mom to be very complicated. Responding to the comments about her mother's choice of a husband, I wrote: "Maybe she is upset about her decision, and maybe she is trying to protect you, if you know what I mean. I think she would want you to be happy. Probably, when you meet the right one at the right time, she will support your happiness" (response, journal #5). My assumptions about her mom were not appropriate, but I felt I had to respond in some way to her dilemma. Being bi-racial and both Assyrian and American, how was she to marry within *her* own ethnic group? Her background was distinct, neither all Assyrian nor all white, so what should she choose? Her feelings of loyalty towards her mother, as well as her antipathy for some of her father's attitudes, made her situation complex. She would face different challenges than either the white students or the students of color (Poston 1990).

As she reflected on the progress of understanding her ethnic identity, Marissa explored how culture was transmitted. Over the course of the semester, she began to reconstruct how she came to know who she was:

> For many years of my life, my dad, being "American 100%" (Irish, French-Canadian), has brainwashed me to think that I'm white and nothing else. What amazes me is that up until this day, my mother never protested against my father's incompetence. Somewhere in me I knew that I was half Assyrian, yet I never believed that to be an ethnicity. I thought of it more as another language I spoke. I always wanted to make my father proud, therefore believing that I'm completely white came out of my respect for him. (journal #11)

She revealed the intricate nature of how identity was constructed. It was not simply a matter of being this or that; rather, there were a series of messages, interpretations, and responses that together told Marissa what it meant to be white and American. Included was the silence around certain aspects of her identity: even though she spoke Assyrian, she did not identify that aspect of her upbringing as "ethnic." Identity existed as both explicit and implicit associations, and Marissa moved between a conscious and unconscious understanding of who she was (Adams, Bell, and Griffin 1997; Harro 2000). In the middle of it all was her desire to please her father, to prove her allegiance to him by asserting her whiteness and, conversely, ignoring half of her identity.

As with many of my students, school became a place of new awareness for Marissa:

> It wasn't until I came to [school] in 8th grade that I started paying attention to my other half. I learned to appreciate many diverse cultures and accept them as something that makes up who I am. Especially thanks to my Ethnic Voices class, it has helped me think about certain issues that revolved around me, or perhaps about me, and I never questioned them. Now I am very conscious and aware of my ethnicity and try to learn more about myself and others as each day passes. (journal #11)

Her growth was evident, and it was interesting for me to watch how her awareness and participation in the class were affecting her view of herself and others. She was able to develop a more complete picture of herself at school that was not possible at home, citing again the critical

role classrooms play in identity development. Marissa was able to affirm multiple aspects of her identity once she found a safe place to explore different facets of her background:

> I have finally learned to accept my Assyrian heritage to its full potential. No longer do I hide from it much like I was expected to from my father's standpoint. Actually, when someone asks me what nationality, my first response would be "Assyrian." On college [applications], I check two boxes – "white/causacian" and "other – Assyrian." The first time I wrote this response in my journal, I was unsure of what I should think of myself as. I knew that calling myself Assyrian is what I want. I'm very proud to be different and distinguishable from others. It's who I am. (journal #11)

It was significant that Marissa found a way to name herself, to be able to check the boxes that were appropriate for her as opposed to having to fit someone else's definition of who she was. Referring to the process of biracial identity development, Poston (1990) states, "It emphasizes the individual's need to value and integrate multiple cultures and it specifies the social, personal, and status factors important in this process" (154). To see this kind of developing awareness reinforces the role of the classroom in helping students understand themselves, others, and their world. Also, identity is not fixed, and certainly as my students moved through school, their identities continued to shift and change.

Conclusion

In considering these two students' responses in a separate analysis, I wanted to look at how their unique position as border crossers affected their experience in the class. They did provide a different perspective on many topics, especially white privilege and the connections between ethnicity, race, and religion. At times, it was impossible for them to label themselves as one ethnic group or another, and at others, the distinctions were clear. Their ability to handle this complexity was evident in their writing as they provided examples of what their multiple identities meant to them.

Tara and Marissa participated differently than I expected. Tara, by far the best writer I have ever taught, wrote insightful literary criticism papers, but her journal entries felt rushed and

superficial. Marissa, one of the weakest writers I ever taught, wrote phenomenal journal entries. She was actively engaged, looking at herself, her family, and the larger society, trying to make sense of who she was in relation to the world around her. Tara seemed to stay in her head, using her intellectual ability to negotiate her identity, but I was not always sure where her heart was. Marissa seemed to laying everything out on the table. Here I am still making assumptions, trying to fill in gaps, but it is so important for me to process how my assumptions and stereotypes played out in my classroom.

Overall, these two young women were trying to construct a vision of themselves that was not partial, but rather inclusive of all the ways they saw themselves:

> The biracial and bicultural person strives for a totalness, a sense of wholeness that is more than the sum of the parts of a person's heritages. The preservation of the sense of a biracial and bicultural identity, being "both" and "neither," throughout life results from the creative interplay between a gradually developing social acceptance and the self's ability to actively reverse the dissociating effects of discrepant experiences... The development of a biracial person who achieves a biracial and bicultural identity is marked by an ongoing integration of different and sometimes contradictory heritages, histories, and parental, social, and community messages. (Root, 1992:317)

Due to their distinct cultural backgrounds, these students faced different challenges, yet their ability to navigate difficult terrain was compelling. They were actively constructing themselves as they moved through the world, receiving both affirmation and denial of who they were, yet never giving up their sense of themselves as multicultural. Root (1996) hopes that society is ready for more complex discussions of race and ethnicity and feels that "the increasing presence of self-identified multiracial people opens the door for reconsidering the type of conversations we wish to have about race in this country" (xxvii; see also Wijeyesinghe 2001). Finally, Root recognizes a complex web of identity where race is important, but it is not the only significant way people identify themselves. She hopes for "multicultural empowerment" which acknowledges race without limiting identity to race alone. Certainly Marissa and Tara

demonstrated the intersections of race, ethnicity, social class, and religion, and the need for space in the classroom to explore all the ways we come to know who we are.

Constructing Identities: Responses to the Literature

> Literature is a window to the soul. It allows the writer to render meaningful the self that is deep within so that others can see it embodied in structure, content, and form. It is second in value and effect only to direct personal experiences for encountering significant intraethnic and interethnic interactions and finding ethnic affiliation. (Gay 1999: 207)

As part of their journal writing, I asked students to devote some of their responses to the literature. I did not offer specific questions, but rather told them that they could consider the literature as a journal writing topic. I wanted to see how the reading related to their sense of their ethnic identity: did they share similar experiences? Could they identify with various characters? In what way was the literature a window into the experiences of others? Style (1998) writes, "If the student is understood as occupying a dwelling of self, education needs to enable the student to look through window frames in order to see the realities of others and into mirrors in order to see her/his reality reflected" (150). It was my intention that our study of literature provide similarities as well as differences, reflecting the dialogical tension that exists between an author and her characters or between a self and others in her world (Bakhtin 1984).

One instructional technique used to promote multicultural education and ethnic identity development is ethnobibliotherapy: "It uses ethnic literature that deals with ethnic identity development. These include personal accounts across a wide range of literature...The intent is for students to gain feelings of affiliation and learn some techniques for dealing with their own identity issues from the situations and characters portrayed in the literature" (Gay 1999:206-7). In order to name themselves and validate their existence, authors use their cultural experiences to tell their stories in their own voice, and in many literary traditions, ethnic groups construct their identity in both personal and symbolic ways. They represent their individual selves and the

collective construction of their ethnic group (Gay 1999) , and their writing can serve as an example for students who may recognize themselves or who may come to understand another ethnic group through exploration of the literature.

Learning Through the Experiences of Others

Students were invited to respond to the readings in their journal in ways that were, in some respects, rather different from the literary studies they did elsewhere. The journal entries allowed highly subjective comments to appear, which were positively welcomed. Of course, these responses did not emerge from the blue or simply at the teacher's request. Rather, they emerged from a history of writing for a teacher that offered opportunities for sustained conversation about challenging issues, often in very personal ways. Although a teacher cannot tell students to work on difficult or powerful experiences in their writing, teachers can provide a process whereby students discover for themselves the value of writing in the company of interested others who are critically responsive, but non-judgmental.

As I made inferences from what students wrote in their journal entries, I was aware that the students were engaging in a complicated, dialogical process as they entered into some kind of relationship with fictional characters. They shuttled back and forth between the world of the text and the world they knew in order to make sense of the fiction. They imagined what it must have been like to be somebody else, and they used these imaginations to reflect seriously on their own life experiences.

Spiegel (1998) discusses reader response approaches to literature, and states that "the making of meaning from reading is a dynamic, reflective, introspective process" (2). The meaning of a particular story is constructed and revised by the reader, grounded in the text but also dependent on the life experiences and perspective of the reader. Thus, in a classroom, multiple interpretations of texts should be expected and encouraged. Spiegel cites research that

shows how students grow in specific areas in their ability to respond to literature. In addition to greater ownership of what they read and appreciation for multiple interpretations and critical reflection, many researchers have found that students make personal connections between literature and their own lives. This provides a safe place for exploration of personal concerns. Also, students who participate in response-based approaches make connections between the world around them and what they are reading. My students' journal responses supported the findings of Spiegel's work and helped my students see that they had legitimate opinions and attitudes, but that others' perspectives were just as valid.

As mentioned previously, we began the semester reading *Bread Givers*, a novel about a young Jewish woman whose family immigrated to the United States in the early 1900's, and we read the short story "Children of the Sea," by Edwidge Danticat. Her story is a modern immigrant account of coming illegally by boat to the US from Haiti. Two of my white students wrote responses to Danticat's moving narrative of a young man leaving his love and venturing out for a new life, only to die at sea. The story is told through the letters he is writing from the raft and well as his girlfriend's letters to him. Obviously, these letters could not be exchanged, but my students found the act of writing powerful. Christi wrote, "Their letters become a way of keeping the other person alive. If they are writing to someone, picturing their face and imagining their response, there is no way for that person to be dead in their minds. The letters keep the lovers' hope alive" (journal #3). Christi went on to note the power of the narrative and its ability to communicate an experience very different from her own:

> Telling stories like that is essential even though the stories leave you with a disturbed feeling and a depressing vision. The stories also leave the reader with a closer vision of Haitians, what they have to endure and gives readers a close feeling to what they might have felt. The only way someone like me could possibly come even close to understanding another culture and the "mountains" that they have had to climb is if they tell me their stories and give me a chance to hear them. (journal #3)

Christi noted the dialogical interaction here: not only must there be a person who was willing to share an experience, but she must be a willing listener, keeping herself open to something very different from how she experienced the world. Her reference to "someone like me" showed active engagement with her own identity because she was aware of her difference and constructed her identity in relation to someone who did not share her background. This interaction through reading produced new knowledge for her while, at the same time, served as a backdrop for her own experience: she understood her position better once she heard another's.

Kimmy also had a powerful experience while reading the story. For her, it gave her a glimpse into another life that made her reflect critically upon her own:

> "Children of the Sea" is the kind of story that makes you think about your life situation without you knowing it. When you read such absolute horror and read how desolate their conditions are, your mind is fixed and concentrated on the story. It is only afterward that you catch yourself driving a car or sitting in a nice chair and think, "I'm not on that boat, nor am I in Haiti." (journal #3)

Kimmy described an unconscious feeling or awareness produced by the reading that emerged at different times. This points to the power of narrative to provoke a deferred reaction, which means the story can stay with students as they grow and develop (Spiegel 1998). At various points in their development, it may strike them differently or move them in another direction. As in some of her other entries on white privilege, Kimmy expressed feelings of shame and guilt:

> You wonder at the privilege and luck you have been born into. Then you are shamed that you do nothing, or not enough for those who aren't you. Children of the Sea makes you feel the pain and the love and any other emotion it can, so that you realize only later how extremely removed you are from the story. But for that short amount of time that I read the story, I was one of them. (journal #3)

She again highlighted the story's ability to bring the reader in, pointing to her own identification with the narrative, and yet at the same time, she had a critical perspective. As in Christi's comments, a dialogical relationship emerged: Kimmy was both a part of and separate from the story. In my response, I commented on Kimmy's awareness of her privilege: "Well, you are really getting at the heart of the matter: privilege. How does it work? Who gets it and why? How

do we 'share' it if we have it? Should we feel guilty, or do we need to think about what to do with our guilt, how to make it productive?" (response, journal #3) I remember being concerned about her feelings of guilt because I was afraid it would paralyze her. She might become overwhelmed by her shame and unable to make her way to another level of understanding. My questions were an attempt to get her thinking about her reaction and to keep her critical consciousness focused on the big picture and not just her individual position.

While reading *Ellen Foster*, by Kaye Gibbons, students had a variety of reactions. The novel portrays the life of a poor, white girl named Ellen whose family situation is less than ideal. The story is told through Ellen's eyes, and the reader comes to know Ellen based primarily on her relationship with her alcoholic, abusive father and her best friend, Starletta, who is African-American. Similar to the students' reaction to "Children of the Sea," Sue, who is Korean-American, wrote about the novel's ability to give her insight into an unfamiliar world: 'It is a glimpse into a world that I know nothing about and does not exist in my mind except in history and a place that is far away from me" (journal #5).

Alicia, my Japanese-American student, commented on Ellen's dialogocal process of identity development: "Ellen, I think, did experience white privilege, but only experienced it when she actually was able to compare how a black person was normally treated, to how a black person could be treated, like a white person" (journal #7). Ellen knew herself better because of her relationship with someone who was different form her; her understanding was produced in the interaction with Starletta. Without her knowledge of Starletta and her situation, Ellen might have been unable to recognize her own position of racial privilege. I wrote in response to Alicia's entry, "Yes, we can only see ourselves when we really see others. Our own identity is totally dependent on others, yet we often see ourselves as only individuals separate from everyone else" (response, journal #7). Alicia went on to make an important distinction between the two friends: "Her realization of her own unconscious discrimination against Starletta had also

lead her to realize that no matter how poor she was, she can always move up if she tried. Starletta couldn't" (journal #7). Alicia pointed to the fact that race continues to trump class in the United States. Even though both girls were poor, Ellen still had the advantage because she was white.

Elizabeth, a white student, also commented on Ellen's relationship with Starletta in addition to her own identification with Ellen: "When I think back to myself at that age, I remember having the confidence Ellen exerts, but I was never able to understand the world and society the way she does. She understands people and their behavior" (journal #2). She then traced Ellen's growing social consciousness: "Later in the novel she begins to understand why she avoids touching Starletta's family's things. She realizes it is not because she will be hurt or become 'colored,' but instead because of what society says. She finally realizes that she cannot associate with 'colored people' because the white society does not approve of that and they may reject her if she crosses the boundary" (journal #2). Elizabeth detailed Ellen's shift in thinking from individual bias to institutionalized racism, and she was also aware of the sanctions that might be imposed if Ellen did not stay in line and betrayed society's social construction of whiteness. Similar to Alicia's comments, Elizabeth wrote about the connections between race and socio-economic status:

> Ellen is able to enjoy some privileges because of her skin color, but only very few because she is poor. This concept led me to realize that to experience the full privileges of being white, one must also have at least a decent economic status. Ellen still experienced discrimination because of how poor she is . . . In a way, Ellen is not seen as much better than Starletta because she is poor. Her poverty is something people use to make themselves feel superior. (journal #7)

So white privilege did not exist in a vacuum; it could be intimately connected with class bias. Elizabeth also revealed the inverse relationship between oppression and privilege: as middle and upper class whites were elevated, Ellen was subjugated.

Marissa, who is biracial, also identified with Ellen, but her process was very different from what any of my other students wrote about the novel. She compared Ellen's father to her own, describing her experiences with an alcoholic and abusive dad:

> One of my previous journal writings was on my father and my everlasting concerns of his racism. Ellen's father reminds me of my father in many ways. One could guess that the racism issue is the first similarity to be acknowledged. But most importantly, Ellen's father is known as a drunk and extremely lazy, as well as a male dominator. My father is just the same. (journal #4)

It is always hard to know as a teacher when to intervene in a student's personal life, yet when asking students to explore their own identity in the context of literature, there are many times when experiences overlap, and students see a text as a mirror of their own experience. I made a sympathetic response and told her I would be there for her if she needed to talk about it, but she never came to me. Marissa went on to describe life with her dad, noting that the situation had improved, but she was still left with painful memories and an inability to really trust him: "Overall, I feel Ellen's pain. Nothing could be more accurate than her dysfunctional family to mine. Gradually, my father's problems have gotten better, but to me, I'll always remember him as the overgrown child of a louse whom I've never had much respect for and whom I never will" (journal #4). In a later entry, she moved away from writing about her own personal experience and commented on Ellen's racist behavior: "It is ironic, however, that Ellen's best friend is black, yet most of her racial comments are geared towards black people. How does she suppose to keep her true friend if she knows that Starletta is black and she degrades their ethnicity in the quest for self-knowledge? This is due to the fact that Ellen, maybe as well as Starletta, are naïve to their racist comments" (journal #7). Again, Marissa noticed the inverse relationship between privilege and racism, and she could see that a process of self-awareness that ignored one's own position in relation to others was doomed to fail. As noted earlier, Marissa's best friend at school was African-American, so again, it is possible that she was drawing from her own experience and critical race consciousness as a biracial young woman.

Native American Ethnicity: Migration, Cultural Disconnection, and Biracial Identity

The next novel we read was *Ceremony*, by Leslie Marmon Silko, a fascinating narrative of a young biracial man and his attempt to reconcile both his Native-American and white cultural identities. The novel itself is a ceremony, healing the native community as Tayo, the protagonist, recovers from his war wounds (World War II) and reconnects with the earth and his people through stories and the power of storytelling. Rasika, who immigrated to the US from India, wrote about the promise America made to those who fought in her wars. By going to battle for the US, there was an understanding that minority soldiers would be accepted by the dominant culture once they had shown their loyalty. However, Rasika noted that for both African-Americans and Native-Americans, this promise was really a myth: "For a while, as long as the war lasted, the three Pueblo men were accepted as American, but as soon as the war was over, the promise wasn't kept and the allusion to being accepted as American stopped. All of the sudden they went back to being 'other'" (journal #9). The illusion lead to illness as the former soldiers struggled to understand their relationship to a white world that did not validate or even respect their culture. Yet Rasika saw herself in a different position even though she, too, was a minority: "I am lucky; America has kept its promise to me. Only I have to take the opportunities offered" (journal #9). This response showed her engagement, and as seen with many of the other responses, Rasika made sense of her own situation by relating to those in a different situation. Here she constructed herself as lucky in contrast with Tayo and his friends.

Yet her response also raised the issue of voluntary versus involuntary immigrants. Nieto (1999) cites the research of John Ogbu who distinguishes between those came to the United States voluntarily, such as Rasika's family and other Asian cultures, and other minority groups such as African-Americans and Native-Americans who were involuntary immigrants. Voluntary immigrants may be able to accommodate the norms of the dominant culture whereas involuntary immigrants, due to historical and sociopolitical reasons, may have a more difficult time.

In my response, I tried to push Rasika to think more critically about her own position. She concluded with the statement above about how she just had to take advantage of the opportunities put before her, to which I added, "And maybe some responsibility for giving opportunity to others who may not have the same access as you?" (response, journal #9). She seemed to be unaware of her privileged status and equated her experience with Tayo, the only difference being her ability to seize opportunity. The implication is that Tayo, and other minorities, might have had opportunities, but they didn't always utilize them. This contradicted her earlier statements which described America's unwillingness to treat all veterans with respect, yet when applied to her own situation, she appeared to lose sight of the institutional prejudice that positioned certain immigrants and native people differently from others. She returned to a myth of meritocracy, the very idea she criticized previously. Here the complicated process of identity development emerged, highlighting the complexity of constructing ourselves in relation to others.

Keisha wrote about Tayo's connection with the land and his ability to live by his instincts once he realized the power of the ceremony and the origin of his illness: "I became truly envious of Tayo in moments when he just knew before anyone spoke or when he felt someone or some animal because I know for a fact that I don't have that kind of connection with my body. I realize that at 16 I shouldn't be expecting much, but I certainly will remember this connection as a life goal" (journal #10). As she matured, Keisha recognized Tayo's intuitive sense as an important part of consciousness, especially in a school where students were often living only in their heads and felt very disconnected from their bodies.

Like Keisha, Kimmy expressed feelings of envy (as discussed in an earlier analysis of white privilege), but her interaction with the novel went a step further: " The rituals and ceremonies make me look around at my culture and realize that I an one of the hated 'destroyers' that Tayo speaks of. I pollute the water, waste the earth, and poison the sky" (journal #9). Her

identification with the novel was striking; she moved from third person, the "destroyers" who represented her group membership, to first person, her individual identity. She located herself directly in the narrative. She then went on to talk about Tayo's connection to the land, and again, made direct reference to her own lack of identity in relation to the earth: "The absolute love that Tayo has for the land to which he belongs and the faith he puts in the land amazes me. Tayo lets the reader know what the value of the earth is. In the face of Tayo's knowledge I feel like I have no knowledge of the land that I live on. Through reading *Ceremony* I feel I can appreciate the land on a higher level" (journal #9). At the time, I did not respond to Kimmy's feelings of inadequacy. I simply affirmed her engagement: "Great! The novel really does explore the intimate connection between humans and the earth, and in our modern lives, we forget this!" (response, journal #9). Like many of my other students, the novel provided a window into a different experience, and Kimmy's involvement with the story was what every English teacher hoped for. Yet, there was also another side to her experience that was more disconcerting for me as a teacher.

In another entry on *Ceremony*, Kimmy focused on the character of Rocky, Tayo's cousin who was the family favorite. He was killed during the war, and Tayo felt guilty because the family had put all their hopes in Rocky: he was the Native American who would be able to assimilate into the white world and become successful. In a series of flashbacks, the reader learns that Rocky shunned many of the traditional ways, mocking Native culture, and Kimmy found his behavior distressing:

> Their culture had survived for such a long time and has such a rich history that Rocky seems to be ungrateful. He wishes to blend into the white society, one without ancient tradition other than oppression, and one in which he will never be equal in the eyes of whites. To want to leave behind the respect that Native Americans exhibit toward each other (some) to live in a world that would never fully respect him as a person is not something I could do. I can understand Rocky's want to expand his horizons beyond the limiting land of the reservation. It seems to me that he wishes to completely deny his Native American heritage. I find the heritage of Native Americans extraordinary and very different from anything I have. (journal #10)

There were several issues here, the first being a tendency to romanticize and idolize Native culture. She was also quite judgmental of Rocky and seemed to be ignoring the effects of internalized racism. Yet there was also the issue of her identity development, and perhaps, a kind of white internalized oppression that reflects the downside of privilege for the privileged: self-loathing and cultural disconnection (Howard 1993):

> I find myself becoming angry at Rocky for his lack of respect for his elders and the stories he has been taught. It's hard to be on the outside looking in and I know that I could never understand how Rocky must have felt, but I find myself feeling ashamed for him. If I had a culture like the Native American's I hope that I would appreciate its worth. (journal #10)

Her feelings of anger and shame seemed entirely out of place, yet her identification was real as was her cultural disconnection. From her standpoint, she did not have an identity beyond being a "destroyer." The irony here is that in a way, she was doing the same thing, for very different reasons, that frustrated her about Rocky: denying her cultural identity. She saw no value to her cultural heritage. I wrote in response: "Yet it lets you see how destructive racism can be! It eats people up from the inside out. The cycle of oppression will drive people away from the things they love and care about most. It is so hard to appreciate something when the rest of the world has NO respect for who you are" (response, journal #10). Kimmy's writing raised a complicated issue: she criticized her own culture, yet in a way, it was appropriate because her culture *was* dominant and was not being denigrated by the larger society. Yet the racism had its own effect on her: disconnecting her from her heritage and leading to guilt and shame that inhibited growth and identification with her own culture. McIntosh (1998) writes about the psychological effects of racism on white people. Since the vast majority of whites are taught not to see their privilege or to embrace their racial identity, the work of understanding privilege and racism can be emotionally overwhelming:

> I would guess that white oblivion about, and inculturated denial of, privilege acts as a psychological prison system that costs white people heavily in terms of preventing human development. Walking obliviously through our own racial

> experience may perpetuate the imprisonment of the heart and intelligence in a false law-and-order of tyrannizing denial about who, what, and where we are. So the societal systems of color...may reside in the psyches of white people, where an equivalent of bad race relations or whit supremacy damages the civic health and balance of the soul. (215-16)

Just as Rocky was having difficulty coming to terms with who he was, Kimmy was suffering form her own identity crisis. Both were impacted by racism in two different, but related ways.

Christi wrote, "I just realized that *Ceremony* is probably the first novel written by a Native American that I have ever read in a class" (journal #9), and I remembered being shocked by her impression. Realizing the importance of literature in relation to historical studies, she felt like her classes usually focused on what had been "done" to the Native Americans by whites as opposed to focusing on Native culture: "They have such amazing views and wonderful ways to look at the world and at life. To truly believe that it is the earth, plants, and animals that are superior shows that the Native Americans are the most brilliant humans" (journal #9). Like Kimmy's statements about Native culture, there was hyperbole, but she made an important point about what had been left out of her education. In addition, Christ wrote about a trip she made to work with children on a Navajo reservation and the fact that her grandmother was one-quarter Native-American: "Her stories were few, but they were vivid" (journal #9). This was the first and only time Christi mentioned her Native-American ancestry, and I realized the importance of the text for giving students an opportunity to connect with previously unidentified parts of their identity. She was able to detail what she was missing in her education as well as offer points of identification, and even though she found the narrative challenging, she felt it was valuable: "This book is difficult to understand, but it is completely worth the effort. Reading Native-American authors should be done so much more frequently so every person can be exposed to he knowledgeable, wise, and thoughtful views of these people, these teachers" (journal #9).

In her next entry, she focused on stereotypes: "Stereotypes, to prejudice, to discrimination, to oppression, and then to internalized oppression. This cycle is so easily

continued throughout the world, but how easily is it broken?" (journal #10). She went on to think through the cycle, trying to understand how it started: "It is in many ways brought about by unconscious actions and thoughts. So what if everyone consciously tried to break the cycle, to just remove one part of it, stopping the circle. Is it possible?" (journal #10). She knew that everyone had stereotypes and that oppression functioned as both "an evil that people could lessen, or it might be an ever-present norm in society which is always just hidden beneath the surface" (journal #10). Christi's critical thinking showed she was trying to work the problem and to take action. As she wrote, she uncovered some of the insidious qualities of oppression, and at the same time, was working to empower herself.

Similarly, Stephanie was highly engaged in her own critical assessment of the novel:

> There is something about the discussion of patterns and life and death that really gets to me. The idea that we are all very dependent on each other, and that we fit into this pattern along with everybody and everything else. It's like the spider web: any single point of the web is unimportant by itself, but when all the points are fit together, you get an amazing web that holds together only with all the points there. (journal #10)

As she made sense of the novel, she could begin to put the pieces together in order to understand the larger whole. And she was moved by her realization of the inter-connectedness of humanity. She went on to describe how Tayo always looked for "the marks living things leave behind: the spider tracing the dust, the mountain lion paw print, Ts'eh's marks in the sand" (journal #10). She tied this idea to her previous observation that we are all connected: "Whenever we go, we leave something of ourselves behind" (journal #10). She concluded by noting that if we all kept these ideas in mind in our everyday lives, "we would be much more careful of how we treat other people" (journal #10). Here Stephanie was taking some of the novel's themes and applying them directly to her own worldview. In my response, I offered my own interpretation, building on her observations: "And we leave our 'mark' on others just as others 'mark' us. Very thoughtful here" (response, journal #10). The idea that we were all implicated in interactions was

also illustrated in Stephanie's journal: as she read the novel, it left its nark on her just as she wrote and left her mark on the page.

In her first entry on *Ceremony*, Marissa wrote about Tayo's internalized racism. She was surprised by Tayo's acceptance of the dominant culture's view of him as inferior: "It's interesting how one person of color can finally give into the ideologies of another more dominating cultural group, in this case white people. Because society can knock an ethnic group down to such a great extent, the more inferior group, or the Native Americans, start to hold the same negative conceptions about themselves" (journal #9). As she recounted the part of the novel where Tayo went on to the white man's land to get his cattle, she was frustrated that Tayo saw himself as a thief and was reluctant to see the whites as the real thieves:

> Tayo also thought at one point, "White people don't steal because they always had the money to buy whatever they wanted" (191). Just by acknowledging that white people had more money than minority groups, they'd have no need to be thieves because they would already have everything they would already want. Therefore, Tayo believes that he is a thief due to the beliefs of society. (journal #9)

Marissa displayed her critical thinking skills through her engagement with white privilege and her ability to see the larger context. To combat internalized racism, she made a connection to the larger systemic forces. Again and again, Marissa was able to take in a wider view and see the big picture and cycle of oppression.

In her next entry, Marissa focused on Tayo's biracial identity and his struggle with his whiteness. After recalling a scene form the book where some of Tayo's friends mock him because of his biracial identity, she explored the value of his whiteness: "Emo brings Tayo down one level and explains that he isn't better than everyone else, however he's just the same, and that Tayo believes that he is better than everyone else due to the part of him that is white. The first realization was said in the hope that Tayo would come down from his established yet invisible soapbox" (journal #10). She highlighted a complicated theme in the novel: Tayo's biracial identity and his position within his Native American community. He received certain

messages that said white was better, as seen with his cousin Rocky and his desire to be assimilated into white culture, and other messages that denigrated him because he was a "half-breed." Marissa went on to suggest that this made Tayo think differently about his whiteness; instead of seeing it as a curse, he began to see himself as superior. I challenged this notion, but was impressed that Marissa was really taking on the issue in a critical way: "Yet as this point in the novel, does it make him feel better or just more of an outcast? This feeling [of superiority] is only temporary. I think Tayo's whiteness is both a blessing and a curse" (response, journal #10). The struggle with the value or privilege of white identity was a core issue in the novel and was also important to Marissa as she explored her own biracial identity over the course of the semester.

Cultural Contexts, Borderlands, and Women Warriors

After completing *Ceremony,* we read Maxine Hong Kingston's *Woman Warrior,* the story of a young Chinese-American woman growing up in San Francisco. Although it was a very different kind of narrative, students made connections and saw patterns because of the value of stories in each text. Just as *Ceremony* had a series of myths that ran throughout the narrative, *Woman Warrior* also used myth-like stories to help the reader understand larger cultural contexts. Sue wrote:

> Reading *Woman Warrior* after *Ceremony* gives new light to *Woman Warrior.* The stories, the ghosts, and the mythical-like stories at the first half of each chapter have more meaning now than just a writing style. It is very central to the book because it is part of the culture of the book. Like reading *Ceremony* was a ceremony in and of itself, reading *Woman Warrior* as Maxine's story tells us how one becomes a woman warrior and how Maxine became one. Actually, reading the book as one of the stories makes us a part of the story, too. (journal #12)

She identified with the literature through both form and content, illustrating that how the story is told is as important as what the story is.

Sue went on to make an important distinction. Although in some ways she could identify with the author, her experience as a Korean-American did not directly parallel Kingston's Chinese-American cultural background:

> I can strongly identify with Maxine, but many times in her life seem too surreal to parallel or resemble anyone else's. My mother is not at all like Maxine's mom, even though we and they are Asian. Being Asian doesn't mean individuals can seem alien to Americans without attributing it to being Asian. All that Maxine's mom does, all her tricks and wants, don't represent all Asian mothers. She is Maxine's mom, and that's that. (journal #12)

Being Asian would not mean the same thing to all Asians. I wrote, "Yes, she is part of an Asian community yet also a specific woman, wife, and mother" (response, journal #12). We had to be able to distinguish between individual and group identities to be sure we were not making generalizations about large, complicated ethnic groups.

In comparison, Alicia identified strongly with the novel and recognized the strength of the female characters as a reflection of the strength of their culture:

> Perhaps I enjoy [Woman Warrior] so much due to the cultural similarities to my own background. . . And perhaps I like this novel because of its universal theme = strength of human will power and in this case, especially focused on women, us. I find myself cheering on Brave Orchid surviving, what I know from my own family experiences, a very difficult journey = trying to live in the US as an immigrant...This power of an individual, which I come across in Chinese characteristics, is truly amazing. The strength that comes from deep within, reinforced and hardened by life, is stronger than any human strength I know. . . I'm always taken aback by the amount of energy that hits me every time I read a Chinese novel/story/biography, etc. (journal #12)

When she wrote "us," I read it as "Chinese women," and found it to be an interesting choice of words, especially since she knew I would be the one reading her entries. Yet I also found it very affirming, as if she was writing, in her mind, for a larger audience and felt safe enough to include me, in a way, as a sympathetic reader. She made an important observation about the value of the novel in relation to her own experience, how the story took on more meaning because she knew what the characters were up against. And she also recognized the more universal subject of

human will power, transitioning between her specific cultural identity and a larger context of struggle and perseverance.

In her next entry, she reflected on being Japanese in relation to a Chinese perspective: "I also learned a lot more about Chinese culture, and how they may perceive me" (journal #13), highlighting the differences between Asian cultures that Sue mentioned. Alicia went on to make some important observations about moving between and across cultures. In contrast to the narrator of the novel who negotiates a hyphenated, Chinese-American identity and often exists in a borderland between the two cultures, Alicia's cultural boundaries were quite clear:

> I have never been living in between two worlds. I have always lived in one or the other, switching between them everyday, many times a day. There can be, I think, no "middle ground." There cannot be a path where there's an equal balance of two cultures when they contradict each other so much. By trying to do so, both cultures lose their meaning, purpose. So then, someone may say that isn't it technically the same thing that I'm contradicting both cultures by switching between them. I don't really now, bur I don't think so because when I'm "in" one culture, the boundaries are well-defined, and I don't think about the "other" world. (journal #13)

I found her critical analysis of her own situation in relation to the main character insightful and demonstrated her active engagement with the text as well as her own identity construction. She could position herself differently because the narrator's experience did not resonate with her own. And the distinction she made was quite important. I wrote: "It is important to talk about crossing boundaries vs. living in a borderland or in an 'in-between' state. It sounds like you have found the best way to move between two cultures, and the important thing is that it work for you" (response, journal #13). As an immigrant, Alicia was in a very different situation than if she had been born in the US to Japanese parents. As teachers think about the students who sit before them, it is important that they are aware of these subtle but critical differences in identity and connections to culture.

Writing from an African-American perspective, Mariah connected with the narrator's ability to overcome obstacles and to fight for her place in both her family and the larger society:

"The book was the story of womanhood and triumph and life. It shows there is a warrior in all of us that needs to be unleashed to serve its purpose or just to let you know that it is there and can be used when needed" (journal #13). Mariah was able to forge a strong connection with the novel even though she was not Asian. For her, the cultural message was about gender, the power of being a woman, and she experienced its value across racial and ethnic lines. Christi had a similar experience: "My favorite part in the book *Woman Warrior* was at the end when she finally found her voice. People search for their identities and voices all through their lifetime, no matter what race you come form. Each person needs to standout, to be unique, and to be independent. Sometimes people need to say things out loud, just so they can realize them for themselves" (journal #13). The issue of expression and personal strength emerged for both Mariah and Christi, pointing to the ways in which novels reached readers on very different levels depending on their context and position in society.

Christi also reflected on the role and manifestation of oppression in the novel:

> This book acknowledges that the enemy, the stranger, the oppressor, the immoral group, is not just one person or group. The "ghosts" are all around every single person. The Chinese immigrants see the ghosts as the Americans, while their ancestors back in China see the immigrants as ghosts... Anyone different, anyone creating new traditions is a ghost. If you define ghosts in this way, then ghosts are not bad. They might be scary, intimidating, or provoke envy, but they are not bad. Difference scares, difference intimidates, but everyone is a ghost to someone else. (journal #13)

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Once again, Christi's insight revealed an important aspect of the novel: depending on the context, our experience could be very different from someone else's. And she was able to take a central image in the novel, ghosts, and develop a compelling argument for their role. Her analysis of difference as just difference, not deficit, revealed the complexity of the image as well as her emerging understanding and critical inquiry. Considering her own position as a dominant-culture student, I wondered if her argument that oppressors existed in all groups was a way of reframing her white privilege, opening up the possibility that not just white people were ghosts and perpetrators of oppression.

Stephanie also addressed issues of oppression when she noted that paradoxes presented in the novel resonated with her experience as a young woman: "Women are supposed to be warriors, yet essentially slaves to their husbands. These two things cannot coexist; it is impossible. And there are so many things like this that occur all the time. I am supposed to get straight A's and be active in many different clubs at school, but at the same time, if I don't spend time with my parents or get my chores done, I get criticized" (journal #12). Like the narrator, she felt the pressure of competing expectations that were often in direct conflict with each other. She began to look for a rationale, some way to make sense of what she realized:

> I think this happens both for me and in *Woman Warrior* when the expectations for behavior are set by other people... by the people who don't have to fit the behavior b/c it doesn't apply to them. In *Woman Warrior* it is a male-driven society that sets the expectations for women, and because a woman can never really succeed in this setting, she is continually repressed. It's a cycle set by male society that keeps women as the inferior group. (journal #12)

Stephanie turned to the larger social context in order to make sense of her experience. Her language was compelling as she set up a parallel between herself and the novel. As dictated by the patriarchal society, she recognized the vicious cycle of sexism that was dependent on power, expectations, and compliance.

Mary focused specifically on the expectations for white women, again paralleling a theme in the novel, but relating it to her specific cultural group. She moved through a series of descriptions, examining the expectations that existed at different ages and stages in a white woman's life:

> In the first stage of life, a period spanning from birth to adolescence, there are minimal yet clear standards for white girls. They are expected to be obedient to their mothers, fathers, teachers, and other authority figures. Girls are not expected to "act out" or misbehave, whereas boys are generally expected to be somewhat wild in temperament and behavior. White girls are expected to be feminine in not only their appearances but also their manner and preferences. Although these expectations may also exist for girls of other ethnic or racial backgrounds, I do not know enough about those cultures to argue that point. (journal #13)

She could apply the novel's premise to her own life, but she was also aware that it might have wider implications for other women even if she was not sure of the details. She went on to note that as white women got older, the expectations became "more clearly defined" (journal #13), citing a boyfriend, college, and a good job as some of the expected norms along with marriage and motherhood. She then turned her attention to white privilege, adding a layer of complexity to her argument:

> Despite the evident social expectations of white women, most of these women do not experience the expectations because they are white. Being white affords a woman's decision to be more readily accepted than perhaps a black or Chinese woman's. By being white, one obstacle to be accepted by a predominately white, male workforce is avoided. However for all women, the cultural expectations are slow changing, and difficult to challenge. (journal #13)

Moving between a general discussion of women and specific cultural groups of women, Mary made some distinctions that were critical to her understanding of the intersections between race, ethnicity, and gender. All women faced sexism, but the degree to which the discrimination impacted their lives was dependent on identities beyond their gender. In my response, I affirmed her perspective:

> A very thoughtful entry, [Mary]. It is so important to look at these expectations that seem very rigid for women, especially white women. The pressure to succeed is huge, and the sexual stereotypes are so strong. White women MUST be pretty, thin, cool, calm, mothers (note the heterosexism here) and wives. We really have to be all. Then on the other side is the privilege we have – and you address this point really well. It is so complicated! (response, journal #13)

My response looked specifically at white women, a position from which I could speak with authority, and I used "we" to include both Mary and me in my analysis. As I acknowledged Mary's insight, I implicated myself, something that might have been more difficult if this were a student of color's entry.

Just as the narrator in *Woman Warrior* was on a quest to find out who she was, Marissa related to her "in that I'm at this struggling stage as well" (journal #12). Then, she moved away

from uncertainty and described herself as Assyrian, saying she had "finally reached a consensus on myself" (journal #13) and went on to recount the narrator's process of identity development:

> The narrator, on the other hand, is searching to find out who she is, not what people already think of her as... She tries to relate her own experiences with that of her mother's. The daughter finds good and bad values for being both Chinese and American... She is forced to accept that she is Chinese as the facts are laid out on the table. As for her American side, she engages in American life activities occasionally; sometimes she liked them, sometimes she didn't... Maybe through time the daughter will come face to face with her identity and learn to accept that she is biracial. (journal #12)

I found her last statement intriguing and wrote, "Yet she is not biracial because her parents are both Chinese. She is bi-ethnic in a sense" (response, journal #12). Given her background and the fact that Marissa's mom was Assyrian, perhaps she recognized the narrator's experience and internalized it as her own, thus locating the narrator as "bi-racial."

Multiple Points of View and the Role of Privilege

These questions of race and ethnicity continued as we read *Twilight Los Angeles,1992*, by Anna Deavere Smith. In a stunning series of interviews presented as monologues, Smith's text reconstructs the aftermath of the Rodney King beating in the U.S., which involved a series of violent uprisings in response to police brutality and a high-profile trial. Los Angeles police officers were caught on videotape beating Rodney King, an African-American, after he was stopped in his car and assumed to be high on hallucinogenic drugs. After all of the white officers were acquitted, Los Angeles erupted, and Smith set out to interview as many people as possible who were in some way connected with the events. Elizabeth noted that *Twilight* was a very different kind of text for her: "Smith included every detail of the interview. The structure she used for displaying people's words was also unique. It was refreshing to read something which is structured differently on the page" (journal #14). Smith tended not to present the monologues in a traditional format; they did not fill the page like text from a novel. Christi pointed out the fact that there was no single author even though Smith wrote the text: "There is no one narrative

telling us what to think. There is no author trying to get us to agree with a certain side. Many people's opinions are simply [laid] out on the page" (journal #14). This narrative was both structurally and stylistically different from other texts the students were familiar with, exemplifying Bank's (2002) conceptual approach to teaching which places a significant event at the center of learning and looks at what happened from a variety of perspectives.

Smith compiled all of her interviews and chose a sampling that represented as many voices as possible, including Rodney King's aunt, the police commissioner, a Korean grocer, and an upper-class white resident. Each "chapter" is a viewpoint, complete with a title and brief description of the person who is speaking. Consistently, my students responded to the multiple perspectives presented in the narrative. Sue called *Twilight* "pretty spectacular as an endeavor, and the result really opened my eyes so many times. Each person I read about and the nuances of what he or she said, the stories they told, and the little messages from Smith herself about their social milieu or physical appearance really gave me a feel for their voices" (journal #14). For Alicia, the different view points gave her insight: "It was especially intriguing to me because I had never had a clear understanding or perspective of a white person, except that they saw all 'non-whites' as bad or inferior" (journal #14). Alison wrote about the value of viewing the situation from another position: "If it were not for this, I would not be able to step into another's shoes and experience what they felt" (journal #14). The narrative provided students with an opportunity to hear the voices of others centered around a specific event, and from this "otherness," they were able to understand the event in a new light: "[These] interviews gave such excellent windows into the way people think and how they defend themselves" (Kimmy, journal #13).

Several students commented that another value of the multiple perspectives was the ability to see a more complete presentation of what happened: "It shows so many perspectives from so many different people about the issues that you really get a full picture of the

atmosphere surrounding the incident" (Stephanie, #13). Here diversity created meaning, citing the dependence on multiple points of view for understanding: "It shows us what was going on from all perspectives... All we have to do is listen to the words and not discount any person's perspective" (Christi, journal #14). Students also wrote about the value of dialogue, especially dialogue around difference. Alicia wrote: "I saw a slight hope that there can be conversation and peaceful understanding of the other's perspective, even if there can't be agreement" (journal #14), and even though the text may not offer solutions, the reader can negotiate the meaning for herself, reconciling her own experience with the characters' lives: "Twilight is a book that shows the differences plain as day, let's everything be seen, no darkness, but the book does not resolve the issues and leaves a feeling of unsureness – the beginning of darkness. But, it is the job of the reader to sort it all out and find the light and break through the darkness" (Mariah, journal #14). Mariah's metaphorical reference to twilight as the "beginning of darkness" reflected the confusion in the text and the idea that without a bigger picture, people were isolated and could not make sense of what was happening. To combat the rising darkness, or ignorance, Smith offered the reader many pieces of the puzzle in order to construct a more enlightened understanding of the events.

Three students called the narrative "shocking" (Sue, Rasika, Stephanie) and several were either unfamiliar with the events or "disconnected" (Rasika, journal #15) from what happened even though they were aware of the event. This raised the issue of positionality, where students were in relation to the events and voices presented: "Positionality means that important aspects of our identity, for example, our gender, our race, our class, our age... are markers of relational positions rather than essential qualities" (Banks, 1996:6). This concept reveals the importance of identifying our context and frames of reference; we may not be aware of another point of view because of our own limited perspective. And our position will have a direct effect on our interpretation: "The story has an entirely different spin depending on whether you identify with

or are identified as white, black, or Korean" (Nina, journal #14). Identity was not only how we saw ourselves, but also how we were seen by others; it was a two-way process. Elizabeth noted that even similarities in identity did not guarantee an identical experience:

> The fact that people interpreted the events of this time differently is amazing and really attributes to the idea that everyone is different, and thus they see and think about things differently. Because such unique people are speaking in this play, I often found myself trying to find common threads of thought between similar people (such as those with the same ethnicity). Though there were some commonalities, for the most part, each voice was extremely unique and had very different thoughts about the time period. (journal #14)

As she noted, the tendency was to look for points of intersection, "commonalities," but in the search for connections, one had to be careful not to over generalize.

Elizabeth also commented on her position in relation to the text: "I love that it comes totally from the perspective of ordinary people. I thought it was amazing to read about regular people who had such profound insight... It was a pleasant surprise to hear such amazing things from people who are not much unlike me" (journal #14). She wrote that she was used to "accomplished" authors saying brilliant things, but not people with whom she could identify. I found this particularly striking: what does it mean if we are not giving students a wide range of texts by a variety of writers? If they never see themselves in the curriculum, how can we expect them to connect and develop critical questions? There was also a central comment about power here: who had knowledge and who could speak with authority? Part of the role of Ethnic Voices was to help students see their experiences as valid and to develop a space for identity exploration, awareness, and development. For this to happen, they had to see themselves as "accomplished," recognizing the value of their own voices.

Another theme that emerged in the *Twilight* entries was economic and white privilege. Rasika knew that the events were a "blur" for her:

> It didn't make sense to me, but it didn't have to make sense. I lived in a world only slightly touched by prejudice and that prejudice I had come to expect. My mother's income made us middle class; I never once experienced hunger, poverty, or gross injustice... What *Twilight* showed me was how disconnected the rich and

> the poor [are]. In our booming economy, the rich get richer, but with the inflation that comes with such an economy, the poor are actually getting poorer. This acerbates the rift between the different racial groups. (journal #15)

Rasika noted her class privilege with clarity: she could choose what she saw and what she ignored. Her privilege allowed her distance form the events in a way that would not be possible for someone of a lower socioeconomic status. And she made an important connection between race and class. Alison offered another perspective: "It is also interesting to read about upper class individuals tell about their experience and fear. Many people criticized the rich because it seemed like they didn't care, but they [the rich] are actually not being arrogant – they are scared and left without much to do" (journal #15). The issue of fear was raised by several students, and I said in my response: "Yes, they need to find their place, and because we usually don't talk about the role of whites (or those who are rich) in the struggle for social justice, they can be left out" (response, journal #15). Upon reflection, I found my response lacking because it seemed to offer an excuse for why affluent people seemed to distance themselves. Yet as Rasika wrote, they had a choice, which means they could either act or separate themselves from what was happening.

Expanding on the connection between race and class, Alicia commented on white privilege while referring to the narrative of a television producer: "She was able to see more from the different perspectives of the people. It was kind of sad to read this because it's almost like this riot hadn't the effect that the rioters wanted. It seemed like their cause, their outcry wasn't even responded to. The white people just removed themselves" (journal #14). Again, white people had the option to avoid the conflict, and Tara made a similar observation about white isolation:

> One of the very fascinating themes presented in *Twilight* is the white sense of separation from the riots. In "Godzilla," the young man notes the references to "they." No description, no identification, no individuality or humanity: "It almost doesn't matter who, it's irrelevant. Somebody" (137). Paula Weinstein talks about feeling isolated" and how "everything retreated" (212). (journal #14)

Tara's use of textual references developed a larger sense of what was happening for white folks during the uprisings. Even the language, the vague references to "them," supported the segregation and inability of whites to connect across racial and class lines. Tara continued her analysis and offered stunning insight into the manifestations of white privilege:

> In "I Was Scared," the young woman unconsciously refers to "they" (157). Tied into this separation and lack of specifics is a nebulous fear and a sense of "generic guilt" (136) and "impotence" (205). The white community in and around LA went into a "sense of real terror" (212) even though relatively few upper or middle class whites felt direct effects, and perhaps because of the lack of specifics, the mobs of the riots seemed to embody the threat of minorities to white complacence and superiority. Because many are unable or unwilling to identify the concrete problems, people, causes, and the white majority's responsibility, those who truly wanted to change things couldn't move against the social inertia. (journal #14)

Tara exposed the root cause of a sense of entitlement: fear represented by an unwillingness to identify with or have empathy for others who were different. Surrounding all of this was the notion of superiority, another way for whites to position themselves above the fray. She went on to reveal further the sinister workings of white privilege: "The majority didn't want to directly address or solve the problems; they only want them to go away. They want to "look at what's possible, not what's real" (212). There's an unconscious and yet almost willful aspect to the fear and ignorance" (journal #14). I found Tara's analysis provocative:

> Yes, because if we get specific and we know who "they" are, then we will have to be responsible for that knowledge. If we don't know, we think we are not accountable. The fear plays a role, and you point to one of the key problems: segregation. Whites are more separated and isolated from people of color then they were 25 years ago. Of course, class plays a big role in this, but the separation allows for a kind of "irresponsible" isolation. (response, journal #14)

My use of "we" here was interesting, and I assumed a connection with Tara even though I knew she saw herself as biracial at times because of her Jewish identity. Yet as I read her entry, it was as if she was speaking from her white self because I found her analysis so incisive. Yet one could also argue that is was her position as a border crosser that allowed her, like Marissa, to see the complexity of situations from a dual vantage point.

Kimmy, who previously had written extensively on white privilege, offered her viewpoint on the reactions of whites:

> I kept feeling that all the white people were trying to defend themselves as if they didn't want to be represented as racists. I can understand their wishes, but they were so concerned with it that they put up natural barriers around the real issues and what they might have actually said. It might have been the fact that a black woman was interviewing people. I think that fact definitely influences the responses of the interviewees. I got a feeling that the white people thought they were being judged. That to me represents why LA is so far from understanding and healing. Everyone is scared of everyone else and with fear, nothing can be accomplished. (journal #13)

Most obvious was her position as white and subsequent identification with white responses, but she also moved beyond a position of empathy to one of critical assessment. Yes, she knew where they were coming from, but that did not justify their behavior. Kimmy also raised the issue of the identity of the author in relation to those being interviewed, again highlighting the role of positionality in the narrative. My response affirmed Kimmy and also referred to the larger role of the text: "What Smith tries to do is move beyond judgment so we can hear each other and really listen. Yet the fear really keeps us from coming together" (response, journal #13). Finally, in response to expressions of fear, Alicia made this observation: "I was reminded that you do need to make an effort, and you do need to be not afraid to connect with people because one thing everyone understands is the human nature of a need for connection" (journal #14).

To conclude the entries on *Twilight*, three students made critical observations and creative responses that I found quite moving. Sue referred to a notion of collective truth: "It was pretty incredible to hear all these witnesses and their individual stories together to make up a collective memory of the LA riots... They really wanted to be heard. They all should be heard because their collective voices make the truth of what happened" (journal #14). The idea of bearing witness to the events was echoed by Marissa:

> The author interviewed a minimum of 200 people to get a generalized, complete analysis of people's and victim's views on the entire matter. The reason why I say victims is because I think that every single person that was physically, mentally, or emotionally inflicted by these mishaps were all involved. People can be

> involved by actually taking a part in the riots and beatings or just by being spectators and silently watching the events. (journal #14)

Both Sue and Marissa recognized a larger context in which folks were connected by unseen forces. One way was the telling of their stories and a desire to be listened to. Another insight was that the truth only emerged from a diversity of perspectives; without a collection of viewpoints, there was no truth. And then there was the notion that even in our isolation, we were still connected because a bystander was a witness. There was no passive involvement or neutral stance; all were implicated because they shared some kind of experience of the event.

Mariah offered this poem entitled "Twilight":

> I almost forgot...
> But you can't forget
> The torture of another a human being
> Why did it happen
> But why was it videotaped
> Why wasn't it stopped?
> But then we have the record you have the record...
> It shows what happened why can't they see?
> The pain the injustice
> If it was someone else would it
> Have been stopped. The judgment
> How could they say that they were free
> Didn't they see...
> What's plain to you and me?
>
> Fire, smoke, bullets, chaos everywhere
> Man against man, woman against woman
> Innocent and not so innocent both
> Hurt alike no differentiation...
> All of those...
> All of you...
> The other
> Not me
> But them
> They are the problem
> Problems arise from problems
> Nothing can be fair until the truth is said
> The truth is waiting to be
> Revealed it is waiting, it is there,
> Plain as day.
> Do you see? I can see. (journal #14)

In my response, I asked Mariah if I could read her poem to the class, which I did, and we were all affected my Mariah's creative, questioning response to a challenging piece of literature.

What it Means to be "Colored"

The last text we studied together was Ntozake Shange's *for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf.* As a choreopoem, it was a new genre for my students and the most distinctive work we read. It combined music, dance, and poetry to create an innovative theater piece that gave voice to the experiences of women, particularly African-American women, in late twentieth-century America. When we finished our reading, I asked everyone to write about what it meant to be a "colored girl," and the responses revealed compelling notions of how we are constructed by race, ethnicity, and gender. Sue wrote:

> I always thought of "colored people" as black people, though it is a term from the 50's that we're not supposed to use anymore. Sometimes I get it mixed up with "people of color," a group of which I now consider myself. I think the negative connotation of "colored" made me resist the term "person of color" at first because it made me think of ugly, dirty, impure, second-class, not really American, and special in a bad way, like being a minority was bad for the first time. Now, I prefer the term "person of color" to "Oriental" since Oriental seems to me to be the equivalent of "colored person" – an outdated term used by ignorant people. (journal #17)

Sue continued with a striking comparison of the terms "colored" and "white": "Colored person makes me think marked, colored over in paint, or tainted. White is normal, good, regular, what people should be or aim to achieve. Colored is second or third class, less human and less deserving" (journal #17). Just when we think we were combating racism in this country, narratives like Sue's emerged that reminded us that racial stereotypes and prejudice were alive and well. Adolescents continued to receive clear messages and value judgments about color distinctions. Then there was a shift in her thinking:

> When Ms. [Denevi] asked us to think about what "colored girl" meant, however, it sounded different to me and suddenly I considered myself part of that group. Maybe because I read the choreopoem and related with the voices, or I felt the voices championed women of all races, but "colored person" now sounds more

> like "vibrant person." Like, "Oh, she had such a colorful personality!" I like to think of myself as vibrant or full of vitality, and would like to be considered a colored person. (journal #17)

As Sue could begin to define herself, to call or name who she was, she became more comfortable with the term. This highlights the critical importance of self-identification (Banks 2002).

Keisha spoke from her own position as an African-American young woman and constructed her own interpretation of the term, citing very specific examples of what made someone "colored":

> Until now I thought I was a colored girl. I though that myself and all the non-whites in this room were colored girls. Now I don't even see that b/c traditionally [Mariah] and I have been the only colored girls. Did people ever call Asians colored in the past? I'm not sure. A colored girl now is someone who has a color. It is one of the women in the book, purple, green, blue, red, orange. It is the literal colors of the rainbow. The most true colors there are. The colors everyone appreciates. Being a colored girl means you will experience wrath, support, love, and hate all while trying to find a place. It means that you look at people differently. You know that you never completely know the people around you. You barely know yourself. Colored girls fall, stumble, and pick themselves back up, only being sure of the strength that won't let them stay prostrate. (journal #17)

Keisha spoke to vulnerability as well as inherent strength. Citing the historical definition of the term 'colored," she noted how the term had evolved, and she added her own definition which included not only a sense of who she was, but also her position or place in society. Here context served as an important aspect of identity development (Nieto 1999; Tatum 1997). She concluded with her own statement of her experience as a colored girl:

> A colored girl may even try to fight this strength. She may try to pass off as someone who is weak and needs assistance. Or a colored girl may try to pretend like she never falls in the first place when that's not completely true either. I am that kind of colored girl. I am the one who masks ignorance with big words; unfeeling with hugs and pity. I am the one who never falls except in private. And even then I am too self-conscious to tell myself" (journal #17).

This was quite revealing for Keisha because she did appear to be full of confidence and calm in any situation. Here she opened up a part of herself that she rarely, if ever, showed to the world.

Mary offered another interpretation of the term, perhaps reflecting her position as a white woman:

> A "colored girl" is one who is different than the mainstream. They may not initially feel colored themselves, but after living in the world for long enough, society begins to affect them to feel separated and not necessarily as pure or untouched as other "white" members of society. However, these colored girls have color! They are not dull and lifeless – they are full of rich culture and warm life. They exist as an enriching part of the world. They are the real ones. (journal #17)

Mary presented a mixed message here. One message from society echoed Sue's conception of colored as marked, something that was placed upon or done to someone, representing a lack of agency. And it caused negative feelings, of being less worthy then someone who was white or not "colored." Yet Mary asserted color as vibrancy, again resonating Sue's concluding thoughts, and located colored girls as authentic and valuable.

Then Mary offered another perspective:

> Everyone is "colored" in some regard, We all have differentiating characteristics that allow us to be different and even cause us to feel isolated from society at times. In those moments, we are colored and everyone else is white – boring – dull. It is color that enriches us and gives meaning to all things. Imagine a world without color – all white and black – boring. I would find it too stark and limiting. Colors allow us to mix and blend into whoever, whatever we want to be. Through this process identity and individuality are created. Colors are free – there are less restrictions. (journal #17)

I was struck by her shift from "they" to "we": Here she included herself in a definition of "colored" whereas before, she has been clear that white was not colored. Yet she also asserted a dichotomy between white and colored, demonstrating the complexity of the issue. As opposed to using race as a distinction, she turned to other characteristics, such as "boring" and "free," to delineate the difference and to move her argument beyond race. Finally, Mary offered this question: "However, in a white/black limiting world, are colors really free? ... In our world, colors are not always wanted/accepted. Therefore, only the strong can be colored and exist in their own entirety – comfortable being different, comfortable being themselves. This is the beauty of being colored" (journal #17). While presenting another conception of "colored" as strong, she returned to the realm of race and discrimination based on color.

Alicia's process of identifying with the work was more complicated:

> It was like touching an open wound, bloody, slippery, slimy, infected. It was quite disturbing. I got the impression of repetition and of a never-ending cycle of oppression...I just don't know what to do to help... Their world is so remote from what we live in that I find myself lost as where to start, how to even identify myself with these women. I have very little in common with them, except that I am also a woman like them. (journal #15)

Here was the beginning of a connection across difference because of a gender association. Although she couldn't relate to their particular circumstances, experiences with violence, and perhaps their socio-economic status, as a woman, she could find a place to begin to understand. Marissa commented on her own process of identification that was aided by the powerful voices of the female protagonists:

> As I read it, I got wrapped up into the characters' experiences. Even though I haven't experienced many of these events for myself, I felt as though I had after reading what each lady had to say. It's the power of the "voice," not just for all people, but in this case, for all women internationally... It serves as a way to unify al women's fears, strengths, aspirations, downfalls, and risks, into one simple way. (journal #15)

Again, gender served as a way of bringing disparate experiences together.

Similarly, Elizabeth responded to the voices of women telling their stories: "What surprised me the most was the amazingly thoughtful and intelligent things the women said while telling their life stories. All of a sudden they will be talking about dancing and then they will come out with these amazing pearls of wisdom" (journal #15). Elizabeth could honor the value of personal narrative, seeing stories as sites of insight. This was the second time she made a comment of this nature, and I continue to wonder if we are giving students a variety of texts so they can see that knowledge is produced in storytelling as well as formal theoretical writing or nineteenth-century literature. Elizabeth went on to offer a critical interpretation of the symbolic nature of different characters, each one designated a color, i.e. Lady in Red, Lady in Brown, etc.: "Each woman represented a multitude of other women rather than each one being the same person every time they spoke... I believe that the author used the colors of the rainbow to represent all different women, But 7 colors can't represent everyone. Therefore, within each

woman was multiple people" (journal #15). Christi also recognized the unifying aspect of the colors and the ability to unite women across difference: "It shows how much all women, especially colored women, have to deal with and experience throughout their lives" (journal #15). In addition to the power of identification, Marissa discussed the possibility for better understanding and resistance to oppression that could emerge from the voices: "Yes, all the women had different colors to serve as identifiable names of each one, but what they truly represent are different women, all unique, perhaps all of different races, cultures, and languages... By the power of the voice, many people will see how similar they are. People will learn to confront each other, confront their fears" (journal #15).

Similar to her response to *Twilight*, Mariah wrote a poem to express her reaction to *for colored girls*:

> The voices are all one linked
> Together
> A common thread
> Same experiences
> Expressed in different ways
> Real & True
> Language is unperfect but left
> To its own meaning
>
> "Their" universe laid out in a book
> In "six blocks" together with the colors
> Colors of the rainbow
> No black
> No white
> But simple
> Brown
> Yellow
> Blue
> Red
> Orange
> Purple
> Green
> No names
> But colors
> A more universal bond
> A woman's universal bond
> Womanhood
> Adulthood

Lost childhood
Growing up individual
Growing up alike
Across color lines
The blending of to make a rainbow. (journal #16)

Mariah echoed many of the themes described earlier while, at the same time, raised some new issues such as age and maturity and moving between and across racial lines.

Stephanie also wrote a creative writing response, two very different pieces that seemed to reflect Shange's work, but with Stephanie's own unique perspective. The pieces were entitled "When do we feel beautiful?"

> I am through this broken door and down cement steps, holding my stomach on the tile floor and moaning. My body shaped like the fetus I once was in my mother's swollen, painful belly. Tears slide down my cheeks as my breath chokes me, in and out, the effort stretching the skin over my knuckles white. I am down here alone with the vainess of pain and shame. Cycles cycle through me like waves, like trains, like all those nightmares we wish we never had. I am forced to own this woman's blood and pain whom I've never known, forced to be a woman. And all I feel is ugly. (journal #15)

The second piece had a very different tone:

> I am dancing hip-hop-step-jump-bam-wam, smiling like a new year, smiling like sunlight. Spinning, glittering like silver and gold. I watch her quietly. My eyes following like secret agents. I always know where she is and when she's laughing, and who she's with. I am waiting. Standing alone in the kitchen. I am imagining her fingers and the shape of lips. Her arms sneak up behind me to hold me. She says she wants to do nothing but hold me all night. She tells me I am beautiful. And all I feel is gorgeous. (journal #15)

By using "we" in the title, she seemed to want to reflect a universal experience shared by all women, yet located that experience in the "I," offering a personal perspective as well. She described both the denial and affirmation of identity, moving from the horror of painful isolation to the joy of love and comfort. This was her offering of what it meant to be a "colored girl," defined in her own terms, in her own way.

Conclusion

The issue of identification with the literature did not fall into any kind of recognizable pattern because both whites and students of color identified with their own ethnic groups as well as across racial and ethnic lines. Students also connected through other social identifiers such as gender, and often they noted the complexity of identity, citing intersections of ethnicity and race with gender and socio-economic status. This process of identification demonstrated an ability to draw together various points of view based on some element of shared experience. It was not a process of assimilation, but rather a struggle to find commonalities *and* to clarify who we were through differences as well as similarities.

Regarding the nature of my responses, I found them to be both affirming and questioning. I was again reminded that we can't see the whole picture at first glance, stressing the value of reflective practice and the need to go back and revisit my responses to see what I did well and learn from what I missed. I was struck by the high level of critical thinking in response to the works of literature. Students made connections to both their own lives as well as larger societal connections. They saw patterns and relationships, moving comfortably between their own experiences and the stories of others. There was an obvious dialogical process at work in their writing. Students frequently commented on the value of learning about something from multiple points of view, and through their writing, I could observe how much they were learning through difference.

The journal process made visible the way in which these young women could imagine the lives of others in the fiction we read. Using their imaginations, their journal writing fostered capacities necessary for understanding what has gone on to create individual identity as well as the identities of others. They could use the fiction to make sense of personal aspects of their ethnic identity which gave them better insight into how others constructed their ethnicity.

Conclusion: Why Look at Ethnic Identity in the Classroom?

For their final journal entry, I asked students to reflect on their experience in Ethnic Voices. I thought it was appropriate to include their responses here to further illustrate the value and necessity of studying ethnic identity in schools. Since one of the goals of this project was to foreground student voices, it is essential that their perspectives be included in an assessment of our work together. They offered insightful comments into their own process as well as the larger significance of our studies, allowing for a comprehensive view of what the course meant to them and their sense of themselves as ethnic young women. Similarly, I reflected on my role and experience as their teacher and co-writer as I responded to their final entries.

Discussion of Findings

1. What we can learn from students' journals about the ways in which ethnicity, race, racism, and privilege are experienced?
2. How can teachers respond effectively to student writing about ethnic and racial identity?
3. What is the role of the literature classroom in regards to dialogue about aspects of student and teacher identity?

My central research inquiry focused on the development of conceptions of ethnicity in the context of a literature class, Ethnic Voices. I examined what could be learned from student journals and teacher responses that addressed notions of ethnic and racial identity. Due to the varying experiences of the students, I analyzed their responses in light of their ethnic backgrounds. The three groups I looked at, whites, students of color, and multi-ethnic students, had distinct notions of their ethnic and racial identities and recounted their histories and understandings in varying ways. Of course, there were some similarities among the young women, most notably their struggle to define and understand the term "ethnicity." All three

groups also noted that school was one of the first sites where they experienced interactions that created a new awareness of difference. While the vast majority of white students were just beginning their exploration of their racial and ethnic identity, the students of color and multi-ethnic students had a more fully developed sense of their ethnic identity because they were *not* white and had to understand aspects of their identity that did not conform to mainstream, privileged norms. Their engagement with difference usually began at an early age, allowing for a longer period of development than some of the white students who did not think about their ethnicity or race until they enrolled in Ethnic Voices.

The literature had a significant impact on their understanding of their ethnic identity. Some of the writers articulated experiences that were familiar to students, thus validating their experiences and encouraging reflection. Others detailed events that were new to students, and these kinds of eye-opening accounts had another kind of effect. Students realized that there were all kinds of experiences and realities that they were not familiar with, and this prompted another kind of reflection and interrogation of assumptions and stereotypes. The literature served as a catalyst, a means for these students to consider their own identity and understanding of others. Through their journal entries, the students were able to move between the texts and their own experiences in order to better understand their identity. They could reflect on their own life while imagining what it might be like to be somebody else, demonstrating the value of this approach to diversity work in schools.

Overall, the students did not come to a resolved or clearly defined understanding of their ethnic identity. None of the white students wrote about a greater understanding of their ethnic group, but all described an important engagement with their racial group membership. Students of color and the multi-ethnic students made more specific references to their ethnicity, and these students seemed to have a greater sense of both their ethnic and racial group membership as the course progressed. However, the vast majority of all the students recognized the process that they

were now engaged in: a more conscious awareness that this part of who they were meant something, whether they had thought about it or not. They were at different stages when they began the course, and they arrived at varying levels of understanding when we concluded our work together. Yet this process was dependent on our interaction. Our ethnic notions were constructed through our writing, and we learned about others and ourselves because of the presence of different voices. Their final assessments detailed what the course meant to them and what they had learned from the dialogic writing we engaged in over the course of the semester.

The Big Picture

Turning to students' final journal entries, they commented on just about every aspect of the course, and several focused on the overall effect of the semester. Marissa noted the process of interactive learning: "This class is not just a class to learn about how different people handle and discover their identities and races, but most importantly how we, as students, discover our identities through reading and acknowledging other people's struggles" (journal #16). In a direct, to-the-point entry, Keisha stated: "ASSUMPTIONS make and ASS out of you and me" (journal #16). Talking directly to me, Keisha went on to say: "Remember (yes, you too) to stay real, and as hard as we continue to fight, don't forget the little things" (journal #16). She was the only one who addressed me directly in her final entry, and I thought it was important that she considered me part of process. Tara reminded us to challenge our first impressions: "You can't just look at a situation, or just at a person...You have to look at an individual as an individual, but see them in their context. And don't assume you know who they are or what their situation is. Only the surface level is visible, and we come in three dimensions, not two" (journal #16). She made the critical distinction between group and individual identity and stressed the role of context.

As opposed to seeing the end of the semester as a finished product, two students saw the class as a process: "Now that Ethnic Voices has come to an end, hopefully this does not mean the

quest for our identities will cease with it...I don't think I've fully figured out what I am or what I want to be" (Marissa, journal #16). Nina left with more questions than answers: "I have enjoyed this class and its energy. I love leaving the room with my mind totally boggled and my head racing. Thank you!" (journal #16). All of these writers offered "big picture" comments, distilling some of the lessons they had learned into concise reflections.

Greater Awareness of Self and Others

Another theme that emerged in the concluding journal entries was the notion of expanded perspectives: "Through this class I have taken many steps in order to learn about myself to a greater extent" (Marissa, journal #16). Kimmy shared a similar reaction: "This class has been a huge source of inspiration for me. The way I look at myself and the way I look at others has changed... I see things more critically now. What a class such as Ethnic Voices allows you to do it gain a completely new perspective on the world around you" (journal #15). She also gained insight into the difference between her group and individual identity: "I feel like I am more myself and not just one more of those white people. You don't have to live up to the everyday expectations of your ethnicity or group, you can be who you are" (journal #15). For some, there were very personal insights such as, "Ethnic Voices has forced me to think about how I treat people in a different way that is hard to explain"(Elizabeth, journal #16), or specific moments when self-awareness emerged:

> I remember when Ethnic Voices first taught me something. It was when I had to relive my experience of finding out about my ethnicity. I hadn't realized that it was such a painful experience, and it taught me that I had been a victim of racism at a young age... I realized that my calling myself [Sue] instead of Seuki was the direct result of people's prejudice and inability to take the time to respect me by calling me by my proper name. (Sue, journal #15)

There were also contradictions: "I know I haven't changed and I know I want to leave this class as a different person. I felt a little guilty thinking about how I haven't changed. However, after I thought a little while I came to think that the purpose of this class was not to

force people to change. It was to create an atmosphere where no one had to change and everyone could be open and accepted" (Christi, journal #16). Although the course was not about changing minds, there was a sense that by reading and writing about ourselves and difference, we would not emerge from the experience with the same set of assumptions we started with. Christi described herself as unchanged, yet after writing the above statement, Christi concluded, "It was a wonderful class, we read amazing books, and I am going away feeling more familiar with all angles of seeing things" (journal #16). Her change might not have been dramatic or immediately apparent, but she did note that her perspective had expanded. I would suggest that even her engagement with change and feelings of guilt indicate some kind of new awareness and discomfort, signaling a shift.

One student gained insight into a specific group: "I also realized that white Americans weren't a great mass of ignorant people, and they could get victimized too, sometimes by their own prejudice, and sometimes by other's, but everyone needs to be more educated" (Sue, journal #15). Another recognized that the class had created its own kind of group membership: "I am not cynical, I feel privileged. I am a member of a very distinguished group of enlightened folk" (Keisha, journal #16). Finally, Sue took her new perspective as direction for future action:

> I loved Ethnic Voices and learning about myself and my prejudices... It makes me sad to know that what I've learned is not taught to everyone, but I know that it is my job to help others come to terms with issues like identity, multi-culturalism, prejudice, and just human decency because of what I have already learned. It kind of makes me think, "Where will I go next?" where else can I go to discuss these issues in a safe environment? (Sue, journal #15)

These kind of comments reminded me of why the course is significant and why it works: Ethnic Voices pushes students outside of themselves, asking them to consider their ethnic identity in the light of others. For some, this is a brand new experience. For others, it affirms and encourages more development.

Value of a Diverse Learning Environment

In addition to gaining new points of view, several students commented on the value of the diverse make-up of the class: "By having a fairly small class with a large variety of diversity, I am introduced to other students' quest for identities" (Marissa, journal #16). As noted earlier, most classes in the school were racially homogeneous, and even if there was ethnic diversity, it was usually not recognized. A heterogeneous learning environment provided a new opportunity: "Before I took this class, I was quite aware of the commonly held stereotypes about various racial groups. However, after being in such a diverse class, my eyes have really been opened to how people of other racial groups truly feel" (Elizabeth, journal #16).

Alicia wrote about her struggle with the class diversity:

> The colored girls often talked about the white girls (outside of class), saying things such as, "They wouldn't understand" type of thing. It was as if it was a given that white people can't understand what colored people go through... The colored girls had this sort of mutual understanding and a sense of community separate from the white girls – is that the embodiment of society? Isn't that the sort of thing we were supposed to break down? It almost seemed as if this class strengthened than bond between the colored girls, against the white girls. Perhaps that's why our discussions seemed 'deep' but superficial at the same time. We were half shut-up within this wall from beginning to end. The white girls seemed more ready to accept a change in the way of thinking about others. Is this a result of oppression instilled in us? (journal #16)

Alicia raised critical issues here, citing the fact that the deep history of racial tension in the US could not be solved in one semester no matter how much we wrote or dialogued. Just as the class sought to break down ethnic barriers, certain connections were reinforced. The inability of the "colored girls" to recognize their own blind spots might have been aided by their group membership, but a sense of belonging does not necessarily lead to distrust of other groups. Our assumptions and stereotypes of others are firmly rooted in the way we are socialized into American culture (Banks 2002; Nieto 1999). Nina came away with a decidedly different experience: "Connections that I've made with many of those in out class continue to amaze me. But, I guess that is what it's all about... connecting, crossing boundaries and venturing into the uncomfortable realm. I always feel a little stronger after every little step" (Nina, journal #16).

And for Sue, ethnic diversity would remain a salient part of who she was: "'Diversity' isn't just a word to be thrown about. Diversity isn't something that one can become tired of. It is very pertinent, and for me, a very deep reaching and personal issue" (journal #13).

Value of Dialogic Communication in an Intentional Community

Quoting Bakhtin, Holquist (1990) writes, "If two persons look at each other, one sees aspects of the other person and of the space we are in that the other does not and – this is very important – *vice versa:* 'As we gaze at each other, two different worlds are reflected in the pupils of our eyes'" (xxii). Ethnic Voices was rooted in this notion of dialogue as reciprocity: "Dialogue, in Bakhtin's conception of it, is a way to conceive nonidentity; in other words, it is a recognition of the constant need for exchange – and exchange is fueled by differences in value" (xli). There was a give and take of ideas, a forum for airing one's concerns and having an opportunity to hear from others: "In this classroom environment, I've been fortunate to have the opportunity to speak my mind and attain feedback from my peers" (Marissa, journal #16). Kimmy noted that the classroom, as opposed to what happens in the lunchroom or hallways, created a unique context because students did not tend to have many friends from their social circle in the same class:

> The class allowed some of their prejudices to come out and be known to the class...The communication in the classroom was great because people were more alone in the class, they weren't with their respective groups. When people are alone it is much easier to see the similarities between individuals of different ethnicities. It is much easier to talk to someone alone then it is if they have 20 friends with them" (journal #15)

Students could take more risks with their dialogue without fear of social reprisal if they said something unpopular, naïve, or insensitive. Elizabeth noted the benefits of dialogue over silence when faced with difficult topics:

> Because our class has discussed some very current and tough topics, I now have a better understanding for why society is the way it is and a better understanding of how other people look at issues aside from myself. This new understanding has

> done me a world of good because by understanding how others feel about tough topics which are usually left undiscussed, I am able to understand why they react the way they do... Discussing hard topics is much more beneficial than leaving the topics in silence. Silence can solve nothing and often makes things worse. By talking things out, everyone can understand each other's perspectives. (journal #16)

Understanding and identity were produced through dialogue as each speaker added her voice to the overall construction of the class: "Everyone has shared a little piece of themselves. When each of us responds to this story, event, or passing remark, another idea comes out. I kind of see the overall class discussions as the dialogue in the book. Nothing is lost once it is voiced, and that's pretty incredible" (Nina, journal #16). Over the course of the semester, we were all putting our mark on the class, creating a larger whole by virtue of our individual contributions and reactions. Sue wrote that she felt "like I'm a part of the movement toward discussion and greater understanding within my community because of the knowledge I have gained from Ethnic Voices" (journal #13), taking what she learned from our dialogue and applying it to other contexts.

Dialogic communication is also connected to issues of power and safety: "We can go as far as to say that in real life people talk most of all about what others talk about – they transmit, recall, weigh and pass judgment on other people's words, opinions, assertions, information; people are upset by others' words, or agree with them, contest them, refer to them and so forth" (Bakhtin 1981:338). Bakhtin notes the inherent struggle present in all dialogic communication, and Kimmy had to balance her need to learn with her fear of hurting others: "[Ethnic Voices] also allows you a somewhat safe place to discuss the different things you are experiencing. I say somewhat because as a white person I am always worried about offending another ethnicity. Without bringing this out in the open, however, I have no hope of understanding the way I think about ethnicity" (journal #15). Alicia expressed a similar sentiment, noting that many students might have had difficulty overcoming the need to be polite or inoffensive when discussing controversial or challenging topics: "I feel that many of us still kept much of our 'true' thoughts

to ourselves...Students in our class seemed very sensitive to hurting others' feelings, which is good, but you can't get to deep that way" (journal #16). She could see that too much worry about offending others would inhibit authentic exchange. For a more conservative student, this issue of power became even more critical. How could a student who knew her views were unpopular safely state her opinion without fear of being run out of the room? "I did not always feel safe saying my beliefs out loud in class. I know that I am probably the student with the most conservative views and beliefs: I'm religious, white, blond, blue eyes, and yes, even a republican. I feel like my views were the only ones that still have a negative air around them. I don't feel mad or angry, just confused" (Christi, journal #16). Feeling that she couldn't put some of her concerns on the table, Christi was not allowed the same opportunity for exchange that Holquist and Bakhtin suggest is an important part of dialogic communication, perhaps leading to her confusion.

I struggled with my response, wanting to support Christi and, at the same time, help her to push her thinking to another level. In "The Art of Response," Crone-Blevins (2002) details the difficulty and responsibility teachers have responding to student writing. Above all, she suggests that the key to successful critique is not the actual words written to students, but rather the teacher's underlying attitude and philosophy. Students need to feel that they are being taken seriously and have a strong sense of their own worth as writers. In my response to Christi, I tried to follow Crone-Blevins advice:

> I think you may have changed in ways that may not be obvious to you right now. I wish you could have felt more comfortable, but I also heard wonderful, important things from you. It is a hard class for white people – especially being a white teacher– yet we need to do the work. We need to have the space and time to think about who we are, who we want to be, and who we are in relation to others. (response, journal #16)

My hope was she would feel like I was seriously addressing her concerns while offering another viewpoint. Upon reflection, I can see that I needed to do more with Christi. As I noted before, she missed a significant part of the semester due to illness, but I probably could have been more

proactive had I considered her position relative to the rest of the class. This is not to say that a teacher can anticipate every hurdle a student might face, but rather to highlight the value of really utilizing what we know about students to make their class experience more successful. The outcomes may not change, but our intensions may hold the key to greater understanding and less margin for error.

Teacher as Learner

As noted in the description of my methodology, I did not intend to include my comments to students when I first conceived of this project. It was only after I had inadvertently copied my responses along with the students' entries that I decided to include my responses. As it turned out, this was one of the most valuable aspects of the project because not only has there been little attention to teacher responses to student journal writing in the context of ethnic identification, but also teachers are not encouraged, generally, to reflect on their process of identification in relation to their work with students. In analyzing both student stories and my responses, I was able to detail the value of dialogic writing as a means of looking at teacher development alongside of student identity exploration. As I read through my responses, I could understand how my own identity development, or lack thereof, impacted how I responded to students. In some ways, it was easier for me to write back to white students because of my familiarity with white identity and privilege. I, too, had not really considered my ethnic heritage until after secondary school, and although I was frustrated with some of the white students, at least I knew where they were coming from.

With my students of color and multi-ethnic students, it was a different story. I could not easily share anecdotes with them because my experience was so different. This challenged my teaching, forcing me either to avoid certain responses or to respond with platitudes because I just didn't know what to say. In both cases, I was not serving these students well. My most effective

responses met these students where they were and posed questions. As opposed to being the expert with all the answers, I had to trust that if I created the right environment and showed the students that I was interested and cared, they would meet me half way, which they did.

Strengths and Weaknesses

As a teacher-researcher, my intimacy with the students was both a strength and a weakness. Because I was their teacher and worked with them almost everyday, we developed a sense of rapport that made it easier to write to one another. We knew each other, and there was a level of trust present that facilitated in-depth sharing and exploration. We held a common goal with clear expectations, allowing us to participate in a joint process. Yet, I was still their teacher and had to give them a grade at the end of the semester. I also knew intimate details of their life, which complicated any notion of a traditional teacher-student relationship. Further, my role as a researcher added another layer to our relationship. I found that I could not read *and* analyze their entries during the course of my teaching because I did not have enough perspective or time. I decided to just collect the data and take as many notes as I could in my research journal.

The typical class size of most independent schools was a definite advantage. With a ratio of fourteen students to one teacher, I was able to respond to each student individually. With a larger number, the interactions would have been different, and bi-monthly responses might not have even been possible with a larger group because of the demands on teacher time. I don't think I could have physically responded to more students every other week. Although it was a small sample group, our numbers allowed for rich data. In this context, the number of journal entries I collected provided many examples from each student that were detailed and nuanced. Also, because the data was collected over course of semester, I could trace their development over time and in relation to specific texts.

The limited time period was also a weakness in that I could only reflect on their process of identification for several months. An ongoing analysis over the course of several years would provide a longer trajectory of development and understanding. In addition, more sample classes would allow for more generalizations and greater application of findings beyond just one case study.

Implications for Further Work

Due to the knowledge gained from this study, there is a need for more in-depth case studies of ethnic identity understanding, especially research that could follow students' notions of their ethnicity as they progress through secondary school. It would be interesting to see what could be gained from a longer research period. Also, more teacher–researchers conducting this kind of research in their classrooms would help bridge the divide between theory and practice. By engaging in reflective practice, teachers would have a better sense of their ability to understand what is happening for students and how they as teachers could intervene to aid ethnic identity exploration.

There is also a need for greater attention to teacher ethnic identity exploration to help educators relate to *all* students. One of my key findings was the value of my own identity exploration. As I was more aware of my own background, it was easier for me to relate to my students and support their learning. The growing diversity in the US and the wider world demonstrates the need for cross-cultural understanding. How do we communicate across difference? This line of inquiry would help teachers identify strategies for working effectively with students who do not share their racial or ethnic background.

In school contexts where European American ethnic groups are dominant, their culture is often institutionalized as the norm, leaving students of color to construct their identities in a way that may require them to restrict the expression or experience of their ethnicity: "Scholars point

out that the psychological dimensions of ethnicity, if compromised, can create conflict for individuals whose social relationships and cultural practices become removed from their sense of identity. In classrooms, teachers may not be aware of the emotional and cognitive stress caused by this psychological dissonance" (Sheets 1999:97). In order to ensure that certain students are not oppressed and that their learning is not compromised, teachers must be attentive to the ways school culture can shape ethnic identity. Thus, the English classroom emerges as an important site for identity exploration, and teachers must also engage in this process: "To improve practice, teachers, counselors, and psychologists must examine their own ethnic identity development as well as understand the ethnic identity development of their particular students" (Sheets 1999:99). Our work in Ethnic Voices reflected the connection between teacher perspectives, ethnic and racial identity development, and teaching practice.

In predominantly white schools, Hollins (1999) has shown that the ethnic and racial identity development of African-American teachers is a salient factor in their relationships with students and colleagues. Those who develop an in-depth awareness of their ethnic identity at an early age (most often by attending schools were they were in the majority) can draw on their culture as a source of strength. They recognize the importance of maintaining active involvement in the African-American community. They tend to be more conscious of their responses to colleagues and students and more sensitive to the needs of African-American students than either their European-American or African-American colleagues who do not express a strong ethnic identity. In contrast, African-American teachers with a more attenuated ethnic and racial identity were socialized outside their cultural group in predominantly white schools. Their lack of identity development creates problems with both students and colleagues. For example, "At times, one teacher seemed embarrassed by the presence of African American youngsters and tried to avoid being identified with them or showing any special sensitivity to them. One such teacher refused to join African American special interest groups and openly admitted having

difficulty relating to other African Americans" (Hollins 1999:184). In addition, these teachers are more tolerant of racist behavior from European Americans than their colleagues who express a strong ethnic identity: "At times, they seemed to emulate this racist behavior. These authors refer to this phenomenon as *codependent racism*" (Hollins 1999:184).

This evidence of the relationship between early socialization and racial identity development suggests that early childhood experiences affect personal and group identity development which, in turn, impacts adult behavior. Applied to my own situation, I was acutely aware of the effects of my lack of identity development on my interactions with students. The expansion of this type of research would provide even more insights into the connections between school, identity development, and anti-bias behavior. Hollins concludes by recommending four approaches to self-understanding and the promotion of a healthy identity for teachers and their students, all of which examine the self from multiple perspectives: recalling and documenting one's own schooling, looking at how the role of the teacher is affected by past experiences, recognizing personal feelings and perceptions of self/others, and "developing a functional definition of culture that encompasses a worldview that shapes thoughts and responses to people, events, situations, and phenomena" (193). Clearly, the ethnic identity development of students and teachers is closely aligned and intimately connected.

Hollins work describes a decrease in racist behavior from those teachers who have a more fully developed sense of their ethnic identity. Similarly, in light of the final comments made by the students, Ethnic Voices helped to decrease biased behavior by increasing ethnic and racial self-consciousness. Students were more aware of themselves and the perspectives of others by the end of the semester, and many discussed how their impressions of others had changed. They were less likely to make assumptions and more willing to challenge their own and others' views, especially if they were relying on stereotypes or a lack of information. Creating more class

cultures that support ethnic identity exploration could, hopefully, reduce stereotyping and prejudicial behavior by increasing understanding.

The lack of ethnic identity awareness of the white students remains an area of concern, one that requires further research and insight. What does it mean if mainstream students continue to see ethnicity and race as something they don't have and, therefore, don't need to worry about? The consequences of the lack of attention to these aspects of their identity are real, yet teachers still struggle to raise issues of ethnic and racial identity in the classroom. My research along with other research findings cited here begin to delineate the role of ethnicity and race in learning, and there is a need for greater understanding of white students and ways to support their ethnic identity.

These journal entries and responses point out the necessity of having a course like Ethnic Voices where students and their teacher are actively engaged in dialogic writing. Our correspondence created a record of our experiences as well as a document of our development. Together we were able to learn and grow, challenging each other and ourselves along the way. I am greatly indebted to the Ethnic Voices class of 1999. My teaching and my life will never be the same because of our work, and as I prepare to return to the classroom in the fall of 2003, their voices have not left my head. I suspect they will always be with me as, perhaps, my voice lives with them in some small way.

APPENDIX A

Course Syllabus

Ethnic Voices in American Literature (AP)
E. Denevi
Fall 1999

Course Texts:

Anzia Yezierska - *Bread Givers*
Edwidge Danticat - "Children of the Sea," from *Krik? Krak!*
Kaye Gibbons - *Ellen Foster*
Leslie Marmon Silko - *Ceremony*
Anna Deavere Smith - *Twilight Los Angeles, 1992*
Maxine Hong Kingston - *The Woman Warrior*
Ntozake Shange - *for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf*
Short stories, poems and essays as assigned

General Course Theme:

Ethnic identity in America involves a complex set of relationships, and Ethnic Voices explores how historical, cultural, and social experiences shape our identity and our understanding of others. The course asks students to look carefully at their own ethnicities, and the literature provides many perspectives on ethnicity and how individuals are positioned within larger communities. We will examine the role of power and hierarchy in ethnic relations to see why certain groups are dominant while others are marginalized. While looking at ethnicity, many of the writers we read will discuss other social identifiers, such as gender, class and "race," in an effort to illuminate the complicated and dynamic nature of ethnic identity. We will look critically at stereotypes and assumptions concerning ethnic groups in an effort to see many of the familiar concepts we take for granted in a new, unfamiliar light. Similarly, Ethnic Voices also gives voice to ideas, feelings, and opinions that may not be familiar to us. The larger goal of the course is to comprehend and affirm our own ethnic backgrounds and to see how our social positions are integrally connected to and dependent on others. As many of the writers demonstrate, individuals and societies must move beyond positions of guilt and resentment in order to build coalitions that seek equality and empowerment for all ethnic groups. The course is demanding on both a personal and academic level, and we will engage in a variety of writing assignments and projects that will ask students to share and question their own life histories.

The key word is "voice." In order to understand race and ethnicity, we must listen attentively to each other and to ourselves. Responses to issues of ethnicity are complex; discussions can sometimes be charged, threatening, enlightening, frustrating, or revelatory. What is critically important is that this classroom be a safe place, a place to question and explore while also listening with an open heart and mind to the experiences and perceptions of others.

(General Course Theme, cont'd)

All of the texts we will read explore the conflict between the assimilation into American culture and the preservation of a culture of origin (meaning a non-American identity). I also refer to this idea as the conflict of the "hyphen" – referring literally to the hyphen that joins so many American and traditionally non-American groups together, such as African-American, Asian-American, etc. I want to explore and challenge what the hyphen signifies in order to come to a better understanding of ethnicity and its meaning in modern America.

Course Requirements:

All reading assignments should be completed prior to their treatment in class. Books or reading handouts must be brought to class with you on the day they are to be discussed. All written work is expected at the beginning of class. No late work will be accepted unless prior arrangements have been made. You are required to make up any work missed due to an excused absence.

• Informal Writing:

Reading/Writing Journal - Since the class will emphasize discussion, active participation is expected. To encourage thoughtful participation, you will keep a reading/writing journal. It is a place for you to ask questions, to raise issues, to make sense of our discussions and the readings, and to dig deeper into the material.

• Formal Writing:

This semester formal essays will be assigned regularly. Generally, you will be encouraged to revise and rewrite each formal essay before submitting it for a grade. I will do my best to offer conferencing periods so we have the opportunity to discuss a draft one-on-one. In-class essays will also be assigned at regular intervals. All papers written outside of class, unless otherwise noted, should be word-processed (double spaced) with careful attention paid to grammar, usage, and spelling.

All students are expected to participate actively in class discussions. This may involve listening carefully to your classmates or offering your own interpretation or experience. In order to be a full participant, it is important that you come to class prepared, having completed all homework assignments.

The following four components will comprise your semester grade:

Informal writing	30% of semester grade
Formal writing	30%
Class participation	20%
Final exam	20%

APPENDIX B

Class Participants – Ethnic Voices 1999

WHITE STUDENTS

1. **Elizabeth** – Although she knew her ethnic background was Irish and German, she did not have any real sense of her ethnic identity.

2. **Kimmy** – Self-identified as having a Norwegian and Anglo-Saxon ethnic background.

3. **Mary** – Identified with her family from New England.

4. **Christi** – She did not describe an ethnicity for herself although she did describe herself as white. She also strongly identified as Christian.

5. **Stephanie** – Although very aware of her racial identity, she did not describe her ethnic background.

STUDENTS OF COLOR

1. **Sue** – Korean-American

2. **Keisha** – African-American

3. **Alicia** – Japanese-American (born in Japan)

4. **Rasika** – Indo-American (born in India)

5. **Nina** – Indo-American

6. **Alison** – Chinese- American (family from the Philippines)

7. **Mariah** – African-American

MULTI-ETHNIC STUDENTS

1. **Tara** – Self-identified as Jewish and white

2. **Marissa** – Self-identified as white on her father's side and Assyrian on her mother's side.

APPENDIX C

Below is the handout I gave to all students to describe the journal writing process. They received it on the first day as part of the course description.

READING - WRITING JOURNAL:

This journal is primarily for you. As time goes on, it should become a place for you to trace the emergence of your thoughts and to help you generate ideas for paper topics. You will use the journal for in-class notes/writing as well as for your entries outside of class. It will serve as a record of your entire experience this semester. Therefore, it is important that you bring your journal to class on a daily basis.

• **Journal Entries:** A minimum of two entries per week. All entries should be dated and numbered.

Your written response in the journal does not have to be a response to the book you are reading. What you write in this journal should be what you want to preserve/remember as a reader and writer. Written entries are your thoughts, reactions, interpretations, questions on what you are reading, what you are writing, and what you are observing in the world around you. Consider the following:

> **Quote or point out:** Quote a part of the book, your own writing, or something that you heard or read, that is provocative to you.
>
> **Experiences or memories:** Are the readings or discussions evoking particular memories? Write about them and, perhaps, connect them to class material.
>
> **Reactions:** Do you love/hate/ can't stop reading this play/poem/essay? Examine why.
>
> **Questions or connections:** What don't you understand? Why did the author do something in a particular way? Connections to issues in the world, at home, at school?
>
> **Evaluation:** How does this compare to other things that you have read? That we have read this semester? What makes it an effective or ineffective piece of writing?
>
> **Evolution:** If and when your thinking changes, be sure to be specific about where, when, and why these changes have occurred. Provide a specific context for the change.

• **Response to your Journal Entries:**

You will be sharing your journal primarily with me, and I will write comments in response to your entries. The response to your journal is meant to "affirm what you know, challenge your thinking, and extend your learning" (Atwell). You will get written comments every few weeks.

• **Journal Evaluation:**

Your journal will receive a letter grade toward the end of each quarter. It will be graded on the following criteria:

Quantity of writing - have you made a regular practice of log writing? Did you generate a certain volume of entries?

Quality of writing - (the most important aspect)
Did you dive in, explore, expand, question, connect, digress, reflect?
Did you use a variety of genres? (analytical, autobiographical, creative)

APPENDIX D

Description of Course Texts

Fiction:

Bread Givers, by Anna Ye

This is a novel about a young Jewish woman whose family immigrated to the United States from Eastern Europe in the early 1900's. Sara, the protagonist, struggles to create an American life for herself while maintaining some kind of connection to her family's European roots. Her father demands allegiance to the old ways, and Sara and her sisters are faced with losing his respect or striking out on their own for economic and social independence. As her sisters are married off to men they don't love, Sara vows to get an education and become a teacher so she will never be dependent on a man again. The novel provides an in-depth portrait of early twentieth-century New York teeming with immigrants, hopes for a new life, and the bitter economic reality of first generation life in America.

"Children of the Sea," by Edwidge Danticat, from her collection *Krik? Krak!*

Told through the letters of two young lovers, this short story details the journey of a young man escaping from Haiti while his girlfriend remains in the country. After a military coup, the young man is forced to leave or face imprisonment. So, he sets off in a leaky boat in the hopes of arriving in America, writing to his girlfriend along the way as their journey becomes more perilous. Unfortunately, the boat does not make it, and the young man becomes a child of the sea, echoing the thousands of slaves who died during the middle passage. Yet the fact that these two young people write to each other even though it is fairly certain the letters will never be sent creates a sense of hope and belief in the power of love.

Ellen Foster, by Kaye Gibbons

Gibbons tells the story of Ellen Foster, an eleven year-old white girl growing up in poverty in the southern US. In the beginning of the novel, she lives with her father who is an alcoholic and who does not take good care of her after her mom died. Bouncing between relatives and foster homes, the story details Ellen's survival and determination to find a home where she is loved. When she becomes close to Starletta, an African-American girl, she must confront the racism she has grown up with in order to be a true friend.

Ceremony, by Leslie Marmon Silko

This novel follows the journey of Tayo, a young biracial man, and his attempt to reconcile both his Native-American and white cultural identities. As he recovers from injuries suffered during World War II, he tries to heal his community in the American southwest by reconnecting with the earth. The novel itself is a ceremony, and Tayo saves his people through stories and the power of storytelling. Silko chronicles life on a reservation burdened with extreme poverty, hopelessness, and alcoholism. She deftly illustrates the effects of prejudice and racism on an entire group of people and the power of spirituality to overcome all odds.

(Appendix D, continued)

Woman Warrior, by Maxine Hong Kingston

Growing up in Northern California, a young Chinese woman must find a way to live with the history of her Chinese ancestors while becoming an American woman. Her family tells her stories from China, detailing the exploits of strong women such as Fa Mu Lan and the protagonist's aunt called No Name Woman. Over the course of the novel, she discovers her own way of being a Chinese woman in a country that is so different from the one her parents left to start a new life.

Twilight Los Angeles, 1992, by Anna Deveare Smith

In a stunning series of interviews presented as monologues, Smith's text reconstructs the aftermath of the Rodney King beating in the U.S., which involved a series of violent uprisings in response to police brutality and a high-profile court trial. Los Angeles police officers were caught on videotape beating Rodney King, an African-American, after he was stopped in his car and assumed to be high on hallucinogenic drugs. After all of the white officers were acquitted, Los Angeles erupted, and Smith set out to interview as many people as possible who were in some way connected with the events. She shows that there are many sides to any story, presenting a complex and rich account of what happened from multiple points of view.

for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf, by Ntozake Shange

First presented on stage in the 1970's, this choreopoem combines music, dance, and poetry to create an innovative theater piece. It gives voice to the experiences of women, particularly African-American women, in late twentieth-century America. Told through the voices of seven women named "Lady in Brown," "Lady in Red," etc., the piece demonstrates the ability of women to work together to overcome hardships and to support one another in the face of sexism and abuse.

Non-fiction articles:

"White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," by Peggy McIntosh, *Peace and Freedom*, July/August 1989.

In this essay, McIntosh writes about her experience of coming to understand how racism and racial privilege operate in the US. She had been taught that racism was something that put others at a disadvantage, but she had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which put her at an advantage. She describes white privilege as an invisible knapsack of unearned privileges that she can use every day, and she shares a detailed list of the privileges she gets just because she was born white.

"Dialects: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly – They're All Myths," by Margalit Fox, *New York Times Magazine*, September 12, 1999.

This article critiques the notion of Standard English. Fox asserts that all languages judged on purely linguistic grounds have equal merit. The fact that some dialects are considered substandard comes from language myths that serve to preserve the social order. These myths about certain dialects, such as Ebonics, stand in for things we would rather not talk about like race.

(Appendix D, continued)

Articles from *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua:

1. "Gee, You Don't Seem Like an Indian from the Reservation," by Barbara Cameron

Cameron reflects on her life growing up on a reservation and the racial violence her community, experienced. Due to American stereotypes about Native Americans, white people are often surprised that she is "articulate." She often feels caught between two worlds, trying to strike a balance between white and Indian worlds. She advocates co-responsibility from people of color and white people to work to eradicate racism.

2."Invisibility is an Unnatural Disaster: Reflections of an Asian-American Woman," by Mitsuye Yamada

Yamada details the struggle of Asian-American women to be seen as part of the multicultural history of the US. Since she was taught not to be seen for who she was, it took her a long time to acknowledge her invisibility and belief in the stereotype of the passive Asian woman. She advocates for social justice and communicates an unwillingness to stand by and remain in the background of American life.

APPENDIX E

Full-Text Sample Journal Entries

Below are full-text entries from three student journals: Kimmy, Tara, and Keisha.

Kimmy's sample entries:

9/1/99 When did you first become aware of your ethnicity?

I first learned that I was Norwegian, and a bunch of other Anglo=Saxon parts around the age of 10 or 11. To me that represents the word "ethnicity," where you come from. I first felt that I was white/traditional caucasian when I came to Camino. At Camino diversity was just beginning to be really pushed for and stressed in our assemblies. As a sixth grader I remember almost all of our assemblies centering around the topic of race. It was strange to be told that I was different because up until those assemblies I hadn't really been aware of the fact. My best friend from kindergarten through 5th grade was and African-American and I'd never been told that, if you can understand this, she was black or different or anything like that. Coming to Camino was the first time it was called to my attention that whites and blacks were separate. Now as I continue here ethnicity has changed in meaning from where you come from to a statement of almost defensiveness. With all the political hoopla flying around people are so afraid of being judged by just their color. In a way it is a good identifier (ethnicity) because you learn so many things from just one person with so many in them. But it was first at Camino that I learned of ethnicity as an identifier or a label.

Response:

Great entry here, and you raise the important issue of race v. ethnicity as well as our own identity v. what society tells us. Yes, whiteness has to become more complicated. But again, we have to separate "whiteness" as seen by others from what it really means for each white person as an individual. Can we not be defensive or feel guilty, yet pledge ourselves to learning who we are so we can promote social equality? Can we know that to be white is a privilege, but that it can be positive as well as oppressive? How do we move beyond guilt and defensiveness?

9/6/99

I think that the community norms are going to help my class think about how they think. At first the name threw me off because when I read "norms" they seemed like guidelines that weren't normal for people to adhere to. I wish that the community norms were more widely known and adopted. Starting with a small group is better than nothing though. From having our second day of class I can tell that Ethnic Voices is not for the faint of heart. Everyone in the class has a lot of guts, even the members who just listen. It takes courage just to listen to others and respond with genuine care. That's the thing that sets Ethnic Voices apart from the other English courses. Everything that is said is so authentic and genuine. People speak from their hearts. It is a unique atmosphere that we have. I think the norms will keep the class a safe place for people and their hearts.

Response:

I hope so! But you are SO right – it is hard work! It is messy to talk about these issues, but the group is committed. And if we keep listening, keep challenging ourselves, we will get there. Keep the faith...

9/13/99

Children of the Sea is the kind of story that makes you think about your life situation without you knowing it. When you read such absolute horror and read how desolate their conditions are, your mind is fixed and concentrated on the story. It is only afterward that you catch yourself driving a car or sitting in a nice chair and think, "I'm not on that boat, nor am I in Haiti." You wonder at the privilege and luck you have been born into. Then you are shamed that you do nothing, or not enough for those who aren't you. Children of the Sea makes you feel the pain and the love and any other emotion it can, so that you realize only later how extremely removed you are from the story. But for that short amount of time that I read the story, I was one of them.

Response:

Well, you are really getting at the heart of the matter: privilege. How does it work? Who gets it and why? How do we "share" it if we have it? Should we feel guilty, or do we need to think about what to do with our guilt, how to make it productive?

9/26/99

I never thought about my whiteness as being a privilege. Reading Ellen Foster and doing my interview has brought me to a different conclusion. Being the "norm" is a privilege because in general circumstances what I do is not representative of my entire race. That is one of the points raised in part of the thesis paper that our class read. Generally, people don't have a preconceived notion of how I will act or what my behavioral history is. Society treats me well because I am a white, upper class girl. When I say "in general," I mean the people I interact with at school and often outside of school. When a police officer pulled me over for speeding on Marsh road, he took a look at me, asked where I lived and said I could be on my way. Yes, I'm white and I live in PALO ALTO. I put that in capitals because there is an assumption when you live in an affluent neighborhood that you have everything you want. Unfortunately, people who judge others like that will never get to know the person they are judging.

Response:

I agree! What I benefit most from white privilege is the very thing you described: people assume I am good, honest, helpful, etc. "Palo Alto" is code for so many things whether we like it or not. Usually, it is just a privilege, but at times I feel bad and shameful, especially if I am with a group of people who live somewhere else. Then, I don't like the assumption that I am a spoiled, rich white woman! I don't want to be grouped. Yet, I take the benefits everyday – ugh! It is so confusing. Your story here is quite poignant.

9/28/99

I feel like I have to apologize for going to Camino when I tell other people where I go to school. It's not because of the lack of boys or how small it is. It's because to people who know the school or have heard of it, Camino is where the "rich" people go. From my friends at [the public school] I hear that the impression of Camino is not that we are all smart, but that we have all the money. So every time someone raises their eyebrows and makes that kind of "ooohhh" sound, I feel ashamed of the way I live, the school that I go to, and things that I have. Other than those times, I don't notice except to see things that I don't have that people here do. It's kind of like this vicious cycle in which no one is justified in what they think about whoever they are judging. With these preconceptions and pre-formed judgments no one ever gets to know anyone that they think is on a different level. I don't know how to change what other people think of me, but I can always change how I perceive my privilege, as something I work for.

Response:

Yes, we have to start with ourselves...but something has to change, doesn't it? We can't feel bad for being at Camino because the guilt will eat us up inside. What could we do to expand [our school's] image? How could the kids at [the public school] start to see Camino differently? What are we willing to do to help others see us differently? This is a really serious issue, and maybe we can talk about it in class soon.

10/5/99

The direction I need to move towards most is the East. I am not spiritual in the least, and I think that a certain degree of the East would make me more whole. I am not especially generous or disciplined, two characteristics which I feel are essential to live my life. It is hard to balance the East and the South, discipline and spontaneity. There are ways that you can have both, but I have not found a balance as of yet. It takes work to try to concentrate on the four directions and the ways in which you could change yourself. Conscious effort to try and balance yourself is a lot of work. The only characteristics of the East I have are compassion, loyalty and some compassion. To have some is not enough with the Medicine wheel. Will is the key to being balanced with the four directions and will is a hard thing to build up.

Response:

Yes! Yes! Yes!

10/6/99

As I read Ceremony this huge feeling of appreciation builds inside of me. How can Tayo see so much in the land? I wish I could be connected to the earth like he is, like the Native American are. Yet I can only be thankful and appreciate that I was privileged enough to read about so great a love. The rituals and ceremonies make me look around at my culture and realize that I an one of the hated 'destroyers' that Tayo speaks of. I pollute the water, waste the earth, and poison the sky. The language that the land is described in makes you feel like you can actually see the color of the rocks. The pollen that Tayo places on animal tracks intrigues me and I want to know what that particular blessing means or represents. The absolute love that Tayo has for the land to which he belongs and the faith he puts in the land amazes me. Tayo lets the reader know what the value of the earth is. In the face of Tayo's knowledge I feel like I have no knowledge of the land that I live on. Through reading Ceremony I feel I can appreciate the land on a higher level.

Response:

Great! The novel really does explore the intimate connection between humans and the earth, and in our modern lives, we forget this!
P.S. I have another resource book for you on Native Americans – remind me to give it to you.

10/12/99

It is hard for me to understand the character of Rocky in Ceremony. I am so amazed and jealous of the traditions, ceremonies, and stories that the Native Americans have. Their culture has survived for such a long time and has such a rich history that Rocky seems to be ungrateful. He wishes to blend into the white society, one without ancient tradition other than oppression, and one in which he will never be equal in the eyes of whites. To want to leave behind the respect that Native Americans exhibit toward each other (some) to live in a world that would never fully respect him as a person is not something I could do. I can understand Rocky's want to expand his horizons beyond the limiting land of the reservation. It seems to me that he wishes to

completely deny his Native American heritage. I find the heritage of Native Americans extraordinary and very different from anything I have. I find myself becoming angry at Rocky for his lack of respect for his elders and the stories he has been taught. It's hard to be on the outside looking in and I know that I could never understand how Rocky must have felt, but I find myself feeling ashamed for him. If I had a culture like the Native American's I hope that I would appreciate its worth.

Response:

Yet it lets you see how destructive racism can be! It eats people up from the inside out. The cycle of oppression will drive people away from the things they love and care about most. It is so hard to appreciate something when the rest of the world has NO respect for who you are!

11/12/99

The group journal was an excellent way for the people in my class to really understand the viewpoints of their classmates. I learned a lot of things about individuals that I would not have known. Many of the things that were written made me wonder if the whole school could participate in a group journal how many other things I would learn. The journal is an indirect way to express your thoughts without having to be judged by your classmates at the moment you speak. The journal gave people time to think over some of the things that were expressed and then make a well thought out response. This response, I felt, was very useful because people had time to articulate what they really wanted to say. It was also great to hear the responses that people gave. Response gives a whole new dimension to a person. I definitely recommend doing another group journal.

Response:

Excellent! I'm glad you found it useful.

11/15/99 Where are you in your ethnicity?

I don't think that I can say that I am further along in realizing my particular Norwegian descent. I would say that I am, as a result of this class, further along in understanding what it means to be of the white race. I have become more aware of my privilege and my advantages and disadvantages. Through our literature, I am able to see my race through the eyes of different people. All of these different perspectives contribute to my understanding and my awareness of he problem of racism in today's society. Through our books I am able to see the magnitude of this issue an the large scope that it entails. I have learned not to restrict my mind to as many stereotypes as I had before. Knowing is half the battle and through this class I hope to begin to start fighting the other half, that of change.

Response:

Sounds like a good plan.

11/16/99 Twilight LA

I feel that Twilight LA is one of the most insightful books I have ever read. I have never learned so much about so many people in that amount of material. The interviews gave such excellent windows into the way people think and how they defend themselves. I kept feeling that all the white people were trying to defend themselves as if they didn't want to be represented as racists. I can understand their wishes, but they were so concerned with it that they put up natural barriers around the real issues and what they might have actually said. It might have been the fact that a black woman was interviewing people. I think that fact definitely influences the responses of the interviewees. I got a feeling that the white people thought they were being judged. That to

me represents why LA is so far from understanding and healing. Everyone is scared of everyone else and with fear, nothing can be accomplished.

Response:

Yes! And what Smith tries to do is move beyond judgment so we can hear each other and really listen. Yet the fear really keeps us from coming together

12/11/99

I wanted to use this entry to say that I would like to do some more of the diversity activities we did earlier in the year. I realize we have only a few weeks left in the semester but it is so interesting to heat the viewpoints of the people in our class. Twilight LA had shown me again the value of different viewpoints and the things that you learn about yourself through your interpretations of people's words. It is not only that you read/hear what is said. It is that you look at the way you perceived the interview or opinion. By looking at the way I perceived something I can either change it or not. How you look at other people is a reflection of yourself.

Response:

I hope you will get involved with Student Nation this spring and help plan Diversity week. They need people like you who "get it" and who want to do the work! I will be back in March to help, and I would love to work with you again.

1/7/00

I'm so sad Ethnic Voices is coming to a close. This class has been a huge source of inspiration for me. The way I look at myself and the way I look at others has changed. The way I look at the media, TV, advertisements, magazines, newspapers, has changed. I see things more critically now. What a class such as Ethnic Voices allows you to do it gain a completely new perspective on the world around you. It also allows you a somewhat safe place to discuss the different things you are experiencing. I say somewhat because as a white person I am always worried about offending another ethnicity. Without bringing this out in the open, however, I have no hope of understanding the way I think about ethnicity. That's why I enjoyed Ethnic Voices so much. The class allowed some of their prejudices to come out and be known to the class. Communication is the most important element to any relationship. The communication in the classroom was great because people were more alone in the class. They weren't with their respective groups. When people are alone it is much easier to see the similarities b/t individuals of different ethnicities. It is much easier to talk to someone alone then it is if they have 20 friends with them. Though they may enter the classroom representing their whole ethnicity, an individual is often more willing to actively listen then when they are in a group who all supposedly hold the same ideals. That, I think, is the key to this class's influence and popularity. I feel like I am more myself and not just one more of those white people. I see things more critically now. You don't have to live up to the everyday expectations of your ethnicity or group, you can be who you are.

Response:

Exactly. I think the class was amazing – really willing to do some hard work. Yet we all have to start with ourselves, our own identity work, before we can begin to know others. As a class, I think we did this. I sure learned a lot about myself.

1/9/00

I've never read anything like "For Colored Girls..." The choreopoem is nothing I had ever of. The work speaks with such passion and eloquence. Many people would disagree

w/eloquence since so many of the words are phonetically spelled but the language fits the attitudes of the colored women perfectly. The choreopoem also gives a whole new meaning to word "colored" in reference to African-American women. "Colored" was the word most used to describe black Americans in times past but it is still used today. The "colored" women in this work require you to think of them as the different colors of the rainbow. I think that now whenever I hear the word "colored" I will think of this poem and the different colors of the rainbow instead of just picturing a black person.

Response:

Yes – our perspective changes. What does it mean to be "colored"? Colored by what? By whom? Thanks for all of your hard work this semester. It was fun working with you again.

Keisha's sample entries:

9/1/99 When did you first become aware of your ethnic identity?

My mom says that we've always talked about it, my being black or African-American. From the time I was a baby and she had to prove to my brother that we were related even though I was much fairer than he was. Right on up to Montessori school at age two when people asked why I was so many different colors. There was confusion about the difference between the palm of my hand and the back of my hand. But this is just what my mother has told me. I could tell you about all the things that happened to me while attending a private Catholic school but those episodes weren't the first time I was aware of my ethnicity. Those were just the times it stung So I come to the conclusion that I just knew it all along because the [her family name] do things differently than Mr. White and family. I eat different food, attend a different church, usually have more rhythm than those around me. There was no first time, no poignant episode. Just a consciousness that I carry with me like everybody has fingernails, I am black.

9/2/99

Today we just jumped right in. It was kind of funny because it just hit me that doing things like defining ethnicity is what we're going to be doing everyday. I always have this picture in my mind of when it's appropriate and when it's not, so now I am a little shocked. As I looked back on last year I realized I could talk a lot in class and sometimes dominate the class so this year I'm trying to listen more. I think I have a tendency to lay my life on the table in the first 15 minutes of a conversation, so I think I should be more reserved. So what I could have shared today I think I'll write down. When Rasika said that someone had innocently asked whether she scrubbed or washed herself well enough, I knew exactly what she was talking about. Except this person did it on purpose to be mean to me. It escalated into a parent-student conference and all which makes it different from Rasika's experience. You're so impressionable at a young age, and when someone says that you will never be clean, well...you remember that.

Response:

Yes, the pain is kind of inscribed on our bodies, always there and a part of us. Great thoughts here, and I like how you are critically assessing your role in class. Be sure not to be too reserved – you have great thoughts that others (esp. me!) can learn from.

9/11/99

"Where is the justice of a society that has such extremes of luxury for some, misery for others? Or does the middle class comfort with which most of us live in the United States prevent

us from asking questions with genuine indignation?" (Zinn, Howard. "Economic Justice: The American Class System.")

While cleaning out a collection of articles I picked up from the resource room of an NAIS conference, I came across this article. Skimming the first page compelled me to read on. The quote above captured my attention and I immediately thought it was poignant and relevant to the work *Bread Givers* by Yezierska. In a recent class discussion about Sara's transformation from poverty to "comfort" we focused on one passage about her new "kid gloves." From the beginning of the novel the whole class tried to get used to the Smolinsky's impoverished life where getting substantial food was a struggle. Never once did I feel pangs of hunger in my stomach because of the severity of their hunger. I could never relate to that feeling. My mother has always made sure that I eat more than I have to. This article on economic justice emphasizes the lack of federal aid to the poor and the misconstrued concept of laissez faire. It goes on to say that laissez faire policy is only for the poor and oddly enough, it doesn't apply to the rich. Companies and corporations alike capitalize on the forgiving nature of the government.

Not once in *Bread Givers* was there mention of food stamps or early forms of social welfare. Probably the most generous person of the book was "Muhmenkeh" the herring woman on the corner.

Response:

Exactly! And real social "aid" like welfare happened after the Depression – post 1929 – so immigrant families in the '20s had NO gov't support at all. The article you refer to is excellent– maybe a good one to do after *Ellen Foster*? I think I have a copy of it, too, but let me know if you think the class would benefit/would like to read it.

9/16/99 LFO Summergirls

I just finished watching Total Request Live on MTV. One of the top ten videos was this song by LFO, "Summergirls." As I was watching, I became completely disgusted at all the white people I saw. Here was a pseudo Abercrombie and Fitch commercial that was very hard to watch. The white boy group was singing about their summer flings and reliving them. Why did this one video incense me so much when there are so many others like it? While the chorus included "I like it when girls wear Abercrombie and Fitch, Chinese food makes me sick..." There were countless other one hit wonders with similarly pointless lyrics. Why were these boys, their beach, and their girls making me so sick? And why was I sort of calmed by the (1) one black head I saw bouncing to rhythm as the song ended. Maybe it's Ethnic Voices or personal growth manifesting itself through this video. Either way I don't want to see the video again and was thinking about writing to MTV about my disgust.

Response:

Yes – write! Your awareness is changing. You are feeling how oppressive all of the whiteness and upper middle-class stuff can be. It is too in-your-face and too "normal" – keep writing and thinking though so you can process your anger.

9/21/99

My hair is a bit of a show at this school. First the braids, now this. People get really confused. It's funny because from my stand point, they ask ridiculous questions. It's a constant joke between black folk. We compare queries. Is that your real hair? How did it grow so fast? Where does your hair end? and it goes on. I even convinced a girl that I took a vitamin that made my hair grow really quickly. She believed me for about a day until I couldn't let it go on any longer. It's also funny when white people want to do their hair this way. I have read many articles

about it not being professional for the work place, and how it is a blatant showing of race. Funny, huh? Like any hair is more prominent than my skin color. Are some people jealous? I am proud that I can do so many things with my hair. Others can't or don't know how to. Then comes the question can you do it on me? And I always think I can, but I know I can't cuz it's different texture, oil, grain – all of it is different. Everyone wanted to touch my newly straightened hair, but how do you tell a line of white girls that you NEVER touch a black person's hair even if it looks busted. I don't know and I haven't figured it out.

Response:

Hair! You raise really good points. Yes, I think the whole "braids are not professional" is BLATANT racism! Do we ever hear about white people and their hair? Does anyone ever say whites can't wear their hair a certain way – no! Yes, people are jealous. People in the majority get jealous when a "minority" starts getting some attention. I think it is a power thing. Whites are so used to being at the center of everything! We are not good at letting others in or dealing with difference.

9/28/99 A 3 day work in progress

Today Alicia talked about hearing stereotypes and doubting herself before she questioned the speaker the stereotype. This comment ended a discussion about Standard English and white privilege, and it reminded me of my past interviews for jobs, Camino, and my innocent question, "Do I sound Black? What a farce. I got on the phone and tried my hardest not to say um and to use correct grammar. What I still can't figure out is why it is so ingrained in me – that I feel weird writing about it. If I wrote the way some of my friends speak, would you accept my paper? Would I be asked to be featured in the view book if I didn't speak proper English? So how do we resolve this problem. I thought to myself that Standard English makes sense because it sounds the best – but that is only because I don't know much else. I could accept the present situation claiming that it's hopeless to fight for an equal weighting of all dialects. Or I could be content with the fact that because these thoughts are in my head, that I'm better off than most. I'm proud that I think these thoughts because I 'd rather have mental conflicts than an ignorant state of bliss.

Response: (in margin)

Yes – the majority is familiar with it, so it becomes the standard. Then is become "right." It is really quite oppressive.

9/28/99

We're all alike – all of people of color. (It seems as though all the reading and novels have drudged up previously buried yet known truths.) In reading the first part of "Gee, You Don't look Like an Indian from the Reservation..." the author comments on two things. One, the racism and discrimination within her tribe and two, her need to disassociate from "third world" people. The author feels the need to speak to whites in order to show how articulate she is.

What a punch in the stomach and light bulb in the brain! But now I am confused. Why? Why do I look down upon Black people who by wearing baggy clothes and low caps provoke fear in myself and sales clerks? Why do I sigh with disgust when yet another black person is working at McDonalds because he doesn't have the sense or opportunity to get a white, Standard English education? I am disgusted with other blacks because they can't speak properly. It is a bad showing on me personally and on my race.

There is no standard English. There should be no need for me to change the way I speak in an interview. It is the dominant majority who makes me hate myself for hating the stereotypes of my race. Who says that using big vocabulary words is considered articulate? What the heck is

correct grammar? I cautiously say that we need to distinguish between English grammar and African grammar and Spanish grammar, etc. (I say cautiously because I 'm not sure I'm up to learning millions of new languages and dialects.) The author of that excerpt...has summed up how pathetic and futile it is to try to maintain your race and heritage and still kiss up to the white people. You end up betraying one or the other (usually your race).
Response:

Incredible thoughts her! Unfortunately, I think you are right. The drive to be white will destroy you because it is a denial and negation of who you are. There has to be a way to see the majority, know how to play their game, and be true to who you are. BUT it is a difficult path to find.

9/28/99

It's 15 minutes to eleven and I just remembered that I haven't answered the assigned question: "How does white privilege work in your life?" At the time you assigned the question I was very intrigues and really not sure what to say. So I'll say this – I have learned that those whites who are privileged have the ability and the power to bring some up and to push others down. My sister bluntly points out that all I really know is how to work w/in white society and how to gain from their privilege. Thus this is how it has worked in my life. I have learned to work a system of sorts. I have been shaped to perform tasks that merit rewards from the privilege basket labeled whites only. Superficially, white privilege has helped to get me where I am today. However, I think the major lesson that I have learned is how to work within and benefit from white privilege.

Response:

Very pointed here – you make a critical distinction. But as your previous entry states, this "privilege" comes with a pretty high price tag! It costs a lot and we all pay (in a different way).

10/4/99

The North is the mental part of the medicine wheel and contains "analyze," "solve problems," and "overcome fear" among other things. I think I need to move more toward the North because I feel analization and solving problems are weaknesses I have. Maybe if I move more toward the North I will be able to solve math problems and my internal conflicts. Also, as I go off to college I need to overcome some of my deep-rooted fears of separation from my family. I'm sure that in my quest for the North I sill visit South, East, and West on the way.

Response:

Yes – it becomes a way to balance all of the directions, to move between/toward them all at different moments. (Great entries, K. You are thinking and feeling, and your insights are so compelling.)

10/12/99

I couldn't really think of anything for this week's journal entry so I looked to my thoughts from doing the pre-read of Ceremony. As I neared the end of the novel, I noticed that Tayo became more and more aware of is connection to the earth and his part in the ceremony. What amazed me about this evolution at the end of the book was how in touch Tayo was with his instincts, feelings, and surroundings. To me Tayo was living off the land as a child is sheltered by their mother. I became truly envious of Tayo in moments when he just knew before anyone spoke or when he felt someone or some animal because I know for a fact that I don't have that kind of connection with my body. I realize that at 16 I shouldn't be expecting much, but I

certainly will remember this connection as a life goal. In addition to the traditional be truly happy, be successful, etc., I how add → be able to hear my body and my environment.

Response:

Yes! Especially at a place like Camino. We feed our heads all day, but we neglect our bodies in a big way. I think it is a serious imbalance that I struggle with as well.

11/12/99

My home group and I finally got comfortable with each other. It took awhile, but once we got the juices flowing, I saw that there was a lot of diverse opinions. The topic that got my group going was affirmative action. I'm still not sure who is for or against it, but the catalyst comment was white girl saying that it will be easier for black people to get into college because they are a minority. The black girl was stunned and tried to reply. After several comments I knew that we had only scratched the surface. I knew that I wanted the conference to be longer so that we could engage in more mind-opening dialogue. I left that dialogue feeling frustrated because I could not add my insights and support the black girl. If only we could have opened up sooner. Although we aired this one misconception, I know there are more. Later that day I reflected on my reason for attending conferences such as these and realized that I felt I could teach people new perspectives. The solution is not always changing the existing situation but making people aware that there exists different situations simultaneously.

Response:

Yes – all we can do is present alternatives and live our lives in accordance with those values so we serve as models. We can't really deal w/ "change" until individuals decide they want something different – but we can be there when they are ready to take on something new.

11/15/99

My close friend said, "You're acting more black now!" I acted surprised, but I knew what she meant. When I began at Camino, I allowed myself to be absorbed by the community, and then I extracted a comfortable niche in which to create myself. I wasn't a new person, I was me in a new environment. Now, in my senior year, when I'm planning to move to a new environment, I look at where I will fit in with a different eye. I look at how being an African American will affect my experience. In order for me to understand what effect my ethnicity will have, I need to understand what being black means to me. I am closer to my black friends now and I realize the critical role they play in my life. I look forward to their company. I learn from them, we learn from each other. My friends and I talk about who we will hang out with in college, and I realize that wherever I go I will have a choice. A completely new avenue for me. I am looking forward to it.

Response:

Sounds good! You present a good overall picture here, but I would love to have a more in-depth look at some of the issues you raise here.

12/9/99

Today in the Student Nation meeting we welcomed Rainbow Alliance to the group. We discussed the stigma attached to homosexuality in religion. We also touched on the parallels between race and homophobia and how they are not completely separate. The comments were interesting, especially those about the gay hierarchy (being black and gay much worse than being white and gay) and how homosexuals are perceived outside of the United States. However the most interesting part was what was not being said. We had a big turn out but it was the same

people talking, and the comments were usually accepted truths. What struck me is how unacceptable and anomalous it still is to talk about homosexuality. All ages, genders, and races were present at this meeting, but we probably would have been more comfortable talking about hate crimes at Camino than we would have been talking about homosexuality. This was a good beginning conversation because people were able to listen comfortably. I know I was comfortable but only because this was a time and a place to be open. I also know that I am not completely comfortable when confronted with these issues on a daily basis. I accept the lifestyle but public displays of affection catch me off guard. I have grown up in a heterosexual community. Men are always with women and vice versa. It seems wrong to see women kissing women. Subconsciously the red light goes off but thankfully mentally I accept the relationship.

Response:

You are doing the most important thing: looking closely at your own beliefs. Homophobia is still so acceptable. And the connection to race, ethnicity and gender are really complicated.

Like anything else related to diversity, we have to have new experiences to counteract the social stereotypes and comfort levels we have grown up with, but it is hard. Keep at it – keep challenging yourself to dig deeper.

12/12/99 Twilight

If twilight is the time between day and night, then it is the perfect title for this play. Most of the interviews are of people who witnessed the riots, spectators not completely involved but not completely withdrawn either. Twilight can be a comfortable place but here it is chaos. The verdict of the Rodney King trial triggered and uprising because it was then that people realized the tenuous environment in which they lived. People were discouraged because in their minds the case was clear-cut, but the justice system didn't support their common sense. Twilight is neither day or night. The participants in the riot were searching for something in day or night but were caught in between. The interviewees were caught between ignorant apathy and forced participation.

Twilight LA as a whole is proof that racial issues affect everyone. They can't be ignored. In the piece I'm performing, the Reginald Denny interview, he talks about a room of riot memorabilia where color is not an issue and there is no remorse. This idea is not new, but the concept is still poignant. A room where we can all learn from a collective experience where there is no blame, and no regret; this would be a room where learning and understanding take place. We would move forward in this room.

Response:

Very thoughtful entry – your interpretation of the roles of folks, how they (we!) are all in-between. We are all trying to find our way, yet we need to do it together.

1/6/00

I'm tired. My mom says I got the flu because I've been running too much and pushing too hard. She may be right on many different levels. I keep myself busy but that's what I've always done. I've never needed to slow down or cut back. In retrospect, though, I juggle more than the tangible volleyball, dance, clubs, etc. I juggle a worldview, insight into the workings of people and places that I appreciate but nonetheless views I have to make a part of myself. It's confusing, nerve-wracking, daunting and pleasing all at the same time. My life until the present has been a series of conscious decisions so I can't regret much or blame others. Still the weight of my world view is not always a welcome one especially when it's in my face. Each day I arrive at my small bubble [school] and try to glean as much information from class discussion as from

the lunch table. I take all this information and see where it fits with the values and lifestyle of home, and there you have my worldview. I try to reconcile any conflict by expanding my world view. After all, disagreement and incoherence is very allowed. Sometimes, though, when I'm feeling really sensitive and maybe have had too much time to reflect, I hit walls and closed doors and I see darkness in others. These things don't just suddenly spring up, they're there all the time, but some days I am keenly aware of how small school is. Of how small minded people can be. Of the fact that I'm not getting an accurate world view from this place. Of how different I am. I lead two different lives! It's amazing how oblivious I can make myself then BOOM it hits...the walls, the slams of the doors. Don't worry. I will get out. I won't get anchored in oblivion. That's one New Year's resolution I'll actually keep. And I will continue to stretch my world view because it is my world view which is definitely dissimilar to everyone else's. As much as it hurts, I know I have to. I'm too optimistic to let the weight of the world be my insurmountable stumbling block.

Response:

You are a great observer, but that comes at a price – the price of awareness and knowledge. Yet it serves you well because you have insight and maturity that others don't have. It is also why you are such a capable leader

1/9/00 ASSUMPTIONS make and ASS out of you and me.

Thanks for a great semester. I must confess that this last entry is a combination of many people's efforts, but I thought it was appropriate. In light of the many discussions that we have had I am forced to reflect back on earlier days when the words above would be all I worry about. I am not cynical, I feel privileged. I am a member of a very distinguished group of enlightened folk. Please forgive the crassness, but remember (yes, you too) to stay real, and as hard as we continue to fight, don't forget the little things.

Response:

A very provocative concluding entry! It has been a great semester. I have loved working side by side with you. Yet we have lot o'work ahead of us. Diversity week will be fantastic, and it will be a wonderful combination of all of our work. Keep pushing — you are so skilled and talented at dealing with the tough stuff. I hope you enjoyed Ethnic Voices and learned some things along the way.

1/13/00 What is a colored girl?

Until now I thought I was a colored girl. I though that myself and all the non-whites in this room were colored girls. Now I don't even see that b/c traditionally [Mariah] and I have been the only colored girls. Did people ever call Asians colored in the past? I'm not sure. A colored girl now is someone who has a color. It is one of the women in the book, purple, green, blue, red, orange. It is the literal colors of the rainbow. The most true colors there are. The colors everyone appreciates. Being a colored girl means you will experience wrath, support, love, and hate all while trying to find a place. It means that you look at people differently. You know that you never completely know the people around you. You barely know yourself. Colored girls fall, stumble, and pick themselves back up, only being sure of the strength that won't let them stay prostrate. A colored girl may even try to fight this strength. She may try to pass off as someone who is weak and needs assistance. Or a colored girl may try to pretend like she never falls in the first place when that's not completely true either. I am that kind of colored girl. I am the one who masks ignorance with big words; unfeeling with hugs and pity. I am the one who never falls except in private. And even then I am too self-conscious to tell myself.

Tara's sample entries:

9/2/99

Although I cannot recall a specific date or incident, I have always had the sense of being different from mainstream WASP society. Not necessarily separate or isolated as a young child and adolescent, I took pride in being among a religious minority, one of a select few. I was special. However, my religious identity had completely superceded my racial and regional background. I always wrote my personal diversity papers on my religion. I know very little about the shtetls of my predecessors beyond the poverty and Judaism pervading them, and this knowledge is garnered mostly from literature or dramatic works.

However, many people I've met can more comfortably define my ethnicity than that of a mixed race person. When my religious background enters into a conversation for the first time, I'm met by nods and assertions that they "thought so." I find myself wondering: is it my inflections? My speech patterns? The sturdy peasant build? Is it the nose? Was I brassy, strident, a "character"? Half aware, I search for stereotypes to match what I know of my personality and bearing despite the fact that I have often identified my fellows in a similarly intuitive manner. These experiences have left me with a sense of ethnicity but little ability to define it.

Response:

As I said when you shared this with the class, your insight here is compelling. What is the role of intuition? Where do we get it? How does it work? I think 'ethnicity' as a working term will become clearer as we work through the semester, but it is never a fixed term. It is always shifting and twisting.

9/14/99

I just completed my interview with Peshali, and it has left me feeling a little embarrassed. So far in Ethnic Voices, we've tried to break our minds to the idea that for many immigrants, America is not the land of milk and honey we often bill it as. While we must not lose track of that, I think such a view may be equally one-sided. During the interview, I kept probing, looking for regret or discontent beneath Peshali's optimism and found none. Now I'm left with a slight feeling of shame because after discarding one stereotype I immediately embraces another.

Response:

Well, maybe, or actually, you find a place in the middle or a point of view that can accommodate both perspectives and the many shades of gray in between.

9/21/99

Ah, the Miss America pageant – a time-honored tradition which, in the words of David Mack, introduces American womanhood to the formula for "some lowest common denominator for attraction." In my experience, it has always been a display case for racist and sexist stereotypes about beauty and youth. Interestingly enough, there was a fair amount of diversity this year, in several senses of the word. And although I'm sure an emphasis has been placed on diversity, the state pageants are held separately, and they can hardly draw lots for which states have to pick "colored girls" (← read it with a smile). My personal favorite was Miss Pennsylvania who was adopted as an infant and spoke about her recent journey to Korea to meet her birth family. She said it was her first experience of identifying as her family people who resembled her. When she didn't win, I regretted it but understood where the judges might have been coming from. So much of her interview centered on her Korean heritage. That smacked me upside the head: I'd just assumed that feelings for another country kept her from being a model

American. But the title is Miss America; doesn't that imply a certain single-mindedness? All of a sudden, I've lost track of the interaction between patriotism and multi-culturalism. I need to think for a week or two before I try to come up with an answer.

Response:

And let me know when you figure it out! It is beyond complicated.

9/23/99

I'm still wrestling with the idea of multiculturalism. In America, we always prided ourselves on being a medley of different cultures, but do we have any real culture of our own? We're a relatively young country, and the original inhabitants have all been isolated or assimilated to a few stereotypes. Can we have any real culture of our own? When I attempt to come up with a few ideas, they all relate to our economic privilege as a nation or our lack of culture in Europe's eyes. Can capitalistic imperialism replace culture?

Response:

Or do we need to redefine "culture"? Maybe we need to look more carefully at our "American" lives – I think there are a lot of facets of our lifestyle that go unreflected and unremarked. What about our need for speed? Is that part of our culture? How do families interact– what do we do together? What do we value?

9/27/99

I am definitely the child of privilege (although I cannot truly separate 'privilege' from 'good fortune'). I am the oldest daughter of an upper-middle class white family. Both my parents have well-paying office jobs and have had steady work for almost my whole life. I live in a safe suburban neighborhood, go to an excellent school, have good medical care. Although these have all facilitated my passage through life, I consider myself most fortunate in my family itself. My parents have been happily and stably married for over 30 years. Few of my friends have parents whose marriages have been so successful. This more than anything has eased my life.

Response:

Yes! But do think about the difference between privilege and good fortune – are these really the same things?

9/28/99

One area where color and class will do little to change the world's view of you: the area of disabilities. My little brother is autistic, and that is often the primary impression of those who meet him. Also, I have never noticed a difference between society's treatment of him and the treatment of his non-white classmates. Perhaps the world forms an opinion of you based on the most apparent of your ethnic identifiers. Similar to the biological concept of a "limiting factor" – you have only as much leeway as your greatest setback allows you, and only the greatest setback is truly important.

Response:

This area of diversity hasn't received much attention. We often forget how this is true.

10/6/99

In her senior talk, Alison addressed an economic barrier – public transportation. That stung. I rely on the train system daily and have been taking buses since I was 12. The idea that many people here have never done either of these things still blows my mind. At the same time, I

have noticed a distinct class difference between myself and my fellow passengers on what a friend callously called the" latino limo." What do economic differences mean if they only determine your situation part of the time?

Response:

Great question! What does this mean? This entry raises some great points, but it seems a bit brief and underdeveloped.

10/13/99

Saw an exquisite production of *Othello* in Ashland. I wasn't previously familiar with the play, and it raised some interesting issues. The interactions between Othello and the Italians was very informative. They feared his differences, saw him as "barbaric," but his race did not have the connotation of inferiority/servitude so much as "otherness." I don't know if the director reinterpreted the text is a way that had this result, but if it was included in Shakespeare's contribution, that suggests something I hadn't before considered. I have always studied African-European interactions from the guilty perspective of the oppressor. I can't recall having ever before seen a treatment of these interactions that did not have these overtones. I'm not sure exactly where these thoughts are headed, but I have a germ of an insight: perhaps, in our attempts to "raise up" the blacks from the stereotypes of servitude, we are still not eliminating that idea from our collective consciousness. We forget that their culture/civilization did not pre-determine slavery. I'm not sure if it's clear, but it should be clear enough that, after this has stewed a while, I can go back and see where I was going with it.

11/8/99

In Rainbow, we were discussing possible topics for our first joint Rainbow/Student Nation meeting. My suggestion was an exploration of different cultures' views of homosexuality. While speaking about this, I realized that all of my gay and bi friends are white. What I'd always thought of as the teen sexuality experience was, in fact, the white teen experience. I don't really know anything about the biases of other cultures or the experiences of inter-racial same-sex couples.

Response:

Very brief, Tara. Try to give more time to your entries so you can explore these ideas in more depth.

11/17/99 Where am I on my ethnicity?

As of yet, I have not managed to come up with a clear ethnic identity. The more we examine a given ethnicity the more I understand it and the less I connect it with myself. Philosophy is beginning to creep into this topic, giving me more academic names for what I feel. To name myself or others smacks of reification, assuming that people have set qualities and therefore constants. I share an opinion with Sartre that any quality you can name in yourself becomes somewhat separate from you in the naming. Also, every word has a definition. To assign a word to a person seems inherently problematic. As they change in their understanding of themselves and that word, they change who they are. If the word is still applied to them, the meaning of he word must therefore also change. If a word is shortened for a certain meaning, and the meaning is altered or replaced, how can you justify using it at all? Naming is a further problematic because language is not a constant temporally or interpersonally. However, this is not confusion. For me, dissatisfaction with names is as clarifying as a name itself. Perhaps more so, as I can see little value in names beyond their definitions.

Response:

Yet isn't identity inherently fluid? Try to stay with your feelings surrounding ethnicity – the philosophy is helpful, but it can pull you away from a more personal, emotional exploration of identity.

12/9/99

I was planning on doing "Swallowing the Bitterness" for one of my presentation pieces. It's very strong and very powerful. However, I've hit sort of a stumbling block. The purist in me wants to attempt not a full accent, but some of the tones and pronunciation used by Koreans speaking English as a second language. The sound of these pieces is important, as much as the words themselves. To that end, I consulted Sue and asked her to tell me some of the pronunciations – vowel and consonant replacement, softened sounds, etc. She was very helpful but I can't help wondering if attempting the pronunciation is still derogatory even if it's not based on any stereotype or major assumptions.

12/12/99

One of the very fascinating themes presented in *Twilight* is the white sense of separation from the riots. In "Godzilla," the young man notes the references to "they." No description, no identification, no individuality or humanity: "It almost doesn't matter who, it's irrelevant. Somebody" (137). Paula Weinstein talks about feeling isolated" and how "everything retreated" (212). In "I Was Scared," the young woman unconsciously refers to "they" (157). Tied into this separation and lack of specifics is a nebulous fear and a sense of "generic guilt" (136) and "impotence" (205). The white community in and around LA went into a "sense of real terror" (212) even though relatively few upper or middle class whites felt direct effects, and perhaps because of the lack of specifics, the mobs of the riots seemed to embody the threat of minorities to white complacence and superiority. Because many are unable or unwilling to identify the concrete problems, people, causes, and the white majority's responsibility, those who truly wanted to change things couldn't move against the social inertia. The majority didn't want to directly address or solve the problems; they only want them to go away. They want to "look at what's possible, not what's real" (212). There's an unconscious and yet almost willful aspect to the fear and ignorance.

Response:

Yes, because if we get specific and we know who "they" are, then we will have to be responsible for that knowledge. If we don't know, we think we are not accountable. The fear plays a role, and you point to one of the key problems: segregation. Whites are more separated and isolated from people of color then they were 25 years ago. Of course, class plays a big role in this, but the separation allows for a kind of "irresponsible" isolation.

1/10/99

I just met with Ms. Trilling regarding our recurring controversy over holiday decorations. It's odd. They never really bother me, but when asked, I have an opinion. Christmas decorations don't bother me much – I don't feel threatened as a member of the Jewish community. I am a little miffed that the administration feels I need them to support and validate my religion for me (although it was nice that they did think of the non-Christians). There was also a sort of hidden hypocrisy that annoyed me. If we're going to have Christmas symbols, just put them up. If we're not, get rid of the red and green trees on the dining room tables, don't make us stuff stockings, take all the tinsel and balls off the giving tree. My suggestion was this: do have decorations put up in the main area. Greenery, white and silver – that's traditional winter, non-denominational. No red or gold. Let the students decorate their own lockers, religiously if they like, for that

month. We're big girls; we ought to be able to deal with someone else's personal expression of personal space.

Response:

I agree. We can create a space for everyone is we talk about it. If we just try to ignore it and make it go away, it only gets worse.

1/11/00

Well, last entry. What have I concluded? What have I learned? I want to give a sort of tie-it-all-together blanket bit of wisdom, which is a little ridiculous, really. I guess what's clearer now is something that I've believed for a while. You can't just look at a situation, or just at a person. Not just generalities or particulars, which are meaningless on their own. You have to look at an individual as an individual, but see them in their context. And don't assume you know who they are or what their situation is. Only the surface level is visible, and we come in three dimensions, not two. You'll never be able to see everything that's going on with a person. So ask them. They might even answer. That's enough of an attempt at general wisdom for today. It's been real which is what I wanted. Tara, signing off.

Response:

And it has been so great working with you – your voice was clear, strong, and insightful. I felt like I learned so much form you, about myself and about the literature. I hope you learned a lot along the way. Best of luck. Keep questioning it all. We need your critical insight!

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