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AFRICAN AMERICANS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE "N-WORD" IN THE CONTEXT OF
RACIAL IDENTITY ATTITUDES

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ABSTRACT

The “N-word” has been a pop-culture topic of interest which has fueled many heated discussions within the African American community. Given the history of the word nigger in America, the use of the word nigga among some African Americans may cause confusion among those who do not understand the phenomenon of African Americans’ perceptions of the “N-word.” The present research was conducted to explore the phenomenon of African Americans’ perceptions of both the words nigger and nigga in the context of racial identity attitudes. A primarily qualitative embedded mixed method model was utilized to gather information about feelings of group membership and African Americans’ perceptions of the words nigger and nigga. The Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS) was used to identify participant’s racial identity attitudes, and all of the participants in this study strongly agreed with attitudes associated with internalized identities. A qualitative analysis resulted in three themes including: (a) nigger is a universally negative and unacceptable term, (b) nigga is acceptable when used by African Americans, and (c) the public use of nigga is inappropriate. An overall profile interpretation of each identity type resulted in the finding that several of the attitudes associated with Cross’s Nigrescence Theory, specifically assimilation, racial self hatred, anti-White, Afrocentric, and multiculturalist inclusive, were reflected in the qualitative themes. Implications for theory, research, and practice are addressed.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ii

ABSTRACT iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iv

INTRODUCTION 1

 Background 2

 Purpose of Study 3

 Research Questions 5

 Definition of Terms 5

 Assumptions 5

 Delimitations 6

LITERATURE REVIEW 7

 Racial Identity 8

 Racial Identity and the “N-Word” 12

 Research and African Americans 12

 The “N-Word” 15

METHODOLOGY 22

 Philosophical Assumptions 22

 Mixed Methodology Design 23

 Sources of Data Collection 29

Participants.....	32
Procedure	34
Data Analysis Procedures	38
Standard of Trustworthiness	42
Limitations	43
RESULTS	44
Qualitative Results	44
Quantitative Results	63
Themes and Identity Statuses.....	70
DISCUSSION	74
Summary of the Results	74
Nigger is a Universally Negative and Unacceptable Term.....	75
Nigga is Acceptable when used by African Americans.....	78
African American’s Public use of Nigga is Inappropriate.....	84
Theoretical Perspectives	86
Limitations	88
Practice Implications.....	89
Future Research Directions.....	91
REFERENCES	93
APPENDIX A: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW	100
APPENDIX B: COMPUTERIZED SURVEY GUIDE.....	101
APPENDIX C: VIGNETTES.....	102

APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT	103
APPENDIX E: CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT.....	108
APPENDIX F: AUDIT TRAIL	109
APPENDIX G: SAMPLE QUALITATIVE DATA EXCERPTS	111
APPENDIX H: PARTICIPANT RACIAL IDENTITY ATTITUDES	120

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Data Collection Methods.	29
Table 2. Summary of Demographic Variables	35
Table 3. Summary of Themes.....	45
Table 4. Participants Endorsement of Themes	46

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Pre-Encounter Assimilation Scale Sores65

Figure 2. Pre-Encounter Miseducation Scale Scores66

Figure 3. Pre-Encounter Racial Self Hatred Scale Scores67

Figure 4. Immersion-Emersion Anti-White Scale Scores.....68

Figure 5. Internalization Afrocentric Scale Scores69

Figure 6. Internalization Multiculturalist Inclusive Scale Scores70

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Racism in America has resulted in 250 years of slavery, followed by years of lynchings, Jim Crow laws, sit-ins, riots, civil rights movements, pseudo-scientific studies to prove African American inferiority, and subsequent tension between the African American and European American populations. Although race relations in America have clearly improved since the abolishment of slavery, a fact which is especially evident with the first presidential election of a biracial man, the residual effects of hundreds of years of slavery and oppression can still be felt within the African American community. For instance, institutional policies that reflect biased agendas continue to present roadblocks for ethnic minorities, specifically Black men. In 2003 “one in three black men aged between 20 and 29 [was] imprisoned, on parole or on probation . . . for nonviolent crimes” (Stephen, p. 21). This may have something to do with the fact that poverty continues to be rampant among the African American and Black community. According to a U.S. Census Bureau report on poverty in 2006, “Black households had the lowest median income among the race and Hispanic-origin groups” (DeNavas-Walt, Bernadette, & Smith, 2007, p. 7). As a result, African Americans continue to fight what may sometimes feel like an uphill battle in an effort to sustain a quality of life that affords them the same opportunities as the dominant population.

Background

Tension can still be felt between the European American and African American populations, especially in relation to certain topics. One such topic is European Americans' use of the word "nigger" or "nigga," also known as the "N-word." The word nigger, alternatively referred to as the "N-word" for the purposes of this paper, is a derivative of the word "niger," which is Latin for black (Kennedy, 2003). It did not become a racial slur until it was used in a derogatory manner to refer to people who were abducted from Africa and then enslaved. African captives were thought of as inferior beings who were "unworthy creatures whose very unworthiness made them perfectly suited to a lifetime of forced servitude" (Asim, 2007, p. 14). They were also considered animalistic, intellectually inferior, lazy, slow, dirty, corrupt, and boorish. The "N-word" was essentially used as a tool to describe a Black person who presumably fit those characteristics. Since the abolishment of slavery, the "N-word" has been used by some European Americans as an "instrument of White supremacy" to demoralize African Americans (Asim, 2007, p. 9). It has also been used by some African Americans who have seemingly transformed the word using "nigga" as a term of endearment to refer to other African Americans (Asim, 2007). However, considering the history and nature of the "N-word," this usage raises the question: how can any derivative of this word still be used within the African American community by African Americans to describe African Americans?

Unfortunately, there is a paucity of research on issues surrounding the use of the "N-word." Although the use of the "N-word" has been a pop-culture topic that continues to be controversial among both members of the dominant population and within the African American community, researchers have largely failed to examine the significance of this issue in relation to the African American psyche. One exception is Motley and Craig-Henderson's (2007)

qualitative study on Blacks' and African Americans' reactions to the "N-word." They found that race and encounters with racism impacted reactions to the use of the "N-word" among Black and African American participants. African Americans tended to have more visceral reactions to the "N-word" when compared to people who identify as Black and who were living in the United States but were originally from other countries. In addition, most participants noted a difference between "nigger" and "nigga," stating that the word "nigga" is less offensive for in-group usage; and most participants indicated that public use of the word "nigga" was less socially acceptable than in-group private use. Motley and Craig-Henderson (2007) provided some insight into understanding Black's perceptions of the "N-word," but more questions remain, specifically in regard to African Americans' relationship with the "N-word." Continued research in this area could contribute to our understanding of the tumultuous relationship between the "N-word" and African Americans.

Purpose of the Study

Motley and Craig-Henderson (2007) suggested that race impacted views of the "N-word" such that people who identified as African American had more emotional reactions to the word. They suggested that the variation in reactions among Black participants was related to the finding that African Americans tended to personalize the negative connotation of the "N-word," having personal knowledge of the abusive history and nature of the word. Researchers have yet to examine potential perceptual variations within the African American community in relation to perceptions of the "N-word." Motley and Craig-Henderson's findings raise questions about perceptual differences that may exist in relation to the "N-word" in the context of racial identity attitudes among African Americans.

Cross (1971) is credited with developing the first model of Black racial identity, entitled Nigrescence Theory. His model has since undergone three revisions that have described the process of becoming Black (Vandiver, 2001). In Cross's latest revision, he describes racial identity as a set of attitudes and beliefs that are consistent with certain identity types (Vandiver, 2001; Vandiver, Fhagen-Smith, Cokely, Cross & Worrell, 2001; Worrell, Cross & Vandiver, 2001). These identity types range from describing an individual who has no awareness of his or her identity as a Black person to an individual who has incorporated multiple identities, including, but not limited, to an awareness of an identity as a Black person. A thorough literature investigation resulted in the finding that there is currently no published research on perceptual variations of the "N-word" among African Americans with differing racial identity attitudes. Examining African American's perception of the "N-word" in relation to racial identity attitudes could expand Motley and Craig-Henderson's (2007) findings by increasing our understanding of the ways in which attitudes associated with group membership are reflected in African Americans' views of the "N-word."

The purpose of this study was to examine African Americans' perceptions of the "N-word" in the context of Cross's racial identity attitudes. Motley and Craig-Henderson's (2007) findings that there may be a relationship between group identification and African Americans' views of the "N-word" were examined in this study using mixed methods. Specifically, this study provides information related to African American's perceptions of the "N-word" across or among Cross's racial identity statuses. Results from this study have implications for the effects of racism on the African American psyche and add to the limited body of research on this topic.

Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. What are African American's perceptions of the words nigger and nigga?
2. How do African American's perceptions of the words nigger and nigga align with their racial identity attitudes?

Definition of Terms

The following terms were operationally defined for the purposes of this study:

1. African American: a citizen of the United States who identifies as African American, and who has African origins.
2. Black: Overarching term for individuals with African heritage who may or may not be U.S. citizens.
3. Nigger: a derogatory term historically viewed as a symbol of racism and which has also been used as an instrument to demoralize Blacks.
4. Nigga: a transformation of the word nigger, usually used as a term of endearment during in-group use among African Americans, which is considered much less offensive than nigger by some African Americans during in-group usage.
5. Racial identity: attitudes associated with one's identification as a Black person as measured by the Cross Racial Identity Scale.

Assumptions

The following assumptions were made for the purpose of this study:

1. Participants would answer all questions on the surveys and interviews openly and honestly.

2. Individuals who presented as African American were impacted by the experiences of Black people in America.
3. I acknowledged the impact of my own perceptions of the “N-word” on data collection and interpretation.
4. All data collected and interpreted would be presented truthfully and accurately.

Delimitations

The following parameters were identified for the purpose of this study:

1. Participants must identify as African American to participate in this study.
2. Participants must be 18 to 28 years old.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers in psychology who focus on issues that are important to the African American community continue to provide insight into the African American psyche and the ways in which African Americans have learned to adapt to a society that has historically been oppressive. For example, Cross's (1971) early work detailing Black identity, or the process of becoming Black, has been expanded extensively within the past decade and has since become the most widely researched of the ethnic identity models (Phelps, Taylor, & Gerard, 2001). This has resulted in several different models of racial and ethnic identity development that can be utilized in clinical settings when working with African American clients to describe the process by which an individual develops an identity as a person of color (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1998; Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Helms, 1990; Phinney, 1992). Racial and ethnic identity have been linked to several other factors including self-esteem, body image, skin color preference, gender role socialization, psychological well-being, and distress (Buckley & Carter, 2005; Coard, Breland, & Raskin, 2001; Grantham & Ford, 2003; Mahalik, Pierre, & Wan, 2006; Pierre & Mahalik, 2005; Turnage, 2004). As a result, the psychological community has operationalized the concept of racial identity and is better equipped to manage issues that are salient among African Americans. This literature review begins with information about racial identity, specifically Cross's Nigrescence Theory, which is the chosen underlying theory of this research project. Information

about the relationship between African Americans and research is also presented. In addition, an explanation as to why there is currently a limited body of research on African American's and the "N-word" is provided. Lastly, the "N-word" is discussed in terms of its history, origins, and presence within the African American community.

Racial Identity

Cross (1971) developed the first model of Black racial identity, entitled Nigrescence Theory. This development led to a variety of racial and ethnic models describing the process by which a person comes to identify with his or her race and ethnicity (Atkinson et al., 1998; Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Helms, 1990; Phinney, 1992). Cross's model has undergone three revisions in which the conceptualization of the model was transformed from a developmental model to an attitudinal model (Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Grantham & Ford, 2003; Worrell, 2008).

Individuals are no longer conceptualized as linearly moving through one stage to another but instead are thought to develop attitudes that are consistent with the different statuses (Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Grantham & Ford, 2003; Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997; Worrell, 2008).

Original Nigrescence Theory

Cross's (1971) original version of the Nigrescence Theory contained five identity stages that describe the process of Black self-acceptance. The original five stages remain relatively intact throughout the revisions, with some conceptual changes. The five stages include Pre-Encounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, Internalization, and Internalization-Commitment. These five stages were considered developmental in nature and were also considered to be related to psychological well-being.

In the Pre-Encounter Stage, an individual identifies more with being an American and individual than with being Black. A person in the Pre-Encounter stage is considered to be somewhat disconnected from the Black community and is conceptualized as being self-loathing and having low self-esteem due to his or her lack of identification as a Black person. The next stage, Encounter, comes as a result of some encounter with events that causes the individual to question his or her previous belief system (Cross, 1971). For instance, an individual in the Encounter stage may question his or her identification as an individual or American after being the victim of a racist event. The Encounter stage is thought to lead directly to the next stage, Immersion, in which an individual develops a pro-Black identity, thereby rejecting everything considered to be associated with the White or dominant culture. The Immersion stage is followed by Emersion, in which an individual again begins to question the previous point of view. For example, a person may begin to question his or her dedication to a single identity as a Black person and instead begin to identify with other identities, such as gender or sexual orientation. In the next stage, Internalization, the individual begins to adopt multiple identities that are just as meaningful as the identification with being Black. In the last stage, Internalization-Commitment, the individual is an activist, socially conscious, and constantly aware of his or her multiple identities (Cross, 1971).

Revised Nigrescence Theory

Cross's (1991) revised Nigrescence theory began the shift to an attitudinal model with multiple components. Cross's 1991 revision contained modifications to the Pre-Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, and Internalization stages. The concept of race salience was added to the Pre-Encounter stage so that "the importance or significance of race in a person's approach to life is captured across two dimensions: degree of importance and direction of valence" (Vandiver,

2001, p. 168). As a result, Pre-Encounter Assimilation and Pre-Encounter Anti-Black emerged as two different constructs. Pre-Encounter Assimilation describes someone who identifies as American and does not value or identify race as a pertinent construct. In contrast, Pre-Encounter Anti-Black describes someone who has negative feelings associated with Blacks and with being Black. An individual in the Pre-Encounter Anti-Black stage may harbor negative feelings toward Black people based on exposure to negative stereotypes about Blacks.

The Immersion-Emersion stage was modified to incorporate pro-Black and anti-White identities in the Immersion stage (Cross, 1991). The pro-Black and anti-White identities were originally conceptualized as two parts of a whole but were divided to indicate that “an immersed individual can either hold one of these identities or both” (Vandiver, 2001, p. 169). As a result, in the Immersion-Emersion stage it is no longer conceptualized that pro-Black involvement automatically leads to anti-White sentiment.

The final change in Cross’s (1991) revised model was in relation to the Internalization stage. He combined the Internalization and Internalization Commitment stages, noting that there was little difference between those stages. Cross also defined three internalization identities: Black Nationalist, Biculturalist, and Multiculturalist. Black Nationalist describes an individual who has developed an Afrocentric identity and who is also often politically active. Biculturalist describes an individual who has incorporated two identities, such as Black and American. A Multiculturalist is a person who identifies with multiple identities which may include racial identity, gendered identity, American identity, and so forth (Cross, 1991).

Expanded Nigrescence Theory

The current version of Cross’s Nigrescence Theory came after the development of the Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS), which is an assessment used to measure Nigrescence

attitudes. “Nigrescence identities describe frames of reference or identity clusters through which the world is viewed, and they are exemplified by particular attitudes” (Worrell et al., 2001, p. 208). This model includes three major statuses with eight identity types. The three statuses are entitled Pre-Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, and Internalization (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). Revisions were made to the Pre-Encounter and Immersion-Emersion identities of the revised model. The Pre-Encounter status now includes three identity types that describe an individual who does not completely identify with being Black. These three identity types include Pre-Encounter Assimilation, Pre-Encounter Miseducation, and Pre-Encounter Racial Self-Hatred. Individuals in the Pre-Encounter Assimilation identity type identify more with being an American and individual than with being Black. A person with Pre-Encounter Assimilation attitudes is likely to be somewhat disconnected from the Black community. Individuals in the Pre-Encounter Miseducation identity type have adopted a stereotypical understanding of Black culture, taking into account negative stereotypes and images. A person in the Pre-Encounter Miseducation identity type is also said to be disconnected from the Black community, but in this case, the disconnection is as a result of the negative perception of Black culture. The last identity type in the Pre-Encounter Status is Pre-Encounter Racial Self-Hatred which describes someone who detests the fact that he or she is Black and as a result experiences feelings of self-hatred.

The Immersion-Emersion status includes two identity types, Immersion-Emersion Anti-White and Immersion-Emersion Intense Black Involvement (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). Someone who is in the Immersion-Emersion Anti-White identity type holds strong negative views of the dominant culture that include feelings of anger and rage and will engage in activities that he or she believes are indicative of Black culture. Someone who is in the Immersion-

Emersion Black Involvement identity type has immersed himself or herself in Black culture while having a romanticized view of everything considered indicative of Black culture (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). No revisions were made to the Internalization status.

Racial Identity and the “N-word”

Motley and Craig-Henderson’s (2007) findings of differences between Blacks and African Americans in regard to perceptions of the “N-word” encourages further examination into African American’s perceptions of the “N-word” and the ways in which perceptions of the “N-word” fit within African American racial identity. Currently, no published research exists on differences of African Americans’ perceptions of the “N-word” in the context of racial identity attitudes. As a result, it is unknown whether perceptual differences of the “N-word” exist in regard to racial identity attitudes. Examining African Americans’ perceptions of the “N-word” in the context of racial identity attitudes could increase our understanding of the ways in which feelings of group membership impact African Americans’ perceptions of the “N-word.”

Research and African Americans

It is important to note that African Americans have had a turbulent relationship with social science and medical researchers. A prime example is the Tuskegee syphilis study in which hundreds of impoverished, African American, male sharecroppers were intentionally allowed to live for 40 years without being treated for syphilis while under the care of physicians who studied and observed them to investigate the natural progression of syphilis in humans (Thomas & Quinn, 1991). Furthermore, in the social sciences, including psychology, African Americans make up a minority percentage of researchers. As a result, there continues to be some deficits in African American research as well as issues that go unnoticed. The “N-word” is one of the issues that continues to go unnoticed. African American’s perceptions and use of the “N-

word” is a disconcerting and multifaceted topic that is intertwined with an even more disconcerting and complex topic, racism. Perhaps the limited number of African American researchers and the turbulent history of the use of African Americans in research have contributed to the lack of research in this area.

Scientific Racism

Racism is a pervasive construct that has permeated the field of psychology. Some early psychologists, such as Ferguson, were known for using science as a method of demonstrating genetic inferiority (Guthrie, 2004). This is an example of scientific racism, which is loosely defined as the use of empirical methods to demonstrate the inferiority of an ethnic minority when compared to the dominant population (Guthrie, 2004).

Throughout the history of psychology, psychological literature has been saturated with racist ideas. One of the most recent examples is Herrnstein and Murray’s (1994) *The Bell Curve*, in which an argument is made for a relationship between genetics and intelligence. According to Herrnstein and Murray (1994), African Americans are assumed to be intellectually inferior to Whites and East Asians due to their poorer average performance on standardized tests. African Americans and people who identify as Black make up the largest proportion of impoverished people in America (DeNavas-Walt et al., 2007). As a result, people who identify as Black and African American have less access to economic and educational resources. Unequal access to educational and economic resources may have resulted in Black’s and African American’s less favorable performance on standardized tests. Herrnstein and Murray (1994) failed to take into account the relationship between economics, resources, and intelligence, asserting that there are genetic underpinnings that have resulted in an inferior and less intelligent race of African Americans compared with European Americans and East Asians.

In his article defining race and racism, Quist-Adade (2006) stated that “human subspecies don’t exist [and] the genes influencing skin color have nothing to do with the genes influencing hair form, eye shape, blood type, musical talent, athletic ability or forms of intelligence” (p. 68). Quist-Adade also discussed DNA sequencing, which led to the finding that all human DNA is of African descent. As a result, Quist-Adade argues that the construct of genetic differences between races is inherently flawed thereby discrediting the very foundation of scientific racism.

Given that race has been scientifically proven, through DNA research, to be a man-made construct, theories of genetic inferiority have not been supported by scientific research (Goodman, 2001; Hudson, 2001; Quist-Adade, 2006). As a result, researchers with racist agendas have attempted to prove minority inferiority by supporting a Social Darwinistic notion of minority populations in America, suggesting that the dominant population’s rise to power has come as a result of some innate survival instincts which have been developed and cultivated throughout the process of natural selection and survival of the fittest (Rutledge, 1995). For instance, Social Darwinistic theories have been used to provide an explanation as to why there is an abundance of European Americans who have assumed positions of power in America when compared to other populations.

However, researchers with racist assumptions fail to account for the fact that racism is a powerful tool that has been used to obstruct the progress of minority populations in America (Hoberman, 1997; Hudson, 2001; Quist-Adade, 2006). Darwinistic notions, although not fully exposed to the public in many ways, have influenced minority population’s perception of themselves. For instance, a growing trend in the African American community has been to place value on athletics and athletic ability (Hoberman, 1997). Darwinistic principles have been adopted to explain the prevalence of African American athletes in professional sports by

suggesting that athletic prowess is a characteristic that has been bred within the African American community (Hoberman, 1997). Darwinistic ideals can be detrimental to the African American psyche by reinforcing stereotypes and damaging self-esteem. Consequently, psychological research needs to be conducted with extra caution, focusing on issues that are of service to the African American community.

The ‘N-Word’

African Americans’ use of the “N-word,” is a sensitive, but popular, topic of discussion within the African American community that should be researched with caution. Researchers have yet to thoroughly examine this issue, perhaps because of the sensitive and racially driven nature of the topic. The “N-word” is one of the few words in the English language that evokes strong emotions, and its use can be considered anything from a threat to a term of endearment. African American pop-culture literature has been saturated with information and opinions about African American’s use and perceptions of the “N-word”, focusing on the fact that the use of the “N-word” by African Americans has been a source of contention within the African American community (Asim, 2007; Himma, 2002; Kennedy, 2003; Ridley, 2006). Those who argue against in-group use of the “N-word” indicate that its use is evidence of racial self hatred, and those who condone in-group usage indicate that there is power in being able to reclaim and redefine the “N-word” limiting its use to members within the African American community (Asim, 2007; Kennedy, 2003). The general consensus in African American literature focusing on the use of the “N-word” is that it is offensive when anyone who does not identify as Black or African American uses the word to refer to someone who is Black or African American (Asim, 2007; Kennedy, 2003). A divide within the African American community has historically emerged when the word is used among African Americans to refer to African Americans. Many

African Americans disagree with the within-group use of the “N-word”, suggesting that its use is self disparaging and confusing to out-group members (Asim, 2007).

Connotation and Offensive Language

In the 1990s, the Merriam-Webster Dictionary contained three alternate definitions of the word nigger, two of which were “a black person, usually taken to be offensive, [or] member of a dark-skinned race, usually taken to be offensive” (Dodson, 2000, p. 61). Although Merriam-Webster’s definition also indicated that the word nigger “ranks as perhaps the most offensive and inflammatory racial slur in the English language” (Dodson, 2000, p. 61), these definitions caused considerable backlash. In fact, the president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) participated in a world-wide campaign protesting Merriam-Webster’s definition of the word nigger, resulting in approximately 100,000 signatures (Dodson, 2000). The backlash came as a result of protestors’ belief that these definitions promoted racist ideology by suggesting that a nigger is a black or dark-skinned person instead of a racial slur. Merriam-Webster has since revised the definition by first identifying that the term is “usually offensive,” followed by a definition of its use to refer to black and dark-skinned people (“Nigger,” n.d.).

The controversy surrounding the definition of the “N-word” and its continued use by some African Americans suggests that this is a somewhat complex topic. Allan (2007), a professor of linguistics, suggested that connotations have pragmatic effects, indicating that words derive meaning from contexts. In regard to the “N-word,” Allan stated that “many racist terms can be disarmed by being used, without irony, as in-group solidarity markers by the targeted group” (p. 1047). In addition, Kennedy (2003) noted that Blacks “have added a positive meaning to the word nigger, just as women, gays, lesbians, poor whites, and children born out of

wedlock have defiantly appropriated and revalued such words as bitch, cunt, queer, dyke, redneck, cracker, and bastard” (p. 38). Based on this concept, the assumption may be made that those African Americans who use the “N-word” to refer to themselves or other African Americans have somehow transformed the meaning of the word, thereby eradicating the previous racially driven and offensive definition.

It must be noted that a general consensus within the African American community does not exist in relation to this topic (Asim, 2007). The within-group use of the “N-word” has been a source of contention in the African American community for years. As a result, research in this area is needed to contribute to understanding psychological implications involved in the use of the “N-word” within the African American community.

Origin of the “N-word.”

The dubious origin of the “N-word” is described by Asim (2007) as something that may have originally been considered a “neutral term” (p. 10). Although it is unclear how the spelling and pronunciation evolved over the years, the original form has been linked to the Latin term for black (*niger*) and to the description of the arrival of the first African captives brought to Jamestown in 1619 in which African captives were referred to as “negars” (Asim, 2007, p. 10). Although the true evolution of the word is unclear, during slavery, African captives were routinely referred to as “niggers.”

African captives were inherently thought of as inferior by their slave masters and were brutalized in many ways. In essence, they were torn away from their native land and brought to a foreign land where they were sold, tortured, bred, beaten, murdered, and enslaved for 250 years. The “N-word” became a tool used to oppress and subjugate people who had no knowledge of the native language and customs. In fact, African captives would refer to

themselves as the “N-word,” as this was essentially the language that they learned from their captors (Asim, 2007). As a result, the “N-word” is a term that encompasses a longstanding and complex history, not only between the European and African American populations, but also within African American culture.

Between-Group Use

The “N-word” continues to be considered a “superlative racial epithet” that is believed to be “the most hurtful, the most fearsome, the most dangerous, [and] the most noxious” word in the English language, particularly when it is used by someone who is not Black (Kennedy, 2003, p. 23). For instance, Kennedy (2003) noted the forced removal of District Attorney Jerry Spivey from office in 1995 as a result of a verbal altercation he had with a Black man in a bar during which Spivey repeatedly called the man a nigger. Spivey was removed from office under the fighting words doctrine, which was added to the United States Constitution in 1942 as a limitation to freedom of speech in the first Amendment (Kennedy, 2003). Fighting words are words that “inflict injury or intend to incite an immediate breach of the peace,” and the “N-word” presumably fits those characteristics in this case (Kennedy, 2003, p. 54). Additionally, Michael Richardson, a comedian and actor, issued a public apology for calling several African American hecklers niggers during one of his stand-up performances, after he received considerable backlash and threatened boycotts from people of all nationalities (Asim, 2007). Most recently, radio personality Dr. Laura Schlessinger impetuously retired after the considerable backlash that she received shortly after using the word nigger 11 times while speaking to a Black female caller. As these examples show, the use of the “N-word” by public figures, particularly those who are not African American, can be considered extremely offensive and result in negative consequences.

Motley and Craig-Henderson (2007) found that African Americans had significantly greater emotional reactions to the use of the “N-word” by European Americans when compared to Blacks who live in the United States but were born in other countries. The use of the “N-word” by anyone who does not identify as Black has become a social taboo that is considered extremely offensive, particularly to African Americans. This is seemingly true even among members of the hip hop and rap culture which is dominated by Black artists who routinely use the “N-word” but whose White counterparts have yet to follow suit (Asim, 2007).

Within-Group Use

In his book detailing the history of the use of the “N-word,” Kennedy (2003) sums up the argument for those who condone the use of the “N-word” by stating that “there is much to be gained by allowing people of all backgrounds to yank nigger away from white supremacists, to subvert its ugliest denotation, and convert the “N-word” from a negative to a positive appellation” (p. 139). In fact, African Americans who condone and argue for the use of the “N-word” to be restricted to those who identify as African American generally assert that the reclamation of the “N-word” and restrictions surrounding its use are extremely empowering to those who choose to use it.

Motley and Craig-Henderson (2007) found a perceptual difference between the terms nigger and nigga in both Black and African American participants, where the word nigga was considered less offensive during in-group usage. They also found a “preference for private use” in which public use by Black entertainers was generally viewed unfavorably (p. 956). Perhaps this preference is related to the concern that public within-group use of the “N-word” desensitizes others to its use. For instance, in 2001, the Puerto Rican actress and singer Jennifer Lopez received considerable backlash from the African American community after using the “N-

word” in her song entitled *I’m Real* (Asim, 2007). The impact of context on African Americans’ views of the use of the “N-word” thus warrants further examination.

In contrast, African Americans who reject the use of the “N-word,” referred to as eradicationists by Kennedy (2003), generally note that it has historically been considered one of the most offensive words in the English language. Kenney (2003) noted that “eradicationists maintain that Black’s use of the word nigger is symptomatic of racial self-hatred or the internalization of white racism, thus the rhetorical equivalent of black-on-black crime” (p. 36). As a result, within-group use of the “N-word” is considered self-disparaging and self-denigrating. Popular African American icons such as Oprah Winfrey and the NAACP have been outspoken in denouncing the use of the “N-word,” particularly among African Americans who use it as a term of endearment (Himma, 2002). Critics have also suggested that its use “grant[s] the word legitimacy, desensitize[s] individuals to its use, reinforce[s] stereotypic images about Blacks, and generate[s] confusion about the meaning and appropriateness of the word” (Motley & Craig-Henderson, 2007, p. 949). As a result, more research needs to be conducted examining perceptual variations of the “N-word” among African Americans with varying racial identity attitudes to examine the theory of within-group use as evidence of “anti-Black, self-hating prejudice” (Kennedy, 2003, p. 36).

The within-group use of the “N-word” is clearly a very complex and sensitive issue. Some African Americans report a sense of empowerment from their reclamation of the word, while eradicationists strongly disagree with its use within the African American community (Kennedy, 2003). The validity of either argument continues to be unexamined due to the lack of research on this topic. However, one study contributes to our understanding of the impact of the use of the “N-word” among African Americans. In their qualitative study of Blacks from diverse

backgrounds, Motley and Craig-Henderson (2007) found a perceived difference in the word nigger when compared with the modified version, nigga. As a result of this finding, they suggested that the word has been modified from its original meaning to a contextually based meaning.

Motley and Craig-Henderson (2007) also suggested that “racial status” and “experiences with being targets of racist language” impacted views and perceptions of the “N-word” (p. 952). As a result, intense reactions to the “N-word” were found in African American participants who “understood the word as a symbol of racism” (Motley & Craig-Henderson, 2007, p. 953). Lastly, Motley and Craig-Henderson (2007) conclude that “although nigger and its derivative nigga evoked negative stereotypes . . . it appears that the African American respondents had found a way to reinterpret the word(s) to fit with their ethnic identities” (p. 958). Motley and Craig-Henderson’s (2007) qualitative research provides a framework in which to understand this controversial issue but also evokes the question of how the use of the “N-word” fits within African American ethnic identities.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Philosophical Assumptions

Creswell and Plano-Clark (2007) stated that “all studies include assumptions about the world and knowledge that informs the inquiries” (p. 20). As a result, Creswell and Plano-Clark suggested that researchers identify and develop an awareness of personal beliefs in regard to “how knowledge is obtained and methods of gaining knowledge” (p. 21). The philosophical foundation for this study was dialectical in nature. Researchers who assume the dialectical perspective assert that variations among philosophical paradigms result in the acquisition of distinctive forms of knowledge (Greene & Caracelli, 1997). Greene and Caracelli (1997) indicated that dialectical variations “not only exist but are important,” and that they “should be deliberately used both within and across studies” to expand and deepen knowledge and understanding of a chosen area of interest (p. 8). Thus, two philosophical paradigms were united for the purpose of this study.

The qualitative portion of this study was guided by a constructivist paradigm and the quantitative portion of this study was guided by a postpositivist paradigm. The constructivist paradigm is considered inductive and subjective, and the notion of multiple realities is recognized and embraced (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). Researchers who adopt a constructivist paradigm allow theories to emerge from data collected from participants, and “rely

as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation" (Creswell, 2007, p. 20). In addition, the meaning that is ascribed to the subject of interest by participants is highly valued and the researcher is viewed as an instrument and major element of the study (Creswell, 2007). In fact, Creswell (2007) suggested that qualitative researchers acknowledge the impact of their own personal factors on the interpretation of data. In contrast, the postpositivist paradigm is considered logical, objective, and deductive, and the use of validated instruments as a method of collecting data is common (Creswell & Plano-Cark, 2007). In addition, researchers who adopt the postpositivist paradigm assert that there is a "singular reality" that can be established by testing a hypothesis based on a theory with the use of empirical instruments or methods (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007, p. 24).

Survey methods encompass the quantitative portion of this study, and the qualitative portion is phenomenological in nature. Specifically, transcendental or psychological phenomenology was the underlying theory guiding the qualitative methods of this study. Phenomenological researchers focus on a concept or phenomenon and "reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence" through data collection (Creswell, 2007, p. 58). Emphasis is placed on how and what participants experience in an effort to provide the reader with an in depth description of the essence of the subject that is being examined (Moustakas, 1994).

Mixed Methodology Design

An embedded mixed methods design was utilized in this study. Using the embedded design, the researcher collects quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously. This design is defined by Creswell and Plano-Clark (2007) as a "mixed methods design in which one data set provides a supportive, secondary role in a study based primarily on the other data type" (p. 67).

The embedded design is most useful when a researcher is examining an issue that is best measured using one framework (i.e., qualitative or quantitative) but needs additional information to analyze supplemental components not easily measured by the primary analysis (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). In addition, the embedded design is an integrative design in which distinct paradigms are incorporated in an effort to “produce significantly more insightful understandings of the phenomenon under investigation,” when compared to other mixed methods designs (Greene & Caracelli, 1997, p. 23). Creswell and Plano-Clark (2007) also suggested that a primarily qualitative embedded model may be used for a study with a phenomenological design.

An embedded model was chosen for this study because African Americans’ qualitative perceptions of the “N-word” were examined using a quantitative measure of racial identity to identify participants’ racial identity attitudes. As a result, the quantitative results were embedded within the examination of the phenomenon of African Americans’ perceptions of the “N-word”, and provided supplemental information in regard to how African Americans’ perceptions of the “N-word” fit within racial identification and feelings of group membership. In addition, in embedded mixed method studies “a single data set is not sufficient, and each type of question requires different types of data” (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007, p. 67). Thus, in order to achieve the primary goal of this study, which is to examine African American’s perceptions of the “N-word” across racial identity attitudes, the use of qualitative and quantitative methods is appropriate.

Qualitative Design

The qualitative design was a major element of this study and was implemented using a transcendental or psychological phenomenological approach. Transcendental or psychological phenomenology focuses solely on descriptions provided by participants in the study, as opposed

to those of the researcher (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). Moustakas (1994) described four “core processes” involved in transcendental phenomenological research, which include (a) epoche, (b) transcendental-phenomenological reduction, (c) imaginative variation and (d) synthesis (p. 33). Moustakas’ four core processes guided the qualitative design for this study.

Moustakas (1994) defined the epoche process as “setting aside prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about things” (p. 85). The epoche process requires the researcher to identify any preconceived notions about the subject matter being examined, and then bracket those notions, or set them aside, in an effort to view the subject matter from “an original vantage point” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 86). Ultimately, the goal of the epoche process is for the researcher to remain as open and objective as possible when collecting information from participants. In the current study, the epoche process included a thorough examination of this researcher’s perception of the “N-word” and potential biases that must be set aside in order to view collected data from an impartial viewpoint.

The process of transcendental-phenomenological reduction followed the epoche process, and included “the task of describing in textural language just what one sees” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 90). During the transcendental-phenomenological process, the researcher pays close attention to textural elements, such as the “prereflective description of things just as they appear,” in an effort to reduce those descriptions to something that is “horizontal and thematic” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 91). Ultimately, in the transcendental-phenomenological process, the researcher records and views each description independently, and then descriptions are compiled to describe the phenomenon in its entirety “in a fresh and open way” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). In the current study, the process of transcendental-phenomenological reduction began with the assembly of relevant open ended interview questions which were then used to gather information about

African American's perceptions of the "N-word." Each response was typed out line by line and examined independently in a word document. Textural elements of the gathered information were then analyzed and reduced to parallel themes.

In the imaginative variation process, the researcher attempts to view the collected data from a number of different angles in an effort to increase understanding of "how the experience of the phenomenon [came] to be what it is" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98). In addition, the researcher develops a "structural description of the experience [and] the precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced" (Moustakas, p. 98). The imaginative variation process is achieved by a thorough examination of data in which the researcher searches for themes and takes into consideration underlying contexts and structural meanings. In the current study, the imaginative variation process began with a thorough examination of the descriptions and reactions to the "N-word" included in three different data sources. As in the process described above, each response from data collected from a semi-structured interview, computer survey, and answers provided from vignette questions were written out line by line and examined independently in a word document. Structural elements of the gathered information were then analyzed and reduced to parallel themes.

The imaginative variation process was followed by the final process, synthesis, in which the researcher integrated textual and structural descriptions to develop a unified description of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Synthesis includes a description of the essence of the phenomenon in which truth is revealed and displayed through the thematic and horizontal descriptions of the phenomenon. In the current study, synthesis was demonstrated through the themes that emerged from participants structural and textural descriptions of their perceptions of the "N-word."

Quantitative Design

The quantitative design was embedded within the qualitative design, and provided supplemental information about African American's perceptions of the "N-word", specifically in regard to feelings of group membership. Information obtained from the Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS) was used to identify individual participant's racial identity attitudes. This information was then used to examine the qualitative information that was gathered on participants' perceptions of the "N-word" by providing additional information on themes that existed within or across racial identity attitudes. Themes that emerged from the qualitative data collected on African American's perceptions of the "N-word" were conceptualized and explained using the Nigrescence Theory.

Researcher-as-Instrument

Morrow (2005) indicated that a standard tradition in qualitative research is "making one's implicit assumptions and biases overt to self and others" (p. 254). In addition, bracketing one's own biases and opinions about a subject of interest is a common practice in phenomenological research (Creswell, 2007; Morrow, 2005). As a result, I must note that I am an African American female who has experienced being called a "nigger" by European Americans and a "nigga" by African Americans. I have a more visceral reaction to being called a "nigger" by European Americans. I believe that some African Americans feel empowered by using the word "nigga" in a variety of ways with the understanding that it is rarely acceptable for anyone who does not identify as Black or African American to use the word "nigga." In addition, I believe awareness of underlying factors in regard to the reclamation of the "N-word" is not necessary for one to feel empowered by its use. For instance, a young African American teenager who routinely uses the word "nigga", but has very little knowledge about the theory of the

reclamation of the word, may still be offended when individuals who do not identify as Black or African American use the word, having subconsciously adopted a sense of entitlement over the word's use. Assumptions and biases that I have in regard to African American's use of the "N-word" include the following: (a) some African American's feel empowered by the use of the word "nigga", (b) awareness of the process of the reclamation of the word "nigga" is not always necessary for one to feel empowered, (c) within group use of the word "nigger" is usually viewed unfavorably, and (d) African American's may respond to the words "nigga" and "nigger" in a variety of ways, some of which may differ from my response. In addition, I hold negative feelings toward European American's use of the word "nigger", and suspect that many participants in this study will also hold negative feelings of European American's use of the word "nigger." Following Moustaka's (1994) recommendations, I made efforts to set aside these assumptions while collecting data and developing research questions, now that they have been identified.

In regard to African American's perceptions of the "N-word" and racial identity, I had no preconceived notions as to what themes may exist among Cross's racial identity statuses. Given that that I found no published research on African American's perceptions of the "N-word" and racial identity, it was unknown whether themes would differ among or across racial identity attitudes. I routinely discussed my reactions and personal reflections with my dissertation committee chairperson at our biweekly meetings to identify my assumptions and biases in regard to African Americans' perceptions of the "n-word" and racial identity to address the issue of subjectivity.

Sources of Data Collection

Qualitative Measures

Creswell (2007) suggested that qualitative researchers use multiple methods of data collection to triangulate the data and ensure valid results. Following Creswell's instruction, three methods of qualitative data collection were utilized. Qualitative data was collected using survey questions, semi-structured interviews, and vignettes (see Table 1). In an effort to expand on previous findings, survey and interview questions were taken from Motley and Craig-Henderson's (2007) study on Black's perceptions of the "N-Word." The vignettes included scenarios in which the "N-word" was used and provided additional information in regard to African Americans' response and perceptions of the "N-word."

Table 1

Data Collection Methods

Methods	Procedure and Purpose
Semi-Structured Interviews	One semi-structured interview was conducted. Semi-structured interview questions were taken from the one known published study on Blacks' perceptions of the "N-word" by Motley and Craig-Henderson (2007).
Electronic Survey Questions	Survey questions were given to participants on a laptop computer. These questions were developed using a version of the questions asked in Motley and Craig-Henderson's (2007) study of Black's reactions to the words nigger and nigga. Participants were asked to type out their responses to these questions on the computer.
Vignettes	Two vignettes were provided for research participants to respond to on a laptop computer. The vignettes included scenarios in which the words "nigga" and "nigger" are used. Participants were asked a series of questions in response to each vignette.

Semi-Structured Interview. Motley and Craig-Henderson's (2007) interview questions were used as a foundation for the items in this study, in an effort to expand on previous findings. Semi-structured interview items were taken directly from Motley and Craig-Henderson's study (see Appendix A). Items included information about participants' general views and perception of the words "nigger" and "nigga", appropriateness of the use of the word "nigga" in a private and public setting, and perceptions of Whites' use of the word "nigger."

Computerized Survey Questions. Survey items developed from questions used in Motley and Craig-Henderson's (2007) study on Blacks in the African Diaspora's perception of the "N-word" were utilized in this study (see Appendix B). Questions included information about participants' perception of the difference between the words "nigga" and "nigger", appropriateness of the use of both words, and thoughts on public versus private use. Answers to these questions provided supplemental information in regard to African American's perceptions of the "N-word."

Vignettes. Two typed vignettes were provided for research participants to respond to in a computer format (see Appendix C). The first vignette included a scenario in which the word "nigga" was used by an African American in a predominantly White setting. Participants were asked to answer a series of questions in response to this vignette to gather information about their reaction to the public use of the word "nigga" in a predominantly White and public setting. The second vignette included a scenario in which the word "nigger" was used by a European American. Participants were asked to answer questions to gather information about their reaction to this scenario as well as their perception of the appropriateness of the use of the word "nigger" by someone who does not identify as Black or African American.

Quantitative Measure

Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS). The Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS) was used to measure African American participant's racial identity attitudes. The CRIS includes a demographic questionnaire that requests information related to racial identification, religious affiliation, age, gender, socio-economic status, and educational background. In addition, it is based on the Expanded Cross Racial Identity Model, and is a 40-item scale that includes 10 filler items that are not related to any particular subscale (Vandiver et al., 2000; Worrell et al., 2004). The CRIS measures attitudes related to six subscales, including Pre-Encounter Assimilation (PA), Pre-Encounter Self-Hatred (PSH), Pre-Encounter Miseducation (PM), Immersion-Emersion Anti-White (IEAW), Internalization Afrocentric (IA), and Internalization Multiculturalist Inclusive (IMCI). Each subscale contains five items that are rated on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from a score of 1 for *strongly disagree* to a score of 7 for *strongly agree*. Participants receive a score for each scale measured by the CRIS. Higher scale scores equate higher endorsements of the attitudes associated with a particular scale. For instance, if an individual scores highest on the IEAW scale, it is likely that he or she endorses more attitudes consistent with the Immersion-Emersion Anti-White status than other statuses.

Two statuses theorized by Cross and Vandiver (2001), Immersion-Emersion Intense Black Involvement and Internalization Biculturalist, are not measured by the CRIS. A factor analysis revealed that items related to the Immersion-Emersion Intense Black Involvement loaded on the same factor of as Internalized Black Nationalist status, "reflecting a pro-Black identity without distinguishing the essence of the internalized Black Nationalist" (Vandiver, Cross, Worrell, & Fhagen-Smith, 2002, p. 73). Additionally, a distinction was not made between the Internalization Biculturalist and the Internalization Multiculturalist Inclusive

statuses (Vandiver et al., Cross, Worrell, & Fhagen-Smith, 2002). The CRIS is internally consistent, with Cronbach's alphas for the six subscales ranging from .89 for PSH and IEAW, .85 for PA, .83 for IA, .82 for IMCI, to .78 for PM. The Cronbach's alphas for the current sample are .93 for PA, .80 for PM, .50 for PSH, .77 for IEAW, .88 for IA, and .67 for IMCI. Convergent validity has been confirmed using the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity, which measures a similar construct (Sellers et al., 1997; Vandiver et al., 2000). Discriminate validity has been established as a result of low correlations with the Big Five Inventory, which measures five broad factors of personality traits, e.g., extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience, not thought to be related to racial identity (Vandiver et al., 2001).

In his study examining the longitudinal utility of the CRIS, Worrell (2008) found that racial identity scores on the CRIS were congruent across participants with differing demographic and developmental profiles. Worrell (2008) examined the congruence of scores among adolescent (*M* age = 14 years), emerging adult (*M* age = 20.70 years), and adult (*M* age = 34.10 years) African American, Black, and Black Caribbean participants. Worrell found that “the patterns of the means were remarkably similar across the three samples” (p. 172), and indicated that the congruency of scores across participants in differing developmental stages supports the attitudinal foundation of the CRIS as opposed to the former developmental foundation.

Participants

Selection Criteria

Wertz (2005) noted the importance of finding participants “whose experience most fully and authentically manifests or makes accessible what the researcher is interested in” in phenomenological research (p. 174). Participants in this study identified as African American.

In addition, Kennedy (2003) noted that there may be generational differences in regard to African American's perceptions of the "N-word." Participants in this study belong to the millennium generation, which includes individuals born after 1980. As a result, participants in this study were African American and college aged, 18 to 28, from a Midwestern university.

Number of Participants

Wertz (2005) stated that "the nature of the research problem" and qualitative methods determines how many participants should be chosen for a study (p. 171). In addition, Wertz noted that an estimation of the number of participants needed in qualitative research is difficult to determine and researchers can conclude that they have enough participants when saturation, or redundancy of findings, occurs. The current research study employed three sources of qualitative data collection to evaluate African Americans' perception of the "N-word" and one source of quantitative data collection to measure racial identity. Following the guidelines established by Wertz, the use of these four sources of data warranted approximately 9 to 14 participants. All participants were given the same set of qualitative and quantitative measures. Fourteen individuals (9 women, 5 men) participated in this study. Due to the selection criteria (African American, ages 18 to 28), one participant's data was removed from this study after it was discovered that that she was born in Nigeria. Although this participant checked African American on the demographic sheet, during the interview her identity and family experiences were Nigerian-American rather than African American in nature. Data from 13 (8 women, 5 men) participants were analyzed for the purpose of this study.

Participant Demographics

All participants were students at one mid-sized Midwestern university. Six were graduate students and seven were undergraduate students. Information related to community

type and racial composition were used in describing the participants in this study. Although all participants were living in a mid-sized Midwestern city at the time that data was collected, they used their home of origin as their community type when completing the demographic information on the CRIS. Of the 13 participants, nine reported an urban community type, three reported a suburban community type, and one reported a rural community type. In terms of racial composition, no participants reported being from a predominately White community, five reported a racially mixed community composition, and eight reported a predominantly Black community composition. A summary of the demographic variables and participant descriptors are listed in Table 2.

Procedure

Recruitment

Participants were recruited from graduate and undergraduate classes in the Colleges of Education and Arts and Sciences at Indiana State University, and via flyers distributed across campus. I informed potential participants of the study and handed out flyers requesting students' participation. Flyers included my contact information, information about the mode of administration, time commitment, incentive, and the purpose of the study. Participants were asked to e-mail or call me to participate in this study.

Informed Consent

After expressing an interest to participate in this research, informed consent was secured from participants (see Appendix D). The procedures for data collection (i.e., surveys and interviews) were explained to participants, and they were informed that their participation in this study was voluntary and that they could withdraw from this study at any time. Participants were also notified about the time commitment (2½ - 3½ hours), potential risks and discomforts,

confidentiality procedures, recognition for participation, and information regarding their rights as research participants.

Table 2

Summary of Demographic Variables

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Academic Status	Community Type	Community Racial Composition
Carla	21	Female	Junior	Urban	Mixed
John	19	Male	Freshman	Suburban	Mixed
Amy	19	Female	Freshman	Urban	Mostly Black
Johnny	27	Male	Grad Student	Rural	Mixed
Ashley	21	Female	Senior	Urban	Mostly Black
Hope	25	Female	Grad Student	Urban	Mostly Black
Jay	25	Female	Grad Student	Urban	Mostly Black
Jada	23	Female	Senior	Urban	Mostly Black
Ahmad	23	Male	Senior	Urban	Mostly Black
Ramone	24	Male	Senior	Urban	Mostly Black
Kelis	26	Female	Grad Student	Suburban	Mixed
Latifah	24	Female	Grad Student	Urban	Mixed
Kyle	28	Male	Grad Student	Suburban	Mostly Black

Administration Procedures

In an effort to preserve confidentiality, I created a master list of participant's names, telephone numbers, and pseudonyms. This information was obtained to contact participants for scheduling purposes, and was stored separately from all other materials. The master list was destroyed after all data was collected.

The completed surveys were coded with an alias name and participant number, (i.e., 001, 002, 003, etc.). Participants were informed of their pseudonyms. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw after data was collected by contacting me and requesting that

their information be withdrawn from the study using their pseudonym. Participant's names were not connected to the data collected. Participants were informed that this study was completely voluntary and that they could decline answering any question or stop at any time. Participants were also informed of the incentive procedures. Each participant received an \$8 gift certificate to Wal-Mart for each hour of their participation in this study, with a maximum of \$24.

Participants met individually with me to complete the Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS), a computerized survey of questions related to their perceptions of the words "nigger" and "nigga", and to provide typed responses to two vignettes of situations in which the words "nigger" and "nigga" were used. Items were administered in the order described above. Meetings were held in a private administrative office located in the office of the Department of Communication Disorders and Counseling, School, and Educational Psychology in the College of Education. Written responses took approximately one hour to complete. Participants then participated in one approximately one-hour semi-structured interview with me in the same office space. All participants completed written responses before being interviewed, and all written responses and semi-structured interviews were completed on the same day. Participant's contact information was stored separately from their survey materials in a locked filing cabinet in my office of employment. The master list of participant contact information was destroyed at the end of data collection. All but two participants took approximately 1 ½ hours to complete all survey materials. Two participants took approximately one hour to complete all survey materials.

In order to protect the participants, a professional transcriber was asked to sign a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix E) before transcribing the interviews. Data from the vignettes and computerized survey were transcribed by the participants using a password

protected computer. Qualitative data was analyzed using the Dedoose web-based service on a password protected computer (Lieber & Weisner, 2010). I am the only person who has access to the one password protected computer that was utilized in this study. Dedoose is a web-based service that allows researchers to import, manage, and analyze qualitative and mixed methods data. I analyzed all qualitative and quantitative data separately. Each participant's CRIS scale scores were presented graphically, as recommended by the authors, to facilitate examination of their individual identity attitude endorsements.

Any information obtained in this study in connection with participants will remain confidential and will only be disclosed with their permission. To secure the data that was collected on my computer, I password protected my computer and saved all data on an external flashdrive. Data was not saved on my personal computer. The external flashdrive was transported in a lockbox and stored along with the Informed Consent documents and original audio tapes in a locked filing cabinet located in the utility room of my apartment. The master list was stored separately from all other materials in a locked filing cabinet located at my office of employment. I destroyed the master list after all of the data was collected.

The informed consent (IC) documents, flashdrive and original audio tapes were transported by me, in my car, from the College of Education to my apartment (approximately 3.5 miles) daily upon completion of data collection. All data that was transported by me was kept in a lock box while in my physical possession. I then removed these items from the lockbox and placed them in a manila envelope in a locked filing cabinet located in the utility room of my apartment. All items remained in the locked filing cabinet unless they were being used by me. My apartment doors remained locked at all times. The only other person, besides me, who had access to my apartment, was maintenance. I was notified by the office when routine

maintenance was going to be performed on my apartment. When I received notification that routine maintenance was going to be performed on my apartment, in an effort to ensure that all documents were secure I placed the audio tapes, flashdrive, and IC documents back in the lockbox, which I then placed in the locked filing cabinet.

Data that was transcribed by a transcriptionist was transported by me in a manila folder in a lockbox. Upon reaching the transcriptionist's location, I took the audio-tapes out of the lockbox and left them with the transcriptionist who was asked to sign a confidentiality agreement stating that she would also keep the documents secure. Once the data was transcribed, I picked up the documents and audio tapes from the transcriptionist and transported them in a lockbox back to my apartment to be secured in the locked filing cabinet.

Data Analysis Procedures

Qualitative Analysis

After participants completed the qualitative survey, semi-structured interviews, and vignettes, all qualitative data was transcribed by a transcriptionist or by me. Data was then analyzed from a phenomenological approach, using Moustakas' (1994) guide to phenomenological research analysis. Moustakas' outlined four steps to analyzing phenomenological research. Moustakas' four steps are presented below:

1. Using the phenomenological approach, obtain a full description of your own experience of the phenomenon.
2. From the verbatim description of your experience, complete the following steps:
 - a. Consider each statement with respect to significance for description of the experience.
 - b. Record all relevant statements.

- c. List each non-repetitive, non-overlapping statement. These are the invariant horizons or meaning units of the experience.
 - d. Relate and cluster the invariant meaning units into themes.
 - e. Synthesize the invariant meaning units and themes into *a description of the textures of the experience*. Include verbatim examples.
 - f. Reflect on your own textural description. Through imaginative variation, construct *a description of the structures of your experience*.
 - g. Construct *a textural-structural description* of the meanings and essences of your experience.
3. From the verbatim transcript of the experience of each of the [participants] complete the above steps, a through g.
 4. From the individual textural-structural descriptions of all co-researchers' experiences, construct *a composite textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience*, integrating all individual textural-structural descriptions into a universal depiction of the experience representing the group as a whole. (p. 122)

Following guidelines established by Moustakas (1994), I began by recording my own experience and perceptions of the “N-word.” I also recorded my initial reactions to individual participants after each interview, as well as my reactions to the data as I read and analyzed each transcript. Information recorded during this reflective epoche process was acknowledged and discussed in bi-weekly meetings with my committee chairperson and then bracketed out so as to not interfere with the qualitative analysis.

Next, in the transcendental-phenomenological reduction phase of this qualitative analysis, I read each script from data that was collected from participants using semi-structured

interviews, vignettes, and a computerized survey. Each script was read several times to get a sense of each participant's experience with the "N-word." After obtaining a broad understanding of each participant's experience, I identified several statements related to the research question. I then deconstructed the data from all three sources by creating a word document of typed verbatim responses listed under each statement related to the research question. All relevant and non-repetitive statements were listed and analyzed. Invariant meaning units were clustered into themes, and a textural description of what participants experienced emerged. Textural descriptions include invariant meaning units that describe what participants experienced. Participant transcripts were then uploaded into the Dedoose web-based program. I thoroughly re-read each transcript and attached verbatim responses to related themes. As suggested by Moustakas (1994), verbatim examples were used to construct a textural description of what participants experience in relation to the "N-word."

Next, a structural description of participant's experience was created through imaginative variation. Specifically, a description of the structures of participant's experience was created through engaging in reflection on the textural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994), and through additional analysis focusing on the context and situations described by participants in the study (Creswell & Plano-Clark et al., 2007). Structural descriptions include information related to how a phenomenon is experienced, and provide the reader with information related to underlying emotions associated with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Samples of structural descriptions of how the "N-word" is experienced by participants are provided in Appendix H.

Lastly, in synthesis, a textural and structural description for each participant was created, and the themes that emerged from invariant clusters are demonstrated through these textural and structural descriptions. These descriptions include information about what participants

experience in relation to the “N-word” and of the underlying emotion associated with this phenomenon. A textural and structural description was then composited and utilized to describe the universal essence of these African American participant’s perceptions of the “N-word.”

Quantitative Analysis

The Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS) was used to identify participants’ racial identity attitudes. Participants received a score for each scale that is measured by the CRIS, and each scale is representative of a particular racial identity attitude. Higher scale scores indicate stronger endorsements of the attitudes associated with a particular scale. Emerging themes from the qualitative data were examined in the context of information obtained on the CRIS in an effort to evaluate the themes that existed among and across racial identity attitudes. Scores from the CRIS cannot be summarized or collapsed for group interpretation (Worrell, Vandiver & Cross, 2004). As a result, emerging themes were examined in the context of racial identity on an individual basis. Results from the CRIS provided information in regard to the themes that exist in relation to African American’s perceptions of the “N-word” among and across racial identity attitudes.

Data Management

Data from the semi-structured interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriber and by me. Data from the vignettes and computerized survey were typed out by the participant on a laptop computer. In order to protect the participants, the professional transcriber was asked to sign a confidentiality agreement. Qualitative data was analyzed using the Dedoose web-based program. Quantitative data was analyzed by this researcher. Each participant’s scale scores were computed to reveal how each racial identity attitude was endorsed by each participant.

Standards of Trustworthiness

Morrow (2005) noted the importance of establishing a level of quality and standard of practice when conducting qualitative research, and stated that “validity, credibility, rigor, and trustworthiness” (p. 250) can be established in qualitative research by following certain guidelines. Specific guidelines followed for the purposes of this study include subjectivity, reflexivity, transferability, dependability, and a peer auditor (Morrow, 2005).

Subjectivity

Morrow (2005) stated that qualitative data are “grounded in subjectivity” and that researchers may embrace subjectivity depending on the underlying paradigm of the study (p. 254). Furthermore, in order to ensure credibility of qualitative research, it is vital that the researcher acknowledge the subjective nature of their qualitative findings (Morrow, 2005). The phenomenological nature of this study warranted a certain level of subjectivity in regard to the qualitative data that is collected. However, data were presented objectively through the use of reflexivity.

Reflexivity

Morrow (2005) suggested that “investigators always believe something about the phenomenon in question” (p. 254). As a result, phenomenological researchers bracket out their personal beliefs about a subject in an effort to promote objectivity (Moustakas, 1994). In an effort to monitor my beliefs and assumptions about the African Americans’ perceptions of the “N-word” and racial identity, I began by identifying my own reactions, and then routinely engaged in debriefing with the dissertation committee chairperson.

Transferability

Transferability is the process of appropriately taking information found in one qualitative study and conceptualizing it in a similar context. Qualitative researchers must provide their reader with rich and contextual descriptions so that readers can determine the appropriateness of applying the findings to other, similar, contexts (Morrow, 2005). In an effort to enhance transferability, I have provided readers with rich and contextual descriptions of participant demographics and research findings.

Dependability

Morrow (2005) suggested that dependability comes as a result of the use of consistent and systematic methods over a period of time. As a result, I kept an audit trail (see Appendix F) clearly identifying each step utilized throughout the study, in an effort to promote credibility and provide the reader with a detailed description of what steps were followed in this study. In addition, I administered all methods systematically throughout the course of the study.

Peer Auditor

After the qualitative data was collected, I imported individual responses to each question into a word document. Approximately 30% of this data was reviewed by a peer auditor who was instructed to re-read each verbatim response searching for themes or invariant meaning units. The peer auditor found similar themes to those found by this researcher.

Limitations

1. The results from this study may not be transferable to all African American college aged students.
2. Results from this research are subject to other interpretations and are not limited to the interpretations made in this study.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Qualitative Results

After analyzing the qualitative data, invariant meaning units were clustered into themes and textural and structural descriptions were created. Textural descriptions included information related to what the African American college students who participated in this study experienced in relation to the “N-word.” Structural descriptions included information related to how this phenomenon was experienced by the participants. Textural and structural descriptions were then combined to obtain a general understanding of the way the “N-word” was experienced by individual participants. Next, textural and structural descriptions were composited from all participants to describe the essence of this phenomenon across all participants in this study. Examples of a textural, structural, and textural-structural description are presented in Appendix G.

Themes were generated from the invariant meaning units identified from individual participant’s responses to items on a computerized survey, semi-structured interview, and questions related to two vignettes. The themes identified include the following: (a) nigger is a universally negative and unacceptable term, (b) nigga is acceptable when used by African Americans, and (c) the public use of nigga is inappropriate. Several specific subthemes were

also supported by the data. A summary of themes is listed in Table 3, and participants' endorsement of themes is presented in Table 4.

Table 3

Summary of Themes

Themes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Nigger is a universally negative and unacceptable term <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Intended to hurt b. Used to objectify or label 2. Nigga is acceptable when used by African Americans <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. In group ownership b. Term of endearment c. Ubiquitous usage <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Media influence ii. Ambivalence about personal use d. African American's Perception of the "N-word" is generational 3. Public use of nigga is inappropriate <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Demeaning to self b. Confuses other cultures

Table 4

Participants' Endorsement of Themes

Themes	#1	#1a	#1b	#2	#2a	#2b	#2c	#2d	#3	#3a	#3b
Carla	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
John	X	X		X	X		X				
Amy	X		X					X	X	X	
Johnny	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X
Ashley	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Hope	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X
Jay	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
Jada	X	X	X	X				X	X		
Ahmad	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
Ramone	X	X	X	X		X	X		X	X	X
Kelis	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X
Latifah	X						X	X	X	X	X
Kyle	X	X		X	X	X			X	X	X

Theme 1 – Nigger is a universally negative and unacceptable term

Theme 1a – Intended to hurt

Theme 1b – Used to objectify or label

Theme 2 – Nigga is acceptable when used by African Americans

Theme 2a – In group ownership

Theme 2b – Term of endearment

Theme 2c – Ubiquitous usage

Theme 2d – Perception is generational

Theme 3– Public use of nigga is inappropriate

Theme 3a – Demeaning to self

Theme 3b – Confuses other cultures

Nigger is a Universally Negative and Unacceptable Term

Participants generally expressed a negative and sometimes visceral reaction to the word nigger. Common responses related to this theme included statements that a nigger is an “an ignorant, uncivilized, unethical, uneducated, and incompetent individual,” “an ignorant Black person,” a “person with no values, morals, reason or feeling to better themselves,” “an ignorant Black person who has no goals or drive to better themselves or their community,” “an ignorant person,” and “a way of calling someone stupid.” Participants varied in their responses to inquiries related to their reactions to being called or being exposed to the word nigger, but most expressed negative feelings. Six participants stated that they felt shocked or upset when either called the word nigger by a European American, or present while the word nigger was used to describe someone else. Four participants stated that their reaction was to withdraw themselves from the situation, or to terminate friendships or communication with the individual(s) who used the word nigger. Two participants stated that they reacted to being called a nigger by disliking White people and becoming more grounded in African American studies; and, two people indicated that being called a nigger pointed out that they were “Black and different.” Data analysis resulted in two subthemes related to African American participants’ perception that the word nigger is a negative and unacceptable term. These subthemes included the perception that the word nigger is used by European Americans with (a) the intention to hurt, and to (b) label or objectify African Americans. These subthemes are further explained below.

Nigger is intended to hurt. All participants stated that they perceive nigger as a negative or derogatory term and, of these participants, eight reported perceiving the word nigger as a term that, when used by White people, is meant to harm. Common responses related to this subtheme included participant’s references to nigger as a “derogatory term,” a “put down word,”

a “demeaning term created during slavery,” a “term that relates to a kind of prejudice,” a “nasty word,” “profanity,” a “negative term,” a “term of discrimination,” a “demeaning term,” and an “extremely offensive” word. A typical response illustrating this theme was provided by Hope who stated that nigger is a “negative term [used] to refer to African Americans. It is a derogatory term used towards African Americans by Caucasian Americans.” Additionally, common responses related to the perception that the word nigger is meant to harm included statements indicating that nigger is “a way of putting someone down,” said with the intention of “harming someone,” “meant to sting,” meant to “make Black people feel inferior,” meant to “make Black people feel like the scum of the earth,” and “used to degrade African Americans.” As a result, the general consensus among participants in this study is that the word nigger is perceived a term that is derogatory, offensive, and meant to harm.

Furthermore, when asked about perceptions of equally offensive words, four participants indicated that there is no word in the English language that is as equally offensive as the word nigger. Five participants indicated that the word bitch is as offensive as the word nigger. Lastly, more than half of the participants (7 of 13) noted that other racial slurs used to describe Blacks and other minority populations are as offensive as the word nigger.

Nigger is used to objectify and label Blacks. Nine of 13 participants expressed the perception that the word nigger is used to categorize or refer to Blacks, and 6 of 13 participants expressed the perception that the word nigger is used by Whites. Common responses related to this theme included the statements that the word nigger is “a term used to describe Black people,” a term “used to talk down to African Americans,” “a predominantly negative term used toward African Americans,” “a word used by Whites to make Blacks feel incompetent,” “what White people use to refer to African Americans in a condescending way,” and “a derogatory

term used by Caucasian Americans to describe African Americans.” A common illustration of this theme was provided by Carla who stated that the word nigger “was a socially accepted way to identify slaves and later free African Americans with the understanding that they were of a totally different category than Whites.” Overall, the majority of participants in this study perceive the word nigger as a term that is used to categorize Blacks.

Nigga is Acceptable When Used by African Americans

The majority of participants noted a difference between nigga and nigger, and most noted that the use of the word nigga is perceived as inoffensive and acceptable. Common responses related to this theme included several statements indicating that the word nigga is “an acceptable term when used by Black people,” “holds no negative connotation when used by Black people,” and is typically “not seen as a derogatory statement” when used by African Americans or Blacks. Several subthemes related to the overarching theme of the acceptability of the word nigga among African Americans emerged during data analysis.

Most participants attributed the creation of the word nigga to African Americans, suggesting that its use by other races is unacceptable; and, a considerable number of participants defined the word nigga as a term of endearment when used among African Americans. Additionally, many reported difficulty identifying how they obtained an understanding of the word nigga, and described the word as something that has seemingly been omnipresent. All participants indicated that they have used the word nigga with friends or loved ones at some point throughout their childhood or early-late adolescence, and six participants indicated that they either do not currently use the word nigga, or they try not to use the word. Lastly, many participants indicated that the perception of the word nigga among African Americans is generational. These subthemes are further explained below.

African American's ownership of nigga. Ten of 13 participants noted a perceived difference between the words nigger and nigga within the African American community. Additionally, 6 of 13 participants expressed a sense of ownership over the word nigga, stating that it was created by African Americans and is used primarily among African Americans. A common response illustrating this subtheme was provided by Johnny, who stated:

Nigga is a term that was created by African Americans that served as a means of taking back the word nigger from White people. There's a big difference, a big difference because I think black folks created nigga and white folks created nigger. That's the way it is, it's a big difference. It wasn't necessarily, nigga wasn't created with hate. Nigga was created kind of to me to take back this word nigger because white folks called us nigger. I think it was to show white people that, hey we can take this word and do something positive with it and we put a different spin on it.

Included in common responses related to this subtheme were comments related to the belief that one can regain control through the use of the word nigga among African Americans. For example, Carla stated:

I think using it in the way that African Americans do today it is kind of like we are gaining control. We are not letting this word hurt us. It doesn't mean what it meant back then. Like we don't associate it with that. Like we know where it came from and that it is related, but that is not what we are meaning when we say it.

Many participants who claimed that nigga is a transformation of nigger created by African Americans, also expressed the belief that nigga is most appropriately used among African American individuals. Many of these participants noted that the use of the word nigga with someone who does not identify as African American or Black is inappropriate or odd. For

instance, Ashley stated:

I think because we use it today in the Black community, it's kind of like we have taken over the word. Like it's ours now. And I know you can't tell somebody. . .you can't use this word. It's a word that's in the dictionary. But it's something that we've kind of taken over. And in the back of our heads we all know where it comes from. And it's like okay you're not Black. I wouldn't call somebody that was Asian a nigga even if we were cool, because I mean they're not Black they're Asian.

Another response was provided by John, who stated that “Black people feel like [nigga] is our word” and “many feel like [because] nigga is our word, they can use it wherever.” Other common responses included several references to nigga being perceived as “our” (African Americans) word, as a word that was “transformed from nigger,” and as a word that is “used to describe Black people.” As a result, many participants indicated that because African Americans are responsible for creating the word nigga from a word that was previously thought to be racist and offensive, nigger, ownership of the word nigga resides within the hands of individuals belonging to the African American community.

Nigga is a term of endearment. Nine of 13 participants either indicated that the use of the word nigga is reserved for close friendships, or defined the word nigga as a term that is indicative of a close relationship with a friend or loved one. For instance, when asked what comes to mind when she hears the word nigga, Carla stated:

When I hear the word nigga I think of it as being used among African-Americans today. It kind of seems, it's kind of socially accepted within African-Americans as a term of friendship. It is kind of relating that you have some kind of personal relationship with each other and you guys are close friends, so I don't take offense to it when it's used in

the context between African-Americans. When used by African Americans, nigga is a term that emanates a sense of camaraderie or a close personal friendship between those using the word in their conversation.

Similarly, when asked a related question, Ahmad stated:

It's acceptable. It's like, what's up nigga? It's like a greeting. Or nigga, please.

It's how we refer to each other. It's like, its establishing a relationship that, I don't know.

Like we're both Black and we're cool.

Four participants specifically indicated that nigga is considered a term of endearment within the African American community, and five participants stated that nigga is often viewed as a term that describes friendships among African Americans. For instance, a common response related to this theme was illustrated by Ashley who stated, "nigga is like my black friend."

Nigga is ubiquitous. Nine of 13 participants stated that the use of the word nigga among Blacks and African Americans is extremely common and engrained in African American culture. Of these participants, many implied that African Americans are unaware of their use of the word nigga due to their perception that nigga is a common word in African American's vocabularies. For instance, 9 of 13 participants stated that they perceive the word nigga as a "greeting" or "tool of reference." An illustration of a common response related to this subtheme was provided by Hope, who stated:

If it is someone that is African American, it can be a greeting. Like it can just mean hi, nothing major. Nigga, when I use it, it's more of saying hi.

Other common responses illustrating this subtheme include several references given by participants indicating that nigga is a "common everyday greeting," "a way to address someone," "a way to refer to each other," and "a way to describe someone," typically a Black person.

Furthermore, of the participants who endorsed this subtheme, five specifically used the terms “embedded,” “instilled” or “engrained” to describe African American’s use of the word nigga. Another illustration of this subtheme was provided by Hope, who stated:

I think that our generation uses that term because it’s so engrained in our culture. I identify with this group and this is how we refer to ourselves. It’s not something that we even think about. For us, it’s just another word that we say. It’s like an everyday thing.

Likewise, when asked to provide an explanation as to why African Americans use the word nigga, Johnny stated:

The crazy thing is that a lot of people use it and do not even realize they are using it. It is so engrained in our minds, it’s just normal. Sometimes it so engrained in me that sometimes it comes out. Just because that’s all we see. It’s fed into our minds so much that at some point it is just like we just have to accept the word I feel. I think that is what happens is that it is just so engrained in our culture we have to find reasons not to use the word as opposed to reasons why we should use the word.

Another related response was provided by Jay, who stated:

It’s just so embedded in our culture that people don’t realize what they are doing. It’s been embedded for so long, and now that it’s become a word that is used so loosely.

Other common responses included statements such as, “[people] use it in everyday speech like it is just another word,” “I think it maybe got carried on into [African American] culture today,” “I use the word nigga because it’s almost first nature to use the word,” “you hear it so much it’s kind of hard not to use it,” “it was just dialogue,” “nigga is a more common everyday greeting,” “just everyday almost conversation use of the word.”

Media influence. Six of 13 participants indicated that the use of the word nigga in

various media outlets, and by Black entertainers, contributes to the embeddedness of the word nigga in the African American community and makes African Americans use of the word nigga acceptable. Of these participants, many indicated that the word nigga is embedded within African American culture due to over exposure to the word in music, movies, and other media outlets. An illustration was provided by Latifah, who stated:

Because of the mainstream media, such as rappers and comedians. . .it is just kind of like this automatic thing. No one really sits down and thinks about it. Not knowing, but the majority of people don't sit down and just really think about it.

Similarly, when asked to expand on his perceptions of why African Americans use the word nigga, Johnny stated:

This is such an urban hip-hop culture type word. I think the word has been owned by the hip-hop culture. I think they bought the rights to the word. I think they bought the rights to the word and took the word and use this word.

Another illustration was provided by Ahmad, who stated that “when rap music first came out, [nigga] became publicly heard around the world [and] it became more acceptable to say it in public.” Other participants who endorsed this theme stated that the use of the word nigga is “second nature,” “instilled,” and “embedded” in African American culture due to “music,” “seeing it in different videos,” and “hearing it in different songs.”

Ambivalence about personal use of nigga. Many participants implied that they use the word nigga because it has been omnipresent throughout most of their lives. However, upon thinking about either the origin of the word, or of how it is perceived by others, they began to believe that their personal use of the word nigga was wrong. For instance, 8 of 13 participants expressed some level of ambivalence as it relates to their personal use of the word nigga. A

common illustration was provided by Jay, who stated:

I have a struggle with using the word because it is so easy and so embedded in my brain that I am accustomed to the word. I shouldn't use it. And I can admit that on my own part that I use it and it's wrong. I hate using the word, but I use it. . . . it's pathetic. I know that it's wrong. . .but I use it.

A similar illustration of this theme was provided by Ashley, who stated:

All I can say is that it's something that I've heard and picked up on. It's just out of habit. I know that's not a good excuse, but that's really the reason why I use it. I know better, I just hadn't ever thought about it. I think when I hear somebody else that's not black use it, it kind of snaps back like dang that's a bad word. It hurts when they say it. I probably shouldn't be using it either because maybe somebody along the way. . .even if they're not doing it to degrade me. . .you know somebody that's White...they might think that it's okay. They might have heard somebody black say it and think its okay for them to use it.

Additionally, when asked if she uses the word nigga, Latifah stated:

I'm guilty of it. I don't say it as much. I remember a time when I was telling people don't say it at all, but I listen to the music so much it comes out. I mean I wouldn't say that I say it all the time, but if you hang around me enough and someone pisses me off or if I'm just talking, it just rolls out.

Other related responses included the comments, "our generation shouldn't use it," "the smartest thing for me to do is to not use it myself," "I use it because the people around me use it. And I know that sounds bad," and "I use it but I don't feel comfortable saying it that much."

African American's use of the word nigga is generational. Nine of 13 participants expressed the perception that the use of the word nigga in the African American community is

generational, with younger generations being most likely to use the term. Most participants who endorsed this subtheme also indicated that younger generations have a different understanding of the term nigga due to a lack of knowledge and direct exposure to the Civil Rights Movement and other racially tense events. An illustration of this subtheme was provided by Latifah, who stated:

The older generation is trying to kill [the word nigga] and the younger generation is trying to keep it alive. Just different time periods. I think that if we were living right now in 2010 like people in the 1960s were living, it would be a different dynamic. That word would not be as exchanged as it is now. Civil Rights movement, the Black Panther movement, Jim Crow laws, slavery. . .those are the times I'm talking about. I just think that people had a different experience with the term and that now with those times being nonexistent anymore the experience with the term is completely different.

A similar response was provided by Ahmad, who stated:

Older people never say [nigga]. I don't know when it started but I think if you were around during the Civil Rights you wouldn't use it, but now that it's more acceptable and now younger generations use it. My little cousin is 3 and he is running around saying nigga, nigga. You know [younger generations] can read about it, but it's really nothing to experience it. So I think if they were to experience it then they would have more appreciation for the Black community and for the use of the word nigga.

Another significant illustration of this subtheme was provided by Hope, who stated:

I completely think that it's generational because a lot of. . .I know my mom and dad and a lot of older generations experienced the word differently, as a symbol of racism. It's probably just because a lot of the older generations faced a lot more discrimination and racism than we do now. Because I know my dad, he grew up here, faced a lot more

racism. Like the KKK marching up the streets in their rallies and stuff like that. They just experienced a lot more direct racism than our generation has.

Overall, the general consensus among participants was that the use of the word nigga is generational, and that younger generations view nigga as an acceptable word because they do not view it as a symbol of racism.

African American's Public use of Nigga is Inappropriate

Twelve of 13 participants indicated that African American's public use of the word nigga is inappropriate. Of these participants, six noted that the use of the word nigga in a private setting (e.g., a setting with close friends or among other people who identify as African American) is viewed much more favorably. Additionally, many participants expressed the perception that public use of the word nigga is demeaning to self, and stated that public use of the word nigga is confusing to other cultures. Participants also expressed concern for public use of the nigga reinforcing other race's use of the term nigga and nigger. An illustration of this theme was provided by Carla, who stated:

There is a time and a place to use [nigga]. When you're in a personal setting and your just with friends, that's ok. But not in public. It is a word that signifies a close relationship between African Americans and therefore has no purpose or place in a public setting.

Additionally, when asked about her perception of African American's use of the word nigga in public settings, Jay stated:

The public use of the word nigga by African Americans is almost like black face, and I say that because we use it for entertainment. But the minute somebody questions us about it or uses it themselves we're ready to fight or protest. It's so embedded in our

minds to stick up for one thing and then fight for another, but we're not fighting the same battle. That's why I say that it's confusing. It really needs to stop; it does not give us power or respect.

Another response related to this theme was provided by Ahmad, who stated that he uses the word nigga but "not in a public place" because there is "no excuse to use the word publically."

Likewise, Hope stated "African Americans should never use the n-word in a public setting. I don't agree with that. I don't agree with saying it in front of people from other races."

Additionally, Ashley stated:

Like if you're in an area where there are only a few black people. Not even if it's just a few black people, if there's another race around. I don't know. . .they probably think that anyway. So for us to be yelling that around them, it's like yeah they really are niggers. They say it out loud and they act like it anyway. . .is what they're thinking. It's just inappropriate.

Other responses related to this theme included the statements, "there is a time and a place for the use of that word [and] that time would not be in public settings," and "I don't think that it's appropriate because it shows ignorance and makes other races really want to call us that."

Overall, the majority of participants in this study expressed the perception that the public use of the word nigga is viewed unfavorably by the African American community.

Public use of nigga is demeaning to self. Eight of 13 participants expressed the perception that public use of the word nigga is demeaning to self. An illustration of this subtheme was provided by Ramone, who stated:

I still feel it would be an ignorant thing to do using the word all crazy in public period. Because you never know who is listening. Even if like the food court was filled with

Black people, you never know if some of these Black people were professors, or some of the Black people were influential members of the community, or even someone that you work with. [Using the word nigga] would show ignorance in front of these people and would bring their thoughts of you down. They would think of me as nothing more than a person with an in-extensive vocabulary.

Another illustration of this subtheme was provided by Ahmad, who stated:

I think it makes Black people look bad. This is how we are viewed today, as uneducated and immature. So I wouldn't use that word in public, especially if they are not supposed to use it and it's a bad word, then why would I use it around them.

Many participants who endorsed this subtheme also expressed concern for White people's perception of the African American individual who is using the word nigga in a public setting.

For instance, Latifah stated:

It appears as though we don't care about ourselves enough because we would use such a demeaning term. So White people, they don't see the endearment in it. They see only the demeaning, at least that is what I think. It would [be] a term that would break down my whole united front.

Similarly, Johnny stated:

I hate when I hear an African Americans use the word nigga in public. I think it makes our race look bad and it is counterproductive to why people feel we should use it. It is supposed to show that we have taken the word back, but in reality it makes us look stupid. I think it is completely out of line. I think that if the word is to be used, it should be behind closed doors, even though I don't like the word. What would be our purpose for using the word in front of White people? White people will use the fact that we say

nigga and make it another argument of why African Americans are ignorant. Honestly, it splits the Black community sometimes. Because what it does, it makes people, and I'm going to say like me but not me, look at other Black people in a negative way.

Other responses related to this subtheme include the responses, "you'd be demeaning yourself if you use the word [in public]," "we are degrading ourselves when we use it," and "it's not a good representation of our race." As a result, the majority of participants involved in this study perceive the public use of the word nigga by African Americans as demeaning, especially when used in front of people who identify as European American.

Public use of nigga confuses other cultures. Ten of 13 participants expressed the perception that African American's public use of the word nigga is confusing to other cultures, and six participants stated that the public use of the word nigga reinforces other race's use of the term. Many of these participants stated that public use of the word nigga is confusing to other cultures because other cultures do not understand the perceived difference between nigger and nigga. Additionally, 10 of 13 participants reported that they view other races, particularly European Americans, use of the word nigga unfavorably. An illustration of this subtheme was provided by Ashley who stated, "Black people get mad when other people use that word, but then we use it in a public arena. It's confusing to other people, and then they think it's okay to use it too." Additionally, Kelis stated:

It associates with, you know, just being called a nigger, nigga is associated with nigger. So you know, it makes [other races] feel uncomfortable just hearing that word. I think a lot of them don't know the distinction between nigger and nigga. So when they hear nigga they just immediately think of nigger. Because, you know, they probably think of it like, if y'all didn't like being called a nigger, why do you want to be called a nigga? It

sounds the same to me, or you know.

A participant called Jay, endorsed this theme and gave a personal example of why she believes that African American's public use of the word nigga confuses other cultures. She stated:

It's confusing to other cultures and other races, and I get that because how could you be mad at somebody White for saying it? Like for example, my freshman year in high school all the freshman are meeting in a room and there was a whole bunch of Black guys telling White dudes you cool, you can say nigga. . .you my nigga. . .the whole nine. And I'm like okay, y'all are giving him this pass, but if he uses it out of context y'all will be the first one to want to whoop his ass. And they was just like ahhh. . .whatever. . .and then three years later it's senior year and he was like all y'all niggers need to shut up! Guess it was the wrong day for certain people. He didn't mean it, but he was so used to using it after he got permission freshman year. He had been using it freshman, sophomore, and senior year. . .so okay. . .he's saying it now. So calm down. But I guess it was the wrong day to say it because they was like hell naw! Getting rowdy. And I was just like this is what I'm saying you gave him permission to say it. How are you going to get mad at him now for using it?

Additionally, Ramone suggested that the public use of the word nigga by African Americans may be shocking to other races. He stated:

But those [other races] who just hardly ever hang around African Americans might be unaware of the use of it. Because I've met friends who they've been around and they saw that people were using the word and they were just in awe, like why are they. . .?

Other responses related to this subtheme included the statements, "It confuses other cultures besides Whites because we use it freely but someone else uses it we get mad and scream

injustice, racist, etc.,” “I don’t think that White people understand the difference between nigger and nigga,” and “using the n-word in a public setting can cause confusion.”

Six participants in this study reported that the public use of the word nigga is confusing to other cultures and reinforces other’s use of the term, which was generally viewed unfavorably by participants. For instance, when describing why she does not agree with the public use of the word nigga, Latifah stated:

I would not use it because I do not want others to feel that it is okay to use it. Most people do not understand why younger generations use the term and may misread its use and believe that it is okay for them to use it. I would not want any misinterpretation to occur due to someone overhearing me use the term. We’re not saying it is okay for them use it, but they will misinterpret it and feel that way.

Another illustration was provided by Hope, who stated:

I feel like it should never be used in a public setting. I just feel like that should never be done. It reinforces people’s beliefs that it’s okay for them to use it. It is confusing to other people.

Three of the six participants who endorsed this theme also indicated that public use of the word nigga by African Americans reinforces European American’s use of the word nigger. An illustration of this perception was provided by Johnny, who stated:

But the truth is we say nigga but that allows White people and gives them an excuse to say nigger now. Because they can say I’m just rapping it in the song, I’m just mimicking you. If we eliminate all those words and they still say it then you really see where their heart is. Because now you don’t have an excuse any more. But we’re starting to give them an excuse because they are switching their words and now they can just go sing it in

a song like, what's up my nigga? So, they are trying to take over our word and what we have created as our word and they are using it. I still think it is a mockery of us.

Other common responses included the statements, "I also think that it makes other people from other races think that it's okay for them to use it, especially if we're using it publically," "I know that I should not [use nigga] because I do not like when other races do. And them hearing me do it may allow them to think that the word is okay," "I know that I have heard other Hispanic people call themselves niggas and I think when we use it in front of others it makes them think that it's okay for them to use it," "It's very confusing because on one end we don't want other cultures, especially Whites, use the word but we would put it in songs and movies as a form of entertainment and then get mad when someone says it," and "I don't agree with African Americans using this word publicly because it reinforces other people using this term." As a result, many participants in this study believe that the public use of the word nigga is confusing to other cultures and reinforces other races' use of the terms nigga and nigger, both of which are viewed unfavorably.

Quantitative Results

The Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS) was used to identify the racial identity attitudes of the participants in this study. In this section, the quantitative results from the CRIS will be presented graphically and described briefly. The CRIS included a demographic questionnaire that gathered information related to racial identification, religious affiliation, age, gender, socio-economic status, community information, and educational background. For the purpose of this project, racial identification, age, gender, education, and community information were chosen to be used as participant descriptors. The CRIS measures attitudes related to six subscales: Pre-Encounter Assimilation (PA), Pre-Encounter Self-Hatred (PSH), Pre-Encounter Miseducation

(PM), Immersion-Emersion Anti-White (IEAW), Internalization Afrocentric (IA), and Internalization Multiculturalist Inclusive (IMCI). Higher scale scores equate stronger endorsements of the attitudes associated with a particular scale. As expected, participants' individual scores on the CRIS varied among racial identity attitudes (See Appendix H). According to Worrell et al. (2004), participants more strongly endorse the attitudes associated with the scale in which they score the highest and participants may strongly endorse more than one attitude.

The CRIS does not yield a global summary score and the six subscale scores cannot be averaged for interpretation. Rather, the authors recommend that CRIS users apply a profile analysis to understand the results. Participants rate their agreement with each item on a 7 point Likert scale with the options: *strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *somewhat disagree*, *neither agree nor disagree*, *somewhat agree*, *agree*, and *strongly agree*. To aid in understanding the extent of agreement with the attitudes reflected in each identity scale and consistent with the CRIS response options, for the purposes of this study, scale scores of 15 and below indicate disagreement with the attitudes reflected in each scale, scores of 16 through 24 indicate that participants “neither agree or disagree” with the attitudes in the scale, and scores of 25 and above indicate agreement with the attitudes in the identified scale. A profile of participant responses for each CRIS identity status is presented in Figures 1 – 6.

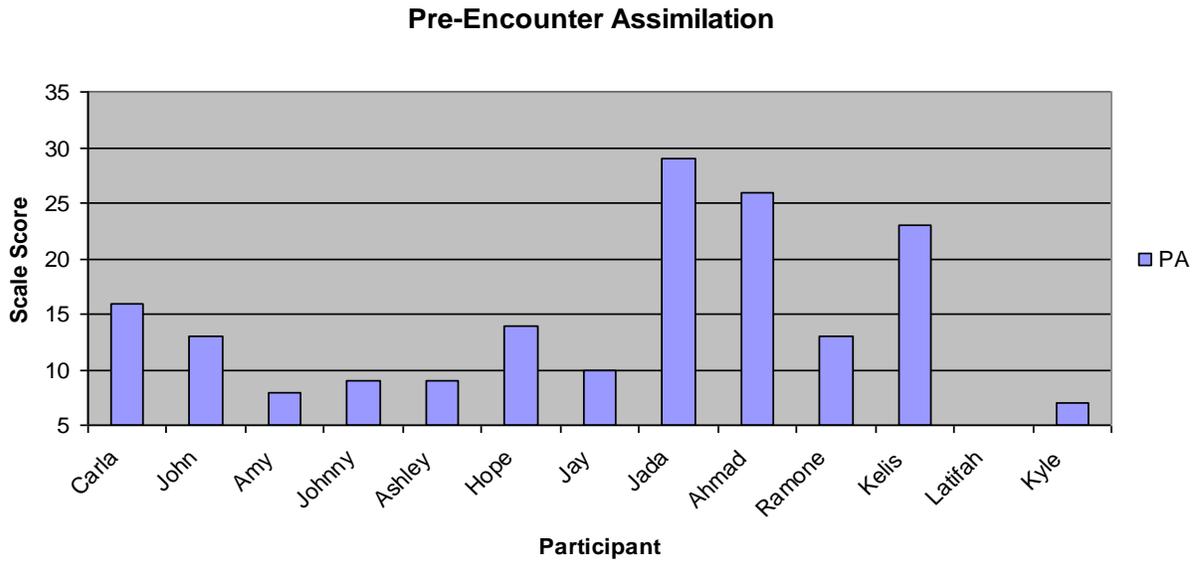


Figure 1. Participant scale scores on the Pre-Encounter Assimilation Scale.

Individuals who agree with the items on this scale typically identify more with being an American and individual than with being Black. They may also be somewhat disconnected from the Black community, and may not value or identify race as a pertinent construct. The lowest scale score on this status is an 8 (disagree range), and the highest is a 29 (agree range). Nine participants fell in the disagree range, two participants fell in the neither agree nor disagree range, and two fell in the agree range. As a result, the majority of participants endorse attitudes of connection to the Black community and value race as a pertinent construct.

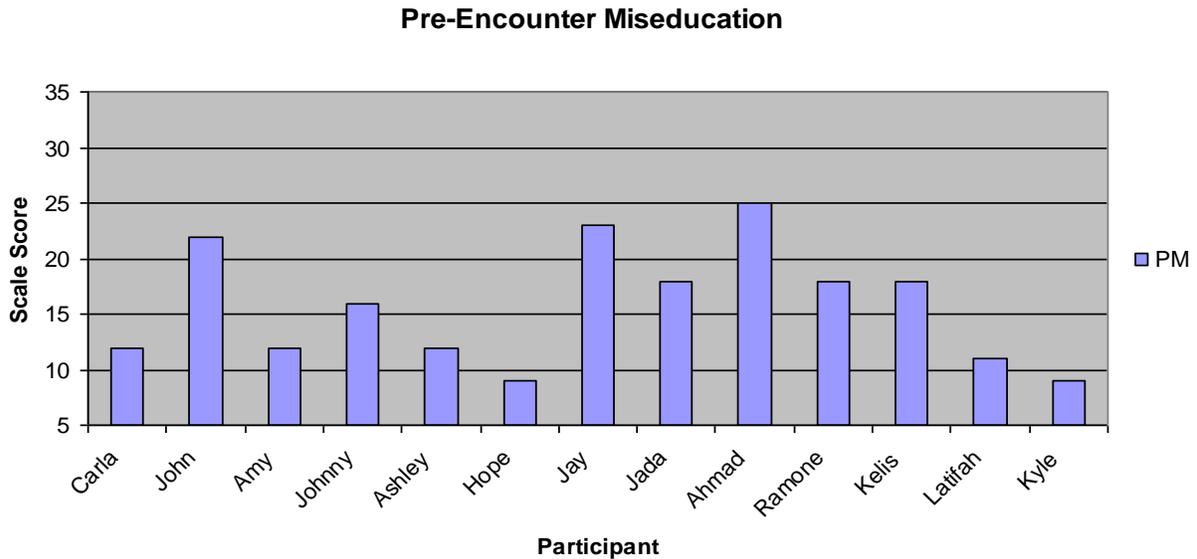


Figure 2. Participant's scale scores on the Pre-Encounter Miseducation Scale.

Individuals who agree with the items on this scale typically have adopted a stereotypical understanding of Black culture, taking into account negative stereotypes and images. A person in the Pre-Encounter Miseducation identity type is also said to be disconnected from the Black community, but in this case, the disconnection is as a result of a negative perception of Black culture. The lowest score on this scale is a 9 (disagree range), and the highest score is a 25 (agree range). Six participants in this study fell in the disagree range, six fell in the neither agree nor disagree range, and one participant fell in the agree range. As a result, nearly half of the participants in this study had a positive perception of Black culture and rejected negative stereotypes, and half were ambivalent in regard to miseducation attitudes.

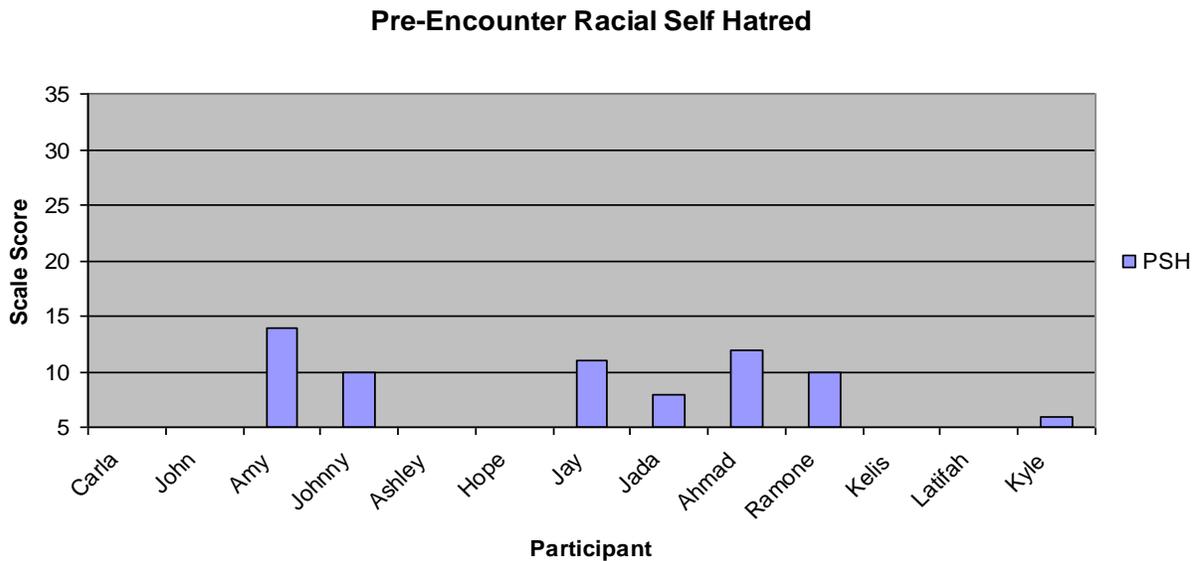


Figure 3. Participant's scale scores on the Pre-Encounter Racial Self-Hatred Scale.

Individuals who endorse the items on this scale most frequently are said to detest the fact that they are Black and as a result experiences feelings of self-hatred. Scores on this status are relatively low compared to other statuses. The lowest scale score on this status is a 5 (strongly disagree), and the highest is a 14 (somewhat disagree). Overall, participants did not strongly endorse attitudes associated negative self-perceptions about being Black, which suggests that they felt connected and had positive views of the Black community.

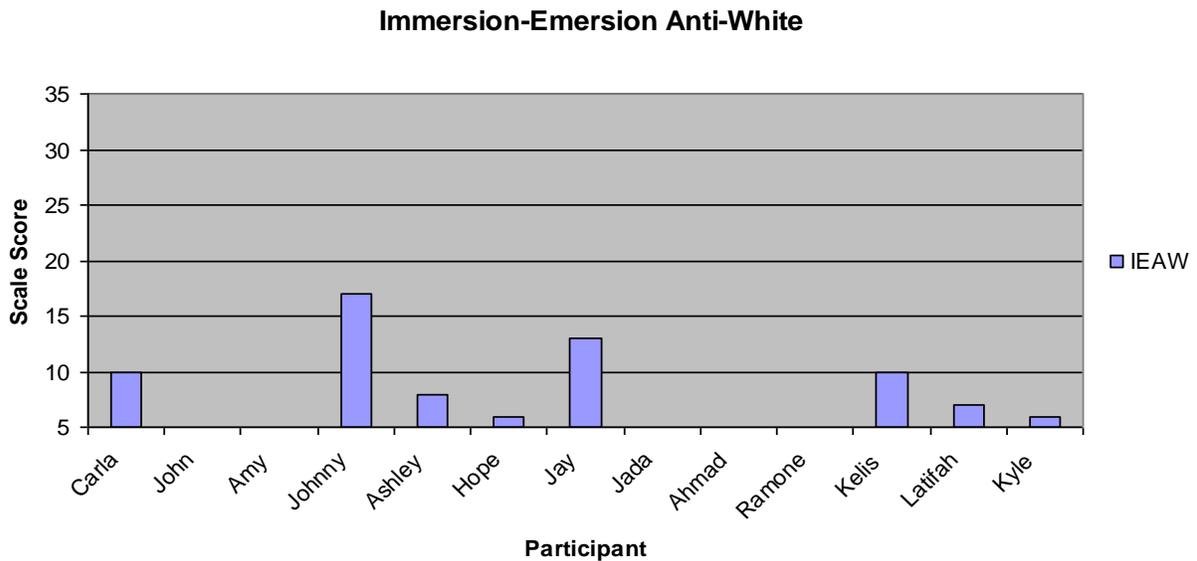


Figure 4. Participant's scale scores on the Immersion-Emersion Anti -White Scale.

Individuals who endorse the items on this scale most frequently are said to hold strong negative views of the dominant culture that include feelings of anger and rage and will engage in activities that he or she believes are indicative of Black culture. The lowest scale score on this status is a 5 (disagree), and the highest is a 17 (neither agree nor disagree). Twelve participants in this study fell in the disagree range, and one participant fell in the neither agree nor disagree range. Overall, participants did not hold negative views of the White culture, which suggests that they likely were not angry with Whites.

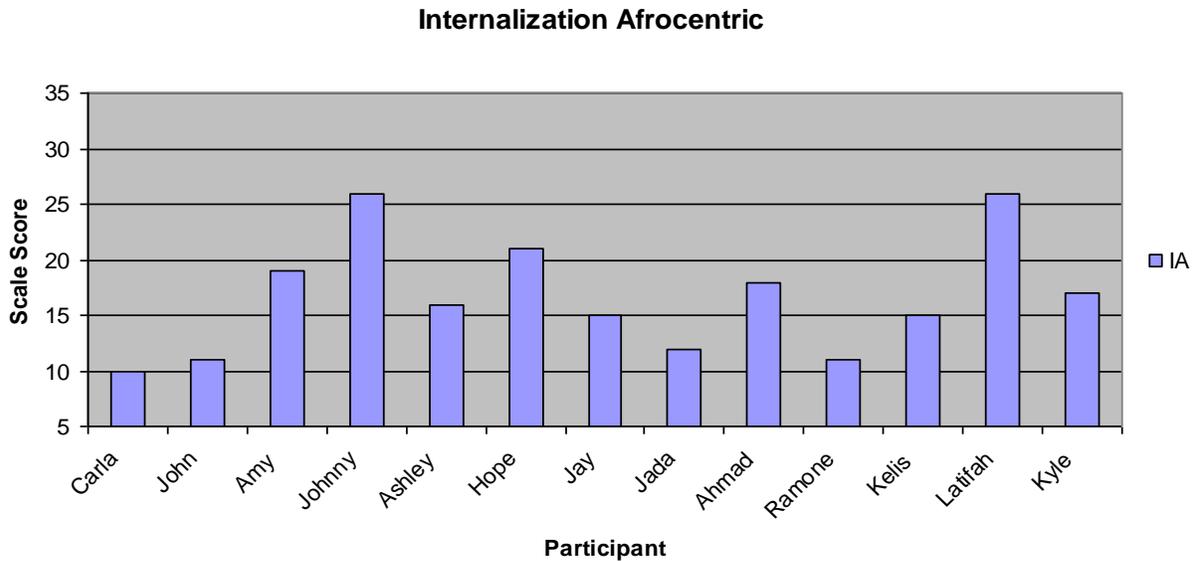


Figure 5. Participant's scale scores on Internalization Afrocentric Scale.

Individuals who endorse the items on this scale most frequently are said to have developed an Afrocentric identity and are often also politically active. The lowest scale score on this status is a 10 (disagree), and the highest is a 26 (neither agree nor disagree). Six participants fell in the disagree range, four participants fell in the neither agree nor disagree range, and two participants fell in the agree range. As a result, nearly half of the participants did not endorse a strong identification with African heritage.

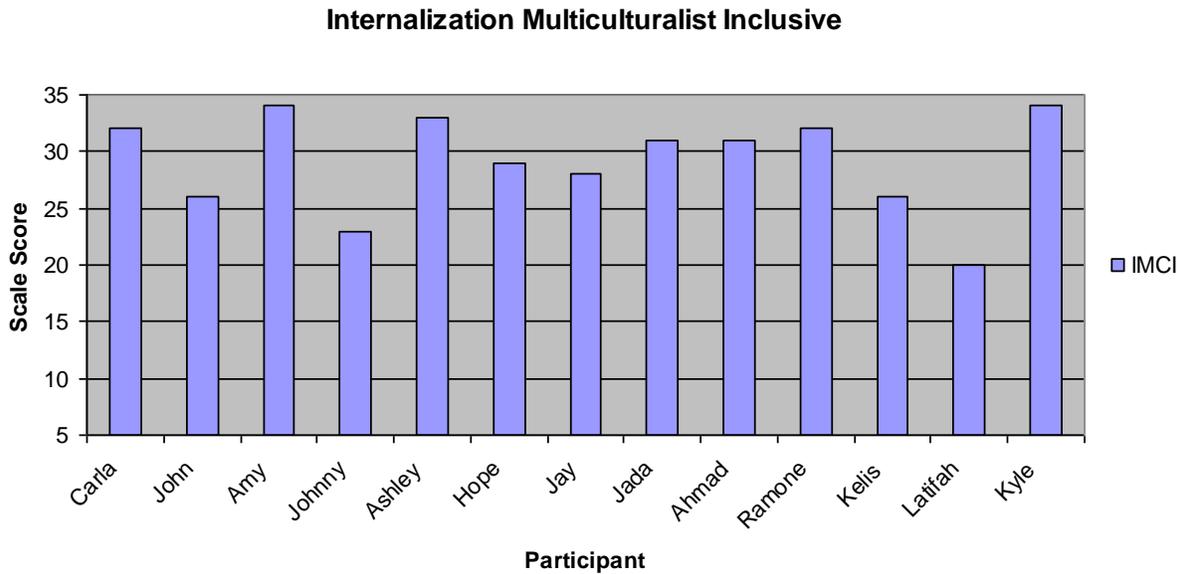


Figure 6. Participant's scale scores on Internalization Multiculturalist Inclusive Scale.

Individuals who score highest on this scale typically identify with multiple identities which may include racial identity, gendered identity, American identity, and so forth. The lowest scale score on this status is a 20 (neither agree nor disagree), and the highest is a 34 (agree). Eleven participants fell in the agree range, and two participants fell in the neither agree nor disagree range. As a result, the majority of the participants in this study identify with multiple personal or cultural identities

Themes and Identity Statuses

An overall profile interpretation of each status in the context of the themes was conducted. The qualitative themes and overall analysis of participant racial identity attitudes are presented below.

Pre-Encounter Assimilation and Perceptions of the “N-word”

A profile analysis of participant scores on the Pre-Encounter Assimilation (PA) scale was conducted. Overall, participants did not strongly agree with the attitudes of this scale, which suggests that they generally do not agree with attitudes associated with a disconnection from the Black community and heavy identification with an identity as an American. The participants in this study generally expressed negative perceptions of the word nigger, and provided rules and boundaries in regard to the appropriateness of the word nigga. Given that the participants in this study generally do not assume attitudes in which their American identity is more significant than their identity as a Black person, it seems appropriate that they would, in most cases, express concern about the “N-word. As a result, participants’ strong disagreement with feelings of assimilation are reflected in the identified themes of *nigger is a universally negative and unacceptable term, nigga is acceptable when used by African Americans, in group ownership, and public use of nigga is inappropriate*. No patterns in identified themes emerged among those who strongly disagreed with assimilationist attitudes. In contrast, the pattern that emerged among those who strongly agreed with assimilationist attitudes included a failure to endorse the theme of *ubiquitous usage*.

Pre-Encounter Miseducation and Perceptions of the “N-word”

A profile analysis of participant scores on the Pre-Encounter Miseducation (PM) scale was conducted. Individuals who more frequently endorse the items on this scale typically have adopted a stereotypical understanding of Black culture, taking into account negative stereotypes and images. A person in the Pre-Encounter Miseducation identity type is also said to be disconnected from the Black community, but in this case, the disconnection is as a result of the negative perception of Black culture. Nearly half of the participants in this study had a positive

perception of Black culture and rejected negative stereotypes, and half were relatively ambivalent in regard to miseducation attitudes. No patterns in identified themes emerged among those who strongly agreed and strongly disagreed with miseducation attitudes.

Pre-Encounter Racial Self Hatred and Perceptions of the “N-word”

A profile analysis of participant scores on the Pre-Encounter Racial Self Hatred (PSH) scale was conducted. Individuals who endorse the items on this scale most frequently are said to detest being Black and, as a result, experience feelings of self-hatred. Overall, participants did not frequently endorse items associated with this scale, which suggests that participants in this study generally have positive views associated with being Black and do not experience feelings of self-hatred. Participants' low feelings of self-hatred were reflected in the themes of *nigga is acceptable when used by African Americans, in group ownership and term of endearment*, as these are viewed by participants as positive manifestations of an ugly word used to describe Blacks. A pattern emerged among those who strongly disagreed with attitudes reflecting self-hatred, in which all participants endorsed the theme *nigger is a universally negative and unacceptable term*.

Immersion-Emersion Anti-White and Perceptions of the “N-word”

A profile analysis of participant scores on the Immersion-Emersion Anti-White (IEAW) scale was conducted. Individuals who more frequently endorse the items on this scale are said to hold strong negative views of the dominant culture that include feelings of anger and rage and will engage in activities that he or she believes are indicative of Black culture. Overall, participants did not strongly agree with the attitudes associated with this scale, which suggests participants generally do not experience feelings of anger and rage directed toward Whites. Participants low feelings of anger toward Whites are reflected in the themes *nigger is a*

universally negative and acceptable term, intended to hurt, and used to objectify and label. A pattern emerged among those who strongly disagreed with attitudes reflecting anger toward Whites, in which all participants endorsed the theme *nigger is a universally negative and unacceptable term.*

Internalization Afrocentric and Perceptions of the “N-word”

A profile analysis of participant scores on the Internalized Afrocentric (IA) scale was conducted. Individuals who more frequently agree with the items on this scale are said to have developed an Afrocentric identity and are often also politically active. Nearly half of the participants strongly disagreed with the attitudes reflecting an Afrocentric identification, and two participants strongly agreed. No patterns were discovered among those who strongly disagreed. A pattern emerged among those who strongly agreed, which was reflected in participants’ failure to endorse the theme of *nigga is acceptable when used by African Americans.*

Internalization Multiculturalist Inclusive and Perceptions of the “N-word”

A profile analysis of participant scores on the Internalized Multiculturalist Inclusive (IMCI) scale was conducted. Individuals who strongly agree with the items on this scale typically identify with multiple identities which may include racial identity, gendered identity, American identity, and so forth. Overall the majority of the participants in this study agreed with the identity elements of this scale. Internalized attitudes were reflected in participant’s statements related to the theme *nigger is a universally negative and unacceptable term*, in which participants were able to identify other equally offensive words. Participants’ internalized identities were also reflected in the theme *nigga is acceptable when used by African Americans.* No patterns emerged among those who strongly agreed with the items on this scale.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the current research was to examine African American's perceptions of the "N-word" in the context of racial identity. An extensive review of the literature yielded no published research in which African American's perceptions of the "N-word" were examined in the context of racial identity. Results from the current study demonstrate support for the one known study by Motley and Craig-Henderson (2007) in which Black's reactions to the "N-word" were examined, and expand on previous findings by providing supplemental information on how perceptions of the "N-word" fit within African American ethnic identities. This discussion begins with a summary of the results, followed by an examination of the themes in light of identity attitudes. The current findings are also discussed in relation to relevant literature. Lastly, the limitations of the current study, clinical practice implications, and recommendations for future research are addressed.

Summary of the Results

Two issues were addressed in this study. The first was related to gaining a greater understanding of African Americans' perceptions of the "N-word," which includes the words nigger and nigga. The second issue addressed in this study was the examination of African Americans' perception of the "N-word" in the context of Cross's Nigrescence theory as operationalized in the CRIS. The general consensus of participants in this study was that, (a)

nigger is a universally negative and unacceptable term, (b) nigga is generally viewed as acceptable and inoffensive when used among Blacks, and (c) the public use of the word nigga is inappropriate. Overall, participants tended to agree with attitudes associated with an identity status characterized by internalization, and most participants strongly agreed with the attitudes associated with multiple internalized identities. Participants generally disagreed with the identity elements characterized by assimilation, racial self hatred, and anti-white attitudes. An overall profile interpretation of each identity type resulted in the finding that several of the attitudes associated with Cross's Nigrescence Theory, specifically assimilation, racial self hatred, anti-White, Afrocentric, and multiculturalist inclusive attitudes, were reflected in the qualitative themes.

Nigger is a Universally Negative and Unacceptable Term

Participants in this study generally expressed negative views of the word nigger, even if they had never been called a nigger. Most indicated that they learned about the term from family members (mostly parents) or during elementary school while learning about the history of slavery in America. Many participants likened the word nigger to profanity, and stated that its use by Whites is racist. Additionally, the word nigger was typically viewed by participants as a term that is used by Whites to label and objectify Blacks. In fact, most participants expressed the belief that the word nigger is primarily used by Whites, and rarely, if ever, used by Blacks. Given that most participants indicated that the word nigger is used by Whites in an effort to inflict pain on Blacks, the perception that this term is not used by Blacks seems appropriate. The word nigger is a term that is viewed as unacceptable and hurtful, even among a population that admittedly has had few overt encounters with it.

One third of the participants in this study reported having been called a nigger at some point during their lifetimes. These participants tended to express more negative views of the word nigger, when compared to those who had never been called a nigger, who tended to express more subdued negative views of the word. For instance, those who had not been called a nigger, expressed general statements of dislike for the word, often stating that it is “demeaning” and “derogatory.” In contrast, those individuals who had been called a nigger, tended to express more visceral reactions to the word, often discussing emotional reactions. Overall, participants who reported being called a nigger stated that their reactions were to withdraw themselves from the situation, or to terminate friendships or communication with the individual(s) who used the word nigger. For instance, when describing how she felt when she was called a nigger, Hope stated, “I was upset by it. I was upset that there were people that still feel that way and that would still do things like that.” Other responses related to this theme include the statements, “it shocked me,” “I couldn’t believe White people still use the word nigger,” “it really upset me,” and “it caught me off guard.”

Results from this study demonstrate support for Motley and Craig-Henderson’s (2007) findings that “racial status” and “experiences with being targets of racist language” impacted views and perceptions of the “N-word” (p. 952). Most of the participants in the current study reported few encounters with racism. However, those who reported more direct or overt experiences with racism, tended to express more visceral and negative reactions to the word nigger. Similarly, Motley and Craig-Henderson found intense reactions to the “N-word” in African American participants who “understood the word as a symbol of racism” (p. 953). It is likely that many African Americans view the word nigger as extremely offensive and generally

unacceptable when used by Whites; and, people who have experienced more overt encounters with racism have more negative views of the word nigger.

Racial Identity and Perceptions of Nigger

Overall, participants reported disagreement with assimilationist, self hatred, and anti-White attitudes. As a result, most of the participants in this study were connected with their identity as a Black person, and did not experience feelings of rage and anger toward Whites. The connection that these participants felt to their identity as a Black person was demonstrated through their negative views of the word nigger. It seems appropriate that someone who views the word nigger as a derogatory term used by Whites to label Blacks would also be connected to their identity as a Black person. In contrast, this issue may not be as salient for someone who identifies more as an American than Black. A related illustration was provided by Ahmad, who strongly agreed with assimilationist attitudes and reported a minor level of disturbance related to being called a nigger while working at a fast food restaurant. Additionally, participants stated that nigger is a universally negative and unacceptable term, used by Whites, with the intention of hurting Blacks. Although White people were mentioned frequently throughout the themes, particularly in relation to the word nigger, it seems that participants' perceptions of Whites in relation to the word nigger were not based on Anti-White attitudes. Lastly, participants' internalized attitudes, and subsequent connection with multiple aspects of their identity, were demonstrated in their ability to identify words that were as equally offensive as the word nigger. For example, Hope strongly agreed with elements of an internalized identity and stated that the word bitch was as offensive as the word nigger.

The word nigger is one of the strongest symbols of racism and one of the most offensive words in the English language. Therefore, the results from this study provide the psychological

community with information, not only in regard to African American's perceptions of the "N-word," but also in regard to racism and racial identity. Shelton and Sellers (2000) found that race salience plays a central role in the perception of racist events, such that the more an individual identifies with their minority group status, the more likely they are to attribute negative discriminatory events to race. These findings were supported by Major et. al. (2002), Operario and Fiske (2001), and Sellers and Shelton (2003) who found highly ethnically identified individuals reported greater sensitivity to potentially racist events. Findings in the current study parallel previous findings, such that African American participants who more strongly agreed with items associated with the Internalized Afrocentric status reported more visceral reactions to the word nigger, when compared to those participants who more strongly agreed with items associated with the Internalized Multiculturalist Inclusive Status. As a result, the participants in this study who reported a higher identification with race, when compared to their other identities, perceived the word nigger as more of a symbol of racism than those whose African American racial identification was less salient.

Nigga is Acceptable when used by African Americans

Most participants stated that nigger and nigga are two different words. According to the participants in this study, the word nigger was created by Whites to demean, label, and objectify Blacks; whereas African Americans are responsible for the creation of the word nigga. This finding was consistent with Motley and Craig-Henderson's (2007) observation that most participants noted a difference between nigger and nigga, stating that the word nigga is less offensive for in-group usage. In the current study, the word nigga was described by participants as many things that were viewed as acceptable, such as a greeting, form of reference, term of endearment, slang, and term that signifies a sense of camaraderie. A few participants even stated

that the word nigga was created by Blacks as a means of taking back the word nigger. This finding supports theoretical arguments posed by Asim (2007) and Kennedy (2003) in which they indicate that some African Americans have transformed the word nigger from a negative to a positive appellation. The conclusion drawn from the opinions expressed by participants in this study is that young African American adults have transformed the word nigger to a more positive, and in some cases meaningless, appellation.

Overall, it was challenging for participants to identify how they obtained an understanding of the word nigga, in contrast to the ease with which most participants were able to recall the first time they learned of the word nigger. Participants generally noted that the word nigga is embedded in the African American community, and most indicated that they rarely ever think about their use of the word. Many participants also noted that media and public entertainer's use of the word nigga contributes to its embeddedness within the African American community. For instance, some participants referred to the use of the word nigga among Blacks as something that is "automatic." The responses provided by participants related to this theme suggest that the word nigga has become a part of young adult African American culture.

More than two-thirds of the participants in the current study expressed the perception that the use of the word nigga in the African American community is generational, with younger generations being most likely to use the term. One participant indicated that the use of the word nigga by younger generations around people from older generations is "disrespectful" because older generations have more exposure to overt racism and "probably do not know the difference between nigga and nigger." The responses provided by participants related to this theme suggest that individuals who have been exposed to racist events view the word nigga more negatively than those who have little or no exposure to racist events. According to participants, older

generations have more exposure to racist events than younger generations. As a result, older generations view the word nigga more negatively than younger generations.

It is also interesting to note that those individuals who viewed the within group use of word nigga as less acceptable expressed difficulty differentiating between the word nigger and nigga. For these individuals, because the word nigger was connected to the history of slavery and oppression in America, within group use of the word nigga was seen as evidence of ignorance or lack of a connection to the history of slavery and oppression in America. In fact, one major exception to the finding of acceptability of the word nigga among different generations was demonstrated in the responses provided by Johnny, in which he expressed negative views of both the words nigger and nigga. Johnny was the only participant in this study from a rural area in the Southeastern regions of the United States, and as such, he reported the highest instances of overt racism. Ultimately, Johnny related the unacceptability of the word nigga to overt racism and knowledge of African American history. Given that Johnny reported high instances of overt racism and more strongly agrees with attitudes associated with an Afrocentric identity, it seems appropriate that he would express unfavorable views of the word nigga. Clinicians who work with African American individuals may consider issues related to generation, exposure to racist events, and regional issues when conceptualizing client issues and treatment planning.

Operating from the philosophy that the word nigga has been transformed by a generation of African Americans who have had less overt exposure to racism than older generations, one may assume that a relationship exists between exposure to racist events and African American's perceptions of the word nigga. Motley and Craig-Henderson (2007) noted that individuals who reported more exposure to racist events had more visceral reactions to the "N-word." This

finding was also supported in the current study, in which those individuals who reported more exposure to overt racism also reported less of a perception of acceptability in regard to the word nigga. As a result, it appears that exposure to racist events impacts African American's perception of the word nigga.

African American pop-culture literature has been saturated with information and opinions about African American's use and perceptions of the "N-word" (Asim, 2007; Himma, 2002; Kennedy, 2003; Ridley, 2006). Theories have emerged that suggest that there is power in being able to reclaim and redefine the "N-word" limiting its use to members within the African American community (Asim, 2007; Kennedy, 2003). The general consensus in African American literature focusing on the use of the "N-word" is that it is offensive when anyone who does not identify as Black or African American uses the word to refer to someone who is Black or African American (Asim, 2007; Kennedy, 2003). Additionally, Allan (2007) suggested that connotations have pragmatic effects, indicating that words derive meaning from contexts. In regard to the "N-word," Allan stated that "many racist terms can be disarmed by being used, without irony, as in-group solidarity markers by the targeted group" (p. 1047). Lastly, Kennedy (2003) noted that Blacks "have added a positive meaning to the word nigger, just as women, gays, lesbians, poor whites, and children born out of wedlock have defiantly appropriated and revalued such words as bitch, cunt, queer, dyke, redneck, cracker, and bastard" (p. 38). Based on these concepts, the assumption may be made that those African Americans who use the "N-word" to refer to themselves or other African Americans have somehow transformed the meaning of the word, thereby eradicating the previous racially driven and offensive definition.

This theory was supported by the current study, in which three-quarters of participants noted a perceived difference between the words nigger and nigga within the African American

community. Additionally, nearly half of participants expressed a sense of ownership over the word nigga, stating that it was created by African Americans and is used primarily among African Americans. For example, Carla stated, “I think using it in the way that African Americans do today it is kind of like we are gaining control. We are not letting this word hurt us.” Other common illustrations include the statements that the word nigga is “our” (African Americans) word, “created by Blacks,” “used by Blacks,” “a term indicative of a friendship,” a “transformation of nigger,” and “created by Blacks to take back nigger.”

A divide within the African American community has historically emerged when the word nigga is used among African Americans to refer to African Americans. Many African Americans disagree with the with-in group use of the word nigga, suggesting that its use is self disparaging (Asim, 2007; Kennedy, 2003). This was not supported in the current study, in which most of these college aged participants expressed the perception that the within-group use of the word nigga is inoffensive and acceptable. Given the generational theme related to African Americans’ perceptions of the word nigga found in this study, it is likely that generational elements impact one’s perception of the acceptability of the within group use of the word nigga. However, the unfavorable perceptions of the word nigga expressed by Johnny and Latifah demonstrate the complexity of this issue. These participants who belong to the younger generation of African Americans indicated that the within group use of the word nigga is evidence of a disconnection from African American culture and history. It is interesting to note that African American individuals from older generations may share similar opinions about younger generations. It may be important for future researchers to examine African Americans’ perceptions of the “N-word” in light of participant cultural awareness and knowledge of African American history.

Racial Identity and Perceptions of Nigga

Participants' connectedness to the Black community is reflected in the sense of ownership and acceptability of the word nigga among the African Americans participants. Participants stated that the word nigga belongs to African Americans and is primarily acceptable when used among African Americans. Ultimately, participants' assertion that the word nigga belongs to them and can only be used by them suggests a sense of belongingness and identification to the African American or Black community. Low feelings of self hatred were further supported by participants' assertion that the transformation of the word nigga was conducted in an effort to take back the word nigger from Whites. The process of creating and then claiming ownership over the word nigga, which was viewed positively by participants, suggests high feelings of group identification and low feelings of self hatred.

Additionally, unlike most participants in this study, two participants (Jada and Ahmad) strongly agreed with assimilationist attitudes and did not view the word nigga as something that was engrained or omnipresent. Perhaps these participants, having more of an identification as an American than as an African American, may have been less aware of the strong presence of the word nigga within the African American community. Participants who strongly agreed with Afrocentric attitudes viewed the within group use of the word nigga less favorably than those who strongly agreed with multiple internalized identities. As a result, it is likely that those participants whose racial identification as a Black person is the most salient, have more difficulty differentiating between the words nigger and nigga than those who have internalized multiple identities.

Eradicationists, or individuals who have attempted to discontinue the use of the word nigga within the African American community, have suggested that the within group use of the

word nigga is evidence of self-hatred and a disconnection from the African American community (Kennedy, 2003). This ideal was not supported in the current study, in which most participants demonstrated a connection to their identity as an African American, low feelings of self-hatred, and reported the use of the word nigga among friends. As a result, there is no evidence that suggests that African Americans who use the word nigga experience some level of self-hatred. However, from the perspective of someone like Johnny, or someone who may belong to an older generation, the within group use of the word nigga may be seen as evidence of a disconnection from African American history. Clinicians working with African Americans from diverse regional settings and generational backgrounds should consider the differential, generational, and regional exposure to racism that may occur in those contexts.

African American's Public use of Nigga is Inappropriate

Even though most participants in this study viewed the use of the word nigga among African Americans as acceptable, the general consensus of participants was that the public use of the word nigga is inappropriate. Public use was generally defined by participants as the use of the word nigga in front of people from other cultural or racial backgrounds. For instance, the use of the word nigga in a public place among African American's was not typically viewed unfavorably. Participants generally expressed concerns about the use of the word nigga in the company of other races, and most expressed concern for the confusion that the public use of the word nigga may cause. Many participants noted that the public use of the word nigga among other races is "demeaning to self," because other races do not understand the perceived difference between the words nigger and nigga, and as a result, think that African Americans are calling themselves niggers. Because the word nigger was viewed unfavorably by all the

participants in this study, their concern for other's misperception of the public use of the word nigga makes sense.

Furthermore, participants concern for being misunderstood by other races is supported by Bennett's (2004) assertion that people tend to have a more complex understanding of their own culture or group when compared to other groups. In addition, according to Bennett, Allan, Anderson, and Asker (2010), individuals belonging to a subgroup have exposure to characteristics that out-group members do not, which results in subgroup members having a more intimate understanding of the subgroup culture when compared to out-group members. The phenomenon of the acceptability of the use of the word nigga among African American's is something that was viewed by participants as a within group characteristic. Given the fact that out-group individuals may not understand the difference between nigger and nigga, it makes sense that participants are concerned about being misunderstood by others when using the word nigga in a public setting.

Participants also expressed some concern about the public use of the word nigga promoting other races' use of the words nigger and nigga, both of which were viewed unfavorably. According to participants, because the distinction between the words nigger and nigga is not clear to other races, the public use of the word nigga among African Americans may cause other races to view the word nigger as acceptable. One participant stated, "I do believe it means something different to [Euro-Americans] more toward the demeaning side of it. I think that they will try to make it an excuse and say, well you use it, so I can use it. I don't even try to go there with them and I just don't use it." Additionally, because African Americans are responsible for the creation of the word nigga, as evidenced by responses in which participants stated that nigga is "our word" and "created by Blacks to take back nigger," many individuals

viewed other race's use of the word nigga as inappropriate. The current findings were supported by Motley and Craig-Henderson (2007) who also found that that public use of the word nigga was less socially acceptable than in-group private use.

Racial Identity and Perceptions of the Public use of Nigga

Participant's low feelings of self hatred and assimilation were demonstrated in their perceptions of the public use of the word nigga. Participants' belief that public use of the word nigga is inappropriate because other races do not understand the within group use of the word, is indicative of a sense of belongingness to a community and concern that this community may be misunderstood by others. It is likely that participants would not have expressed such concern for the misinterpretation for the use of the word nigga in a public setting if they did not feel a sense of connection and identification with the Black community.

Theoretical Perspectives

Cross's Nigrescence Theory provided the primary theoretical basis for this study. All of the participants in this study more strongly agreed with elements associated with an internalized identity. Additionally, the reactions to the "N-word" expressed by participants in this study align with what one would expect from individuals with an internalized identity (Internalized Attitudes). Therefore, data from this study demonstrate support for the Nigrescence Theory. However, it is important to note that it is currently unknown whether the theory also aligns with "N-word" perceptions expressed by individuals who strongly agree with Pre-Encounter or Immersion-Emersion attitudes, because few participants in this study strongly agreed with those attitudes.

Although the primary theoretical basis for this project is Nigrescence Theory, results from this study can be understood from more than one theoretical perspective. Aspects of

Critical Race Theory (CRT), in which institutional, organizational, cultural, and everyday racial components are examined (Miller & Garran, 2008), may be helpful in understanding participants responses to the “N-word.” Some of the participants in this study reported few encounters with covert racism, and a few reported being shocked to learn that racism still existed when they were confronted with racist events or called a nigger. Participants’ lack of awareness as it relates to the prevalence of racism and prejudice in the United States may be explained by what critical race theorists term the “racial contract” established in the U.S. in which “the familiarity and imperceptibility of racism for many people is sustained by a public, cultural discourse that subjugates and marginalizes narratives of racism” (Miller & Garran, 2008, p. 27). As a result, having less awareness of various forms of racism, and having perhaps adopted a purview in which subtle forms of racism (such as microaggressions) are not recognized, may have contributed to participants in this study being surprised to learn that racism exists.

Sue et al.’s (2007) perspective on microaggressions is also worthy of consideration. Microaggressions are “brief everyday exchanges that send denigrating message to people of color” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 273). According to Sue et al., microaggressions can occur in three forms, which include microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations. A microassault is an “explicit racial derogation,” a microinsult is “characterized by communications that convey rudeness and insensitivity,” and a microinvalidation is “characterized by communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the thoughts [and] feelings of a person of color” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 274). It is likely that the individuals in this study who strongly agreed with multiple internalized identities are less likely to identify microaggressions than those who more strongly agree with Afrocentric attitudes due to the salience of multicultural inclusive individuals identification with multiple aspects of their identity. Additionally, those participants who strongly agreed with

assimilationist attitudes reported fewer encounters with overt racism. This finding is consistent with the Nigrescence theory, in that assimilationist attitudes may impede one's ability to identify microaggressions or more covert forms of racism. Many participants in this study reported that they witnessed the use of the word nigger or had been called the word, which is consistent with statistics reported by researchers indicating that approximately 60% of African Americans and 40% of African American college students have been exposed to some form of racism or racial prejudice (Kessler, Mickelson, & Williams, 1999; Landrine & Klonoff, 1996; Sanders-Thompson, 1996; D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993). Consequently, racial identity plays a major role in how racist events are perceived and internalized, as evidenced by the more visceral reactions expressed on the part of individuals with Afrocentric attitudes. Researchers who examine issues related to perceived racism, internalized racism, or similar issues, may consider incorporating racial identity to fully capture the essence of African American's experience with racism.

Limitations

Transferability

Participants in this study were African American undergraduate and graduate students in humanity related majors between the ages of 18 and 28. They were also students at a predominantly White university in a mid-size city in the Midwest. Most reported being raised in predominately Black urban areas in the Midwest. Readers are cautioned to consider these participant characteristics when making interpretations related to the findings in this study.

Racial Identity Attitudes

Most participants more strongly agreed with Internalization Multiculturalist Inclusive racial identity attitudes, when compared to other racial identity attitudes. Additionally, there was

little variation among the racial identity profiles of participants, and everyone in this study strongly agreed with attitudes that reflect an internalized identity. As a result, it is unknown what perceptions may exist among individuals who highly endorse other racial identity attitudes, such as racial self hatred, miseducation, anti-white, and assimilation. It is important for future researchers to obtain a large enough sample to examine perceptions of the “N-word” among participants with a variety of racial identity attitudes. Additionally, group profile interpretations were conducted for the purpose of this study, because of the focus that was placed on understanding African Americans’ perceptions of the “N-word” in the context of theorized racial identity attitudes. As a result, little information is known about perceptions of the “N-word” in the context of individual Cross Racial Identity Scale interpretations. Future researchers may consider conducting individual and group profile interpretations and examining African American’s perceptions of the “N-word” among individuals across a larger sample of participants representing a wider variety of racial identity profiles.

Internal Consistency

Although normative data indicate that the CRIS is internally consistent, the Cronbach’s alpha values for the current sample indicate that participant responses on the Pre-Encounter Racial Self Hatred scale were lower than expected ($\alpha = .50$). As a result, findings related to perceptions of the “N-word” and racial self hatred need to be considered carefully. The reliability of participant responses on the remaining scales, however, was consistent with the normative data reported in the CRIS manual.

Practice Implications

The general consensus of participants in this study was that the word nigger is offensive; that African Americans have transformed the word nigger into a positive (e.g., term of

endearment) and, in some cases, meaningless (e.g., greeting or tool of reference) appellation; and that the public use of the word nigga is inappropriate. The transformation of the word nigga is viewed as something that is generational, partially due to this group of young adults' disconnection from, and lack of personal experience with, the Civil Rights Movement. The acknowledgement by participants that they have less first-hand knowledge of what it was like to be a part of a movement in which African Americans were overtly discriminated against, speaks to the context in which these individuals view themselves in relation to racism and prejudice in America. Results from this study have implications for clinical and campus-based settings.

All of the participants in this study viewed the word nigger negatively, and most indicated that its use is intended to hurt, objectify, and label Blacks. Clinicians should be prepared to serve as an advocate, educator, and consultant when addressing issues related to the use of the word nigger. Clinicians serving as consultants, for example, should be prepared to have a conversation about the use of the word nigger, and be mindful of the deeply upsetting impact of the words use on African American individuals. When serving in the role of a consultant, they should also be prepared to educate those who do not fully understand the impact of the word nigger on African Americans, if the word is used in interpersonal interactions.

In campus-based settings, clinicians should be aware of the perceived difference between nigger and nigga. Clinicians serving as consultants in these settings may also consider educating people who are unaware of the perceived difference between the words. Also, clinicians working with African American families may encounter generational issues related to the appropriateness of the word, and may consider educating African American clients, who are unaware of these perceived differences, about the generational perception of the appropriateness of the word nigga. Likewise, clinicians conducting groups with African Americans from

differing generations may also encounter similar issues for which it would be appropriate to provide education about the perceived differences between nigger and nigga. African American clinicians working with college populations should be mindful of their own reactions to the within-group use of the word nigga in an effort not to impose their beliefs onto the individuals with whom they work with in a clinical setting.

Lastly, individuals from similar backgrounds to those in this study with multiple internalized identities who are not characterized by Afrocentric attitudes may build rapport more easily with clinicians from a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds. In contrast, those participants with more Afrocentric attitudes who have more overt experiences with racism may be distrustful of European American clinicians, and may feel more comfortable working with an African American counselor.

Future Research Directions

Few researchers have examined African Americans' perceptions of the "N-word." The current mixed methodology study was conducted with a relatively small number of participants who were homogenous in nature. A larger sample of participants would allow for a more in depth examination of contextual variables such as regional, generational, and academic major in regard to African Americans' perceptions of the "N-word." Additionally, the current research findings are limited to perceptions of the "N-word" in the context of Internalized identity attitudes, and little information is known about African Americans' perceptions of the "N-word" in the context of Pre-Encounter and Immersion-Emersion attitudes. Future researchers may consider conducting individual and group profile interpretations with a larger sample of participants to gather more robust information about African Americans' perceptions of the "N-word" in the context of the full range of racial identity attitudes.

Although the majority of participants viewed the word nigga as acceptable and inoffensive, two participants indicated that the perception of acceptability of the use of the “N-word” among African Americans is evidence of a lack of knowledge of African American history. It is unclear whether the perception of acceptability as it relates to the word nigga among African Americans is evidence of a lack of cultural awareness and knowledge about African American history. Future researchers may consider examining variables such as cultural awareness and knowledge of African American history in relation to perceptions of the “N-word.” Similarly, individuals in this study who lived in the southeastern region of the United States and encountered overt racism expressed more visceral reactions to the “N-word.” Little is known about regional differences and African Americans’ perception of the “N-word.” Future researchers may consider examining issues related to regional, rural, and urban areas in relation to African Americans’ perceptions of the “N-word.” Given that most of participants in this study, who were all college students, reported generational differences in perceptions of the “N-word,” future researchers may also consider examining perceptions of the “N-word” among African American participants from differing generations. One approach to assess generational differences may be to conduct a longitudinal study assessing perceptions of the “N-word” at regular intervals (e.g., every five years).

Lastly, mixed methodology was utilized in this study to examine African Americans’ perceptions of the “N-word” in the context of racial identity. Future researchers may consider the use of all quantitative or all qualitative methods to elaborate on this developing understanding of African Americans’ perceptions of the “N-word.”

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APPENDIX A: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What is the history of the word nigger?
3. What comes to mind when you hear the word?
4. What is your perception of the difference between nigger and nigga?
5. What does each mean?
6. How did you obtain understanding of the word?
7. Tell me about a time when a stranger who intended to hurt your feelings called you “nigger”?
8. If the term is offensive, what terms are equally offensive?
9. Why do Blacks use the term?
10. Talk about the use of the word, self, friends, and family.
11. Talk about the appropriateness of it’s use around elders, managers, children, people of other races, in public versus private?
12. Thoughts on use by Whites. Think Whites use in private? Would they be offended if a non-Black friend called them a “nigger”?
13. Thoughts on use of the word by entertainers (e.g. comedians, rappers, in movies)? Is it appropriate? More appropriate for Blacks than non-Blacks? Does their use influence the use of the word by others?
14. Views on the argument that continual use will rob them of its ability to hurt.
15. What is your perception of Blacks taking a stand and stopping the use of the word?

Motley, C., & Craig-Henderson, K. (2007). Epithet or endearment? Examining reactions among those of African Diaspora to an ethnic epithet. *Journal of Black Studies*, 37, 944-963. DOI: 10.1177/0021934705282094.

APPENDIX B: COMPUTERIZED SURVEY GUIDE

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What does nigga mean?
3. What does nigger mean?
4. How did you first understand the meaning of the word nigger?
5. What are your thoughts on African American's use of the word nigga?
6. Explain why you would/wouldn't use the word nigga.
7. What are your thoughts on White's use of the word nigger?
8. If applicable, write about a time that you were called a nigger.
 - a. How did being called a nigger impact how you viewed the word nigger?
9. What are your thoughts on Whites use of the word nigga?
10. What are your thoughts on Whites use of the word nigger?
11. What are your thoughts on African American's public use of the word nigga?
12. Explain whether you would publicly use the word nigga. Why or why not?

Motley, C., & Craig-Henderson, K. (2007). Epithet or endearment? Examining reactions among those of African Diaspora to an ethnic epithet. *Journal of Black Studies*, 37, 944-963.
DOI: 10.1177/0021934705282094.

APPENDIX C: VIGNETTES

You are standing in line at Burger King in the food court in the student union on a busy day. You notice that most of the students in the food court that day are White. A group of three, young, college aged, African American men and women come and get behind you in the line. They are followed by three White men and women who get in line behind them. You notice that the African American students behind you are talking to each other about plans that they are making for the weekend. One African American student playfully calls the other a “nigga” while laughing at a remark that one of the other African American students has made. You turn around and notice that several of the white students stop what they are doing and look at the African American students in line behind you.

- (1) What is your initial reaction to this scenario?
- (2) Discuss your perception of the African American student’s use of the word nigga in a public place of predominantly white students?
- (3) How would your reaction be different if the food court was filled with mostly Black students?
- (4) If you were present in a similar scenario like the one described above, how do you believe you would react?

You walk into a large computer lab and have a seat in the back row. You notice that there aren’t that many people in the computer lab that day, and no one seems to have noticed that you walked in the room. You also notice a group of three White men and women who are sitting several rows ahead of you. They seem to be laughing and joking about something that happened at a party over the weekend. In the midst of the conversation, you hear someone use the word “nigger.” After which, the group of men and women continue to joke and laugh and discuss their weekend.

- (1) What is your initial reaction to this scenario?
- (2) How would your reaction be different if the group of students were Black?

APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT

**Indiana State
University****CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH****Racial Identity African Americans' Perceptions of the "N-word"**

You are being invited to participate in a research study about African Americans' perceptions of the "N-word." This research project is being conducted by Keya Wiggins, a doctoral candidate in Counseling Psychology at Indiana State University. This study is being conducted as part of a requirement for Keya Wiggins to complete her dissertation research for a doctoral degree in Counseling Psychology. This research is being conducted with current students at Indiana State University. Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. Please read the information below before deciding to participate. You may ask questions about anything that you do not understand.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The objective of this research project is to attempt to understand African Americans' perceptions of the words nigger and nigga in the context of racial identity. In order to participate in this study, you must be a student, age 18-28, at Indiana State University who identifies as African American. If you do not meet these criteria, you will not be able to participate in this study. If,

for whatever reason, you participate in this study and it is later found out that you do not meet these criteria, you will not be able to continue to participate in this study.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in the study, you will be asked to do the following things:

Survey & Interviews:

- Complete a written survey of basic demographic information and racial identity.
- Complete a computerized survey of questions related to your perceptions of the words nigger and nigga.
- Provide a typed response to two vignettes of situations in which the words nigger and nigga are used.
- Commit approximately 1½ - 2 hours to completing the written and typed surveys.
- Consent to be audio-taped with a digital recorder.
- Commit approximately one hour of your time to participate in one interview with the researcher.
- Estimated total time of participation is 2 ½ - 3 hours.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

If you decide to participate in this research study, there are very minimal psychological risks other than the day to day risks associated with being a minority student in a predominantly White campus. However, because of the racially driven and sensitive nature of the topic, a list of community resources has been included in the packet if you wish to speak to someone about your reactions to this study after the completion of your research participation. Additionally, I am taking the necessary precautions to ensure that the risk of a breach of confidentiality is minimal. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be

identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law, such as in the case of child or elder abuse, or if you are at risk to harm yourself or someone else. There are no other foreseeable physical, physiological, social, legal, or financial costs for participating in the study.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR SOCIETY

The information you provide will help me understand African Americans' views of the "N-word." The information collected may not benefit you directly but what I learn from this study may contribute to the larger body of limited knowledge of racism and the effects thereof.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

Each participant will receive an \$8 gift certificate to Wal-Mart for each hour of their participation in this study, with a maximum of \$24.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information obtained in this study in connection with you will remain confidential and will only be disclosed with your permission. If you choose to participate, a pseudonym will be used to label your survey and interview information. I will create a master list of participant's names, telephone numbers and pseudonyms. This list will be stored separately from all other materials in a locked filing cabinet. This information will only be used if you need to be contacted for rescheduling purposes, and will be destroyed once all the data has been collected. Your participation is completely voluntary. You will be informed of your pseudonym, and if you decide to withdraw after data is collected you may contact me and request that your information be withdrawn from the study using your pseudonym. Your name will not be connected to the data collected.

Information collected electronically will be stored on an external flash drive that will be stored in a lock box and placed in a locked filing cabinet immediately after information is gathered.

Information that is recorded digitally and written survey information will also be kept in a locked filing cabinet immediately following the interview. Information that is recorded digitally will be kept for at least three years. All audio-recorded information will be destroyed after three years.

Only this researcher, a faculty supervisor, peer auditor, and a transcriptionist will be able to access the information from the interviews.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw your participation at any time without the loss of benefits for which you are entitled. You may refuse to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable answering. If you decide to withdraw from this study, you will be given an \$8 Wal-Mart gift certificate for each hour of your participation, with a maximum of \$24.

IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about completing the survey, interview questions, or about being in this study, you may contact me at (205) 601-5008 or at kwiggins2@indstate.edu. The faculty advisor for this project is Dr. Michele Boyer, Department Chair of the Department of Communication Disorders, Counseling, School and Educational Psychology. Dr. Michele Boyer can be reached at 812-237-2870 or Michele.Boyer@indstate.edu.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Indiana State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) by mail at Indiana State University, Office of Sponsored Programs, Terre Haute, IN 47809, by phone at (812) 237-8217, or by e-mail at irb@indstate.edu.

Please sign below if you understand the procedures described above and agree to participate in this study.

I agree to participate in the study and have been given a copy of this form.

Name/date

I do not agree to participate in this study.

Name/date

APPENDIX E: CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

I, _____, in the capacity of a transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes and documentation received from Keya Wiggins related to her dissertation research on African Americans’ perceptions of the “N-Word.” Furthermore, I agree:

- To keep all research information shared with me confidential by not disclosing, discussing, or sharing any materials or information in any format (e.g., recordings and transcripts) with anyone other than the researcher.
- To store all research information in any form (e.g., recordings and transcripts) in a safe and secure while it is in my possession.
- To return all research information in any form (e.g., recordings and transcripts) to the researcher upon completion of the research tasks.
- To erase or destroy all research information in any form for this research study that is not returnable to the researcher (e.g., documents on computer hard drives) after consulting with the researcher.
- To not make copies of any audiotapes or computerized files, unless specifically requested to do so by the researcher.
- To hold in the strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audiotaped interviews.

I am aware that the unauthorized release of confidential information may subject me to civil liability under applicable federal and state law. I recognize that my obligation to maintain confidentiality and safeguard research information continues after my work on this research study has concluded.

Printed Name Transcriptionist

Signature of Transcriptionist

Date

Witness (Printed Name)

APPENDIX F: AUDIT TRAIL

1. I recruited participants from graduate and undergraduate classes in the Colleges of Education and Arts and Sciences at Indiana State University, and via flyers distributed across campus.
2. Participants contacted me via telephone or by e-mail requesting participation in this study.
3. I scheduled an appointment with participants to complete all survey items.
4. Participants met with me individually to complete a brief interview, computer survey, and to answer items associated with two vignettes.
5. Interviews were transcribed by me and a professional transcriber.
6. Quantitative analysis were conducted.
7. I read each individual transcript several times.
8. I imported individual responses to each question into a word document.
9. I re-read each verbatim response searching for invariant meaning units among and across participants.
10. Invariant meaning units were clustered into themes.
11. I reread each transcript to examine the accuracy of the invariant meaning units and themes.
12. I requested the assistance of a peer auditor who examined a large percentage of the qualitative data searching for invariant meaning units and themes.
13. My themes were validated by my associate who found themes that aligned with those that I found.

14. Textural, structural, and textural-structural descriptions were created from corresponding themes for each participant.
15. A universal description was created from a composite of the individual themes.
16. Participant's racial identity scores were examined and used clinically to examine themes in the context of racial identity attitudes.

APPENDIX G: SAMPLE QUALITATIVE DATA EXCERPTS

Textural Description: Carla

Carla is a 22 year old female junior who was raised in a racially mixed urban area in the Midwest. Like many participants in this study, Carla indicated that she learned about the word nigger in elementary school while studying slavery and African American history. When asked to discuss her perception of the word nigger, Carla replied:

I kind of date that back to slavery when the White people would use it to kind of separate the Black people in a condescending way and kind of separate them, meaning that they were lesser, not just different, but a lesser people.

Carla also related the word nigger to racism, stating “I think its racist and anyone using it is obviously meaning it in a racist way.”

When asked if there was a difference between the words nigger and nigga, Carla stated: The *ER* it’s racist and the spelling kind of still relates back to kind of prejudice, but when I hear the word nigga I think of it as being used among African-Americans today. It kind of seems. . . it’s kind of socially accepted within African Americans as a term of friendship. It is kind of relating that you have some kind of personal relationship with each other and you guys are close friends, so I don’t take offense to it when it’s used in the context between African-Americans.

Furthermore, when asked if the word nigga ever has a negative connotation among African Americans, Carla stated, “I never really hear it in a negative way. I hear it more often in a friendly way.”

Like many participants, Carla expressed difficulty identifying how she learned of the word nigga. When describing how she obtained an understanding of the word nigga, Carla stated:

Nigga, I just grew up hearing it. It was in the African American community. I can't think of the first time I heard it, so. . . I had probably heard it before I went to school, but I may not have known exactly what the distinction was between the two words.

She also indicated that Blacks have transformed nigger into a more positive appellation, nigga.

She stated:

I don't know how [nigga] stems from the word nigger, but I would kind of imagine that it came from the word nigger. But then Black people adapted it to not being such a negative thing. Just a name that they call themselves because other people had called them that, but they don't actually mean it the same way. I think it kind of got transformed somewhere in history. It has the same root of the word, but it does not have the same meaning.

She described this transformation as an “unintentional” process, suggesting that this is has been a subconscious process performed by Black people who use the word nigga. When asked about personal use of the word nigga, Carla stated:

My friends use it. I have used it. I don't feel comfortable saying it that much, but like I'm not uncomfortable when I hear other people use that here all the time. They use it in everyday speech, like it is just another word.

Furthermore, Carla stated that she does not use the word nigga around older generations because:

They don't have that understanding that I have when I'm with my friends of what we mean when we say it, so it would just have a different meaning to them or maybe they just wouldn't understand why I'm using it.

When talking about older generation's misperception of younger generation's use of the word nigga, Carla stated:

I think using it in the way that African-Americans do today it is kind of like we are gaining control. We are not letting this word hurt us. It doesn't mean what it meant back then. . .like we don't associate it with that. Like we know where it came from and that it is related, but that is not what we are meaning when we say it.

While speaking of personal use, Carla went on to indicate that "There is a time and a place to use it. When you're in that personal setting and you're with just friends that's okay, but not in public." She stated that public use of the word nigga is inappropriate and confuses other cultures because "they don't know the difference or like what we mean when we say [nigga], because it is so close to the nigger word." Lastly, Carla stated that public entertainer's use of the word nigga promotes other's use of the word. She expressed the belief that entertainer's use "just makes it a little more familiar and acceptable between or among youths to use it because they hear you know rappers use it, so it must be cool or it must be okay."

Structural Description: Jay

Jay is a 23 year old female graduate student from a predominantly Black urban area in the Midwest. She stated that she experienced very little racism and discrimination having grown up in a predominantly Black area, and that it wasn't until she began attending a predominantly White university in the Midwest that she began experiencing racism. She recounted several

instances in which she believes that she and her friends were treated unfairly because they were the minority. For instance, Jay recalled working in one environment that was “racially tense,” and she stated that she had to “work twice as hard” to receive the same benefits and recognition as her White co-workers. She indicated that she really became conscious of the “N-word” when she moved to the Midwest and began experiencing racism and discrimination first hand.

Jay stated that she was raised in a family with strong matriarchal figures. She stated that she wasn’t surprised the first time she was called a nigger, because her mother had informed her of this possibility during her early childhood. She recounted a situation in which she was called a nigger by an older European American woman while playing on the basketball team where she was the only African American player. She stated that she was “shocked” when called a nigger, mostly because her European American teammates pretended like they hadn’t heard it. She stated that being called a nigger without having the support of her peers was isolating and confusing, and she reacted by withdrawing from her teammates.

Jay expressed negative views of the word nigger. She stated that being called a nigger by a European American:

Brings out a certain emotion...not only for me, but for all of us. If a White person says nigger, it’s gonna sink in like oh my God. It’s a constant reminder that you’re always going to be lower than what you are. Like you can never be as great as a Caucasian.

Like they ain’t got no problems. Yeah they get called white trash, but I mean that’s not as bad.

When asked of equally offensive words, Jay stated, “I guess jiggaboo or porch monkey would be as offensive, any word that’s associated with how they described us during slavery and the civil rights movement is equally and as strong as the word nigger.”

She noted a difference between nigger and nigga, and stated that the word nigger is analogous to “hate” and “disdain.” She related the word nigger to slavery and the death of her ancestors, and stated that it is used with “volition” and is intended to hurt. While speaking about the word nigga, Jay expressed difficulty identifying how she first obtained an understanding of the word. She stated that “It’s just so embedded in our culture that people don’t realize what they are doing.” She also implied that her use of the word with friends is “wrong.” She stated:

I hate using the word, but I use it...it’s pathetic. I know that it’s wrong...but I use it. Sometimes I use it to describe the news...like did you hear what that nigga did? And now I’m using it to describe...what’s my favorite...oh you know how people say I don’t hate Black people I just don’t like niggas. I’m like what in the world is wrong with me?

Jay discussed perceived generational differences as it relates to the word nigga within the African American community. She stated:

Older generations as in my mom, grandmother, great uncle, and stuff. No. I never or hardly ever heard my great aunt saying the n word. If they did it was to categorize somebody’s behavior. Like whoooooo that nigga. You know? But our generation, and this generation that’s coming up after us. . .yes. It has gotten to the point where it’s just. . .I want to say we should just add it to the dictionary. It’s so embedded in our culture. And this generation has no idea of the struggles of African Americans or the Civil Rights Movement. They just look at it like whatever.

Textural-Structural Description: Johnny

Johnny is a 28 year old male graduate student from a racially mixed but segregated rural area in the southeast. He stated that he grew up in an area consumed with racial tension. While

providing background information and describing the environment in which he was raised,

Johnny stated:

Definitely high racism [and] race issues. Now granted some overt, still mostly covert.

But now it is more covert. First of all, I have to give you background on my family. My grandfather was one of the first Black people in that area to own land, and so way before I was born when my father was a kid or whatever there were a lot of race issues. The clan even burned a cross in my grandfather's yard, way back in the day, 'cause they didn't want him to own land as a Black man. My grandfather's mind set was that his wife would never work for a White man. My grandfather would never work for a White man. He always owned some type of little side job, even though it never made for much money he would never work for a White man.

Johnny also stated that his father was one of the first to integrate his school. He stated:

My father, he was the first to integrate his high school. Somewhere in the late 60's. But he dropped out in his senior year. Why? Because of racism. He said he integrated his senior year and so he said it was so bad that he dropped out. He would sit in class and, you know, somebody would hit him in the back of the head and call him a nigger. And he took off. He said he dropped out. So, racism in this area is still kind of prevalent.

Johnny indicated that the racial tension that his father and grandfather experienced was still prevalent during the time that he attended grade school. He stated that during his high school career there were several "race fights," during which "White people would fight Black people." He stated that, even though the area that he grew up in was racially mixed, it was "superficially integrated." He reported that:

We have learned to co-exist but deep within us [is] hatred. I mean, there's not a question

about it. . .One of the normal things in my family is to call a white person a cracker.

That's like a normal every day word and I'm pretty sure at their establishments they call us niggers every day.

When asked his perception of the word nigger, Johnny stated:

The word nigger is a word that, it was created to hurt black people, period, point blank.

Now yes, they have adopted it and used it towards maybe Hispanics and whoever and call them whatever. When I say they, I say White people. But, to be honest, other cultures and other ethnic groups use it towards us. You can have a Hispanic or Latino that get mad at a black person who called him a nigger the same way. So now the word has just been adopted by other cultures, but White people created the word. . .[and] they took the word and made it specifically for Black people. They meant it to hurt black people. That is the whole sole purpose of nigger.

Johnny also stated:

Even if a White person said it in the context of having a discussion, it still bothers me because it has deep roots in hate. My thing is that when you say that word, there's no way you can say that word and have any positive meaning behind it. The word is completely negative. There's nothing positive about the word nigger.

He also indicated that there is no word as offensive as the word nigger due to the history of the word and relation to slavery.

When asked how he obtained an understanding of either word (nigger or nigga), Johnny stated that "there was no way around it" growing up in a racist environment. He stated:

I didn't grow up in an area where everybody can love everybody. I grew up in an area where my family, my family hates White people for the most part. I mean let's be

realistic and so I grew up always knowing what nigger meant.”

Furthermore, Johnny expressed difficulty identifying how he obtained an understanding of the word nigga, and stated:

I believe it was engrained in me before I was even old enough to understand. It was engrained in me. I really believe I knew, because as children we are around conversations. We are around things, and I think we pick up things.

Johnny stated that there is a “big difference” between the words nigger and nigga. He stated:

I think Black folks created nigga and White folks created nigger. That’s the way it is, it’s a big difference. Nigga wasn’t created with hate. Nigga was created kind of to me to take back this word nigger because white folks called us nigger. It’s just like, the b-word. Some women have taken back the b-word to what they claim it is. But guys called them that, and they took the word and made it a positive word. I mean, it’s not actually a positive word, but it’s the same type of situation where Black people took on the word nigger and just tried to offset what White people were doing calling them nigger.

When asked why he believes African Americans use the word nigga, Johnny stated:

Now, I think we just use it because we are ignorant and don’t know why we use it. People just say the word just because it has been around. They say it because, most people say it because of what they see on TV. I guarantee you, you can ask the average Black person right now what was this word was created for. Why this word was created, and they don’t even know. They just use it because it is something they hear. So, that is why we use it. That is why. But it was created I think as a way of taking a word back.

Johnny stated that he used the word nigga with friends before “becoming conscious” during his last couple of years as an undergraduate student. He stated:

That’s when I started learning more about my roots and being exposed to life. I used nigga, what’s up my nigga. That was just a word. The crazy thing is that a lot of people use it and do not even realize they are using it. It is so engrained in our minds, it’s just normal. I have checked myself because I don’t like the word. I hate the word. But sometimes it so engrained in me that sometimes it comes out. Just because that’s all we see. It’s fed into our minds so much that at some point it is just like we just have to accept the word I feel. I think that is what happens is that it is just so engrained in our culture we have to find reason not to use the word as opposed to reasons why we should use the word.

APPENDIX H: PARTICIPANT RACIAL IDENTITY ATTITUDES

