

**IDENTIFYING UNINTENDED RACISM BY WHITE MEMBERS IN A
BIRACIAL PROTESTANT CONGREGATION**

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By
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ABSTRACT

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This ethnography explores the interracial encounters between individuals in a biracial old-line Protestant congregation. Using the theoretical framework of aversive racism, this dissertation suggests that an individual's racial paranoia and racial identity attitude helps to explain the way that white members interact with black members and the way they perceive these encounters.

This dissertation addresses the questions: *How do members of a biracial congregation interact across race? How do they engage in discussions about race? How does racial identity attitude inform their perspectives?* It draws upon data collected over two periods: a two-month pilot study and a nine-month dissertation study. Data include field notes from more than 240 hours of observations during 80 visits, and transcripts of interviews with 17 people (nine black, eight white; two pastors, two staff, 13 members; ages 21 to 76) which averaged 2½-hours each.

This dissertation describes three findings. (1) White members have learned to comfortably co-exist with black members in worship but have not developed deep enough relationships to learn from them the extent of racism that survives in the post

Civil Rights era. (2) Misconceptions among white members about what is “politically correct” stifle constructive interracial dialogue about race issues and lead to aversive behaviors that have a racist effect for African American members. (3) With only modest social interaction across race and little dialogue about race, white members of the congregation hold markedly different perceptions than black members about the interracial life of this church and the problem with racism there.

These findings are significant because they help us to understand the obstacles which this nation must address in order to respond to the complexities of race in urban America, of which this congregation offers a microcosm.

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The journey that led to the completion of this dissertation has been both a spiritual and an intellectual pilgrimage, and has been enhanced by sojourns with many people without whom this dissertation could not have been accomplished. The people of this church played a primary role, particularly the clergy and staff who so fervently believe in the church's mission as a racially diverse congregation that they welcomed a researcher amongst them. I warned them that a researcher's eye catches things most people would rather not have disclosed to *others*, but the church staff figured that the research findings would aid them in their mission, outweighing any risks.

I am especially grateful to James Earl Davis, my dissertation chair. His contributions were extraordinary – from the frequent and lengthy periods of time he made available during his sabbatical year to meet and read drafts, to the wonderful conversations that guided my work. In every meeting with him I gained such clarity, confidence and energy – far more than I could ever have conjured on my own – that the process of writing this dissertation for the most part was exhilarating and fun.

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To Howell, Theresa and Mariel

“A Doctoral Degree:
Transform Your Life and the Lives of Everyone Around You.”

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Race is a social construct. Its wake of racism has disenfranchised people of African ancestry since their arrival on American soil and continues to do so through covert forms of racism in which just about every white individual plays some role. I spent most of my life refusing to acknowledge such a blanket of blame, particularly the charges of racism levied against people and institutions that I wanted to believe meant no harm. That discomfort, I now admit, stemmed from my growing realization that somehow I too might be implicated even though I perceived myself as nonprejudiced and claimed that I was colorblind. To venture further along the continuum of racial identity attitude I had to confess that sometimes subconsciously succumb to racial slights and oversights and acknowledge that those behaviors offer evidence of my racism. I also had to admit that my claim of being colorblind was really a pretense to avoid referencing or acknowledging race or talking about it because it made me uncomfortable. The harshest reality, however, was recognizing that my non-confrontational nature was not neutral in the racialized world and that my silence cast a vote for the racist status quo, whether I intended it or not.

This dissertation is an attempt to respond to this type of complicity in racism. For me it has been a journey of the soul as much as a journey of academic understanding. My approach to this research and the trajectory it has taken has been deeply influenced by my reflection on the meaning of white privilege (McIntosh, 1990) in my life and the ways it allowed me avoid acknowledging my own racism for years. I explore the racial hesitancy of white people like me in the venue I know best – an old-line Protestant¹ congregation

¹ By “old-line Protestant” I refer to what has formerly been known as “mainline Protestant denominations” – those “Protestant denominations which have historically been major forces in American religious life” (McKim, 1996) (e.g. American Baptist, Episcopal, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, United Church of Christ). The Hartford

teeming with socially progressive white individuals similar to me and to the members of a church where I worked as a seminary-trained educator. I did not choose a religious congregation simply because of my familiarity with that world. I chose this biracial church because religious congregations throughout history have been a locus of education, and because society cannot address racism effectively without enlisting their resources.

Consider, for example, the formative role the Church played in the evolution of Western education and the advocacy role that old-line Protestant denominations continue to play today in public education. For example, the National Council of the Churches USA² – which mobilized during the Civil Rights era to crusade for public education – is marshalling its forces again to address the needs of 21st century schools (National Council of Churches, 2003). While there is disagreement about the value of what religious institutions contribute to contemporary education, one need only look at the role of some of them in the textbook selection process to recognize the influence they can wield. For years, fundamentalist Christians in Texas have effectively censored the content of textbooks nation-wide by combing textbooks whose ideology they disdain for

Institute for Religion Research now refers to these denominations as “old-line” to avoid the public confusion created by media references to the growing influence of conservative evangelical Christians who consider themselves representative of *mainstream* Christianity.

² An ecumenical council of 35 faith traditions (including Protestant, Orthodox, evangelical, but not Roman Catholic churches) representing 45 million Americans and 100,000 congregations. Members include the following denominations: American Baptist, Disciples of Christ, Church of the Brethren, Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Friends United Meeting, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, Presbyterian Church U.S.A., Reformed Church in America, United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church, African Methodist Episcopal Church, and numerous Eastern Orthodox Churches. (National Council of Churches).

minor factual errors. Pointing to oftentimes insignificant factual errors, these activists force the state board of education to eliminate those texts from lists of books that school districts can purchase with state subsidy (McNeil, 2000). Furthermore, because the high cost of production motivates publishers to produce one-size-fits-all textbooks, publishers must appease the most vocal critics in states like Texas because of its high volume purchasing (Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991). As a result, this small cadre of conservative Christians in Texas has dictated the content of textbooks available to the rest of the nation's schools because no group has organized opposite them (Apple & Christian-Smith).

These two examples help to illustrate the significant social force of religious institutions in the United States where they comprise the largest voluntary association (Ammerman, Jackson, Dudley & McKinney, 1998) with 165 million people attending 350,000 communities of faith (Linder, 2008). I suggest that we harness some of the powerful influence religious institutions wield and use their significant organizational presence to address social problems such as racism that confound attempts at equality in the United States. Legislatures and courts have attempted to end racial discrimination through laws and legal rulings. Schools have attempted to address racial prejudice and stereotyping and reduce the incidence of racial discrimination through education and training for faculty and students. Many large businesses have done the same. Despite these efforts, racism continues to be a serious impediment, among many intersecting variables, that diminishes for African Americans the constitutional promise of "life, liberty and pursuit of happiness."

Now consider the many unique characteristics of religious institutions that provide scholars an opportunity to observe, understand and address the many forms of racialized behavior and racism apparent in all institutions. These characteristics include (1) the voluntary nature of congregational affiliation, (2) the daily movement of a congregation's members across many institutions, and (3) the microcosm of society that a

multiracial congregation, in particular, provides (Christerson, Edwards & Emerson, 2005; Putnam, 2000).

Because congregations are voluntary affiliations they provide “perhaps our clearest opportunity for studying the processes of segregation, desegregation, integration, assimilation, and pluralism in American organizational life” (Christerson et al., 2005, p. 3). These effects cannot be grasped as easily through studies of neighborhoods, schools, places of employment – the venues that are more typically the focus of research lenses. Even among voluntary organizations in the United States, religious congregations are unique. They serve “as vital mediating forces” (Christerson et al., 2005, p. 3) between their congregation and the public world where church members work, send their children to school, and interact in an array of institutions. Indeed, “religiosity rivals education as a powerful correlate of most forms of civic engagement” (Putnam, 2000, p.67). Putnam suggests that people involved in religious institutions typically know more people and this connectedness influences them to give more generously of their time and money for community causes, not just the religious institutions themselves. Warner (2000) notes that congregations (where members choose to join, by contrast to Roman Catholic parishes where members are assigned based on residency) have a strong “impact on changing people: it gets under their skins,” (p. 304).

This relationship is particularly the case with members of old-line Protestant congregations. Historically they have “provided a disproportionate share of leadership to the wider civic community” (Putnam, 2000, p. 77) through socially progressive programs that serve people beyond the membership of their congregations. By comparison, the religiosity of both evangelical Protestant congregations and Roman Catholic parishes emphasizes individual piety and church-centered activities that have a tendency to exclude non-members (Putnam).

Multiracial congregations provide a third unique characteristic useful to researchers studying racial dynamics. These congregations often provide a microcosm of

the social, economic and racial diversity of society and thereby provide a valid sample for a research study on the racist forces that continue in U.S. society. When we attempt to understand racism in the arena of a religious congregation, we not only develop tools for addressing it there we also empower members to serve as a united front to counter racism in other institutions in which they associate. Sociologists of religion are well aware of this potential. “Multiracial congregations will be called on in the years ahead to use their experience to provide a healing salve for the wounds of racial division, cultural misunderstandings, and even the lingering pain of traumatic events” (DeYoung, Emerson, Yancey & Kim, 2003, p. 75). That is because religious congregations collectively comprise one of the principal locations of education in American society, a place where members are socialized and enculturated into the assimilated white norms.

These implications are illustrated in the chapters that follow. Chapter 1 continues with a statement of the problem that briefly portrays just how segregated old-line Protestant denominations are and the significance of this segregation for all other institutions in which their members participate. Next I describe the purpose of studying the social dynamics in one biracial congregation, particularly the challenges for white individuals of interacting across race, talking about racism and dealing with perspectives that sometimes reflect harshly on them. Developing research questions to address these dynamics was a long process so I describe here how the findings from a pilot study and a long period of reflection helped me to refine the focus of the questions that I asked. This exploration has significant implications because of the nested position of old-line Protestantism within the institution of religion, the position of religious congregations within all American institutions, and the way church members cross them all.

Several scholars have studied multiracial congregations (Christerson et al., 2005; Christerson & Emerson, 2003; DeYoung et al., 2003; Emerson, 2006; Emerson & Kim, 2003; Emerson, Kimbro & Yancey, 2002; Emerson & Smith, 2000; Emerson, Smith & Sikkink, 1999; Emerson, Yancey & Chai, 2001) and their empirical research provides an

important foundation for the theoretical frameworks of aversive racism and racial paranoia which ground this study. The literature review in Chapter 2 explores the substance of these studies. It also introduces the theoretical frameworks of aversive racism (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004) and racial identity attitude (Helms, 1990) as well as a social commentary on racial paranoia (Jackson, 2008) that support the trajectory of my research.

The focus of my study is race and racism. The location is secondary. Chapter 3 explains this rationale – including my choice of qualitative inquiry in general, and the ethnographic strategy in particular to explore how and why racism occurs in a community such as the one that is the focus of my research. I offer a brief snapshot of Crossroads Church (my field site), its biracial character, and the people who attend. Then I segue into details about the process of collecting, managing, and analyzing the data so that it accurately reflects the congregation.

Chapter 4 is the first of five data chapters. It provides the context for my study by describing Crossroads Church, its history and the way its identity has been shaped by its buildings, its urban neighborhood, and the economy there. Each of the three subsequent chapters addresses one of my three research questions by giving voice to the members of the church and its staff, while using my observations mostly to provide context for their perspectives: Chapter 5 explores ways that members interact (and do not interact) across race. Chapter 6 explores how they engage in (and avoid) discussions about race. Chapter 7 considers how the racial identity attitude of these individuals informs their perspectives. I use Chapter 8 to sum up my analysis of the interactions, dialogue and perspectives at Crossroads Church by illustrating them with a multifaceted narrative about the music program told primarily through member voices. Chapter 9 concludes my dissertation with a summary of my findings and the implications of them.

Statement of the Problem

. W.E.B. DuBois prophesied early in the 20th century that it would be “the century of the color line,” a line which Martin Luther King Jr. centered in the church by the mid 1960s when he pointed to Sunday morning as the most segregated time of the week. This reality has changed little in old-line Protestant congregations over the last four decades. Only 5% of Protestant congregations are multiracial and, of those, half are presumed to be multiracial primarily because they are in transition from one predominant race to another (DeYoung et al., 2003).

I am most familiar with segregated white churches. For 11 years I directed the program for children and family education at an Episcopal congregation which, with less than 2% African American membership, considered itself desegregated and welcoming of black³ members. The patterns of visitors to the congregation who joined and who did not join, however, suggested otherwise. It is a vibrant congregation and the continual influx of upper middle socioeconomic status families who spent several months at the church trying it out as a church home always included a trickle of black families. I noticed that too often many black families who participated in the life of the congregation and whose children seemed to enjoy the children’s program just stopped coming without explanation after several months. For more than a decade I have been trying to understand what makes white congregations so uncomfortable for African Americans and how racism may have played a role in this phenomenon.

³ Identifying the race of the subjects is critical to this study. I use the words *black* and *white* only as adjectives, although several quotations include the use of these words as nouns (e.g. “blacks” and “whites”). Because nearly everyone at Crossroads Church is American born, I interchangeably reference people in the two racial groups there as African Americans or black Americans and as European Americans or white Americans, but I make exceptions to this designation in a handful of references when non-Americans are included.

Contemporary literature on racism within the Christian church traces its influence to the legacy of 19th and 20th century scholarship. It gained momentum following the publication of *A Black Theology of Liberation*, by James H. Cone (1970/1990),⁴ which in turn was influenced by the mid-20th century rise of liberation theology.⁵ Since then, numerous scholars have published books that address racism within the Christian church from the perspective of various disciplines: sociology (Emerson & Smith, 2000), ethics

⁴ To illustrate how entrenched the Church is in practices that marginalize the religious perspective of African Americans and their contributions to Christianity, I want to make note of the treatment of this pivotal work in a leading academic reference. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Church* (Cross & Livingstone, 1997, 2005) is a principal reference work for the Anglican communion in which half of the 80 million members (Anglican Communion, 2008) world-wide are African. The treatment of Cone, black theology and African American churches in this dictionary typifies – in an authoritative way – the types of racial slights that I explore more informally in this dissertation.

The slights begin with decisions about which topics warrant an entry in the dictionary. For example, “feminist theology” has its own entry, but “black theology” does not. Black theology is mentioned briefly under “liberation theology” and Cone, the theologian who systematized black theology and gave it a name, is not mentioned there although one book he co-edited is cited as a reference in the entry for “black churches” (Wilmore, G.S., Cone, J.H., eds. (1979) *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966-1979*. (New York: Maryknoll). The entry for “black churches” is a catch-all for the entire African American church history, including references to the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) and other historically black denominations. The decision to lump this range of material under “black churches,” hints of the editors’ racial condescension, especially considering that this reference work differentiates among predominantly white denominations in the United States. For example, it is interesting to note that the A.M.E. denomination is both older (founded in 1787) and has more members (2.5 million) than other newer and/or smaller predominantly white U.S. denominations which have their own entries in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Church* (2005): e.g., United Church of Christ (formed in 1957) with 1.2 million members, and the Disciples of Christ (formed in 1832) with 700,000 members (Linder, 2008). While many white people might argue that this discrimination is not racist because it was not intended, oversights of this nature can have the *effect* of racism for many African Americans, as my discussion on microaggressions will demonstrate in Chapter 7.

⁵ A theological movement – influenced by Marx’s sociological critique of society – that ascended to prominence in 1968 at a meeting of Latin American bishops of the Roman Catholic Church (Cross & Livingstone, 1997).

(Oglesby, 1998), congregational studies (Campolo & Battle, 2005; Davies & Hennessee, 1998; Foster & Brelsford, 1996; Kujawa-Holbrook, 2002; Law, 1996, 2000; Matsuoka, 1998), and religious education (Wilkerson, 1997), to name a few. Most of these studies treat racism as a pathological problem within society.

Meanwhile in another discipline – that of social psychology – researchers of racism began in the early 1970s to turn their attention to a different dimension – the aversive racism of socially progressive white individuals. While they do not dismiss the pathology of racism, they suggest looking at the normative processes embedded within racism that, if understood, can be used to address the systemic problem (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; Kovel, 1970/1988). Most of the research based on the framework of aversive racism has focused on individuals – primarily college students. The principal research on racism in congregations, however, does not consider this approach.

Purpose Statement

I focused my research on a congregation for two reasons. Religious institutions, along with the institutions of family and education, have for centuries constituted the primary locations for socializing members into what their leadership embraces as the community norms (Durkheim, 1912/2001). Because of a church's role in the processes of socialization, I wondered what could occur there that unintentionally sustains racism even as a congregation works intentionally in other ways to counter racism. The second reason to address racism in a congregation is that Christianity has at hand tools for addressing it – Scripture and theology that mandate followers to work actively to oppose injustice. Raso (2002) suggests that “it is the spiritual dimension that can not only ground our anti-racism work but contribute most to recovering the prophetic power of our own voice, which too often lies dormant or speaks only weakly” (p. 105).

There is much scholarship to support the approach of this dissertation research. Lincoln (1999) suggests that Americans can only “make sense of our racial enigma” (p. xxii) if we first look at the institutions in the United States and the roles they played in racism. Throughout U.S. history, the assimilated Anglo Protestant perspective played the leading role in determining the American norms and the groups upon which to bestow the mantle of whiteness. Today the NCC acknowledges “our complicity with and participation in the perpetuation of racism, slavery and colonialism” (National Council of Churches, 2001) as the institutional church works to redress this legacy. The council has organized this work along the following lines: “organizing and advocacy, anti-racism education and training, research and documentation, support cultivation and resource coordination and development.”

While there are many dimensions to racism, such as scale (individual to institutional) and intent (overt to covert), this research study focuses on the racialized and racist behaviors of white individuals who perceive themselves as colorblind. The problem is that they also hold subconscious perspectives socialized into them about race, and they engage in subtle behaviors which in turn help to propagate racist practices in all institutions with which they associate (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; Sue et al., 2007). This behavior is even more apparent among well-educated white individuals, such as the majority of those attending Crossroads Church. Picca and Feagin (2007) suggest that this demographic “may be more likely to disguise their views, and to know how to do so, on racial issues than the less well-educated” and they “may also do more compartmentalizing and rationalizing of their racist attitudes” (p. xv). By studying racism among people whom most white individuals perceive as not racist, and by studying them in a biracial congregation which most white persons consider anything but racist, we can see the heart of contemporary racism.

The Site of This Study and the Insights It Can Yield

To the white visitor, Crossroads Church⁶ looks like a model of integration. Half of the worshippers are European American and half are African American. One pastor is a European American female, the other is an African American male. Half of the members of the governing body of the church are European American and half are African American. Crossroads Church has been stably biracial for more than a decade and its membership is made up of people who can be clustered into three general categories based on their race and outlooks on racial integration.

One group includes members who joined the church when it still was a white high society church and who remained loyal to the congregation even as it shrank 90 percent from its peak membership of more than 2000 adults. Many attend Crossroads Church regularly and demonstrate sincere efforts at trying to embrace the demographic changes there. After the emigration of white members who were uncomfortable with the change in the neighborhood and/or the church, the remnant congregation welcomed an influx of two new groups. A handful of black individuals and families joined in the 1970s as a result of modest outreach efforts by pastors and members to welcome African-Americans, although a noticeable increase did not occur until the mid-1980s. At the same time, a third loose category of members began to take shape – socially progressive white individuals who are so attracted to the biracial character of the congregation that they drive past numerous white congregations on their way to Crossroads.

Existing research on multiracial congregations describes many patterns of behavior similar to those I noticed at Crossroads Church while analyzing the data of the pilot study I did there in 2003. For one thing, diversity comes at a much larger personal cost to members of racial and ethnic minority groups than members of the majority group

⁶ This name is a pseudonym, as are all the names of people, places and institutions described or referenced in this dissertation.

in the congregation. Christerson et al. (2005) observed that members of groups that are a numerical minority struggle to develop close ties with the numerical majority in a multiracial congregation and are less likely to assume leadership in it.

Christerson et al. (2005) also noted that in multiracial congregations there is a pattern of predictability in regards to white families with school age children – a pattern that contrasts with black families. White families with school age children often leave multiracial congregations claiming a negative experience there by their children that they do not attribute to race, but to other expressions that can be considered codes for race. For example, white parents might suggest that the youth group has too rough a crowd, their child has difficulty relating to other members and making friends, or that children who do not share their values have a negative influence. Even families with preschool children anticipate the need to leave the multiracial congregations to which they currently belong once their children are a little older (Christerson & Emerson, 2003). These researchers' finding fits the pattern at Crossroads Church, as I describe later in this chapter.

Birthing the Research Questions

This inquiry stems from my findings from an eight-week study I did at the church in 2003 as a graduate student learning ethnographic methods by exploring the social dynamics in this biracial congregation. I learned that many of the white members of the congregation considered it integrated, while several black members pointed out to me that integration means full inclusion and that based on that definition the church merely was diverse (Herring, 2003). I sensed a white tendency to see a racially balanced church like Crossroads and perceive that the 50-50 membership (half white, half black) equates to perfect balance without recognizing that black members have different experiences there. Creswell (2005) says that qualitative research should start with the most general

open question possible and I took this one step further by framing my research questions so that subjects could answer from their own experience and perspective:

1. How do members of a biracial congregation interact across race?
2. How do they engage in discussions about race?
3. How does racial identity attitude inform their perspectives?

The notion that 50-50 membership balance equates to perfect balance is akin to a null hypothesis: *There is no difference in the experience of African Americans and European Americans in terms of full inclusion as members in the life of Crossroads Church*, where race and inclusion, respectively, are the independent and dependent variables. As I pondered this “null hypothesis” of white American culture over the next three years, I crafted questions that would challenge the white tendency to deny the effects of race. For this reason, I eventually focused my research questions on: the time spent interacting and the nature and quality of those interactions, the degree of comfort when engaged in interracial conversations about race, and the awareness of divergent perspectives that are related to racial identity.

I began to focus on the level of comfort or discomfort in social dynamics that one would expect in a biracial congregation – people interacting with others of a different race and/or discussing race issues with them. For instance, I noticed a disturbing pattern of racial interaction during my pilot study. Although the racial attendance during worship averaged 65% white and 35% black, so few white individuals attended social gatherings (such as the meals that follow worship a few times each year) that black members comprised 80 % of the attendance and white members a mere 20%. While there are many older white members (age 60 and up) who attend the worship and chat with black members before and after services, few of them attend the congregation’s social gatherings. Those events are attended by black members of all ages – many of whom are elderly so age cannot be used unilaterally across race as an explanation for who does not

attend. Those observations shaped my first research question, “How do members of a biracial congregation interact across race?”

A second characteristic I observed during my pilot study was the absence in the congregation of white families with children, which was a stark contrast to the healthy representation of black families with children at Crossroads Church. This fact was particularly striking because black individuals were a numerical minority in the congregation at the time, accounting for approximately 35% of worshippers in attendance.

This absence of white families seemed to give silent testimony to the fact that for many white members the diversity at the church already had tipped too far in the direction of being too black. (On several occasions I heard this discussed privately.) In two months of observation in the fall of 2003, I noticed that the only white children were occasional visitors. The volunteer church school teacher, the children who attended her class (a weekly average of four), the full-time youth leader, and the two dozen teenage members all self-identified as black, except for two youth whose racial heritage is mixed. This situation changed slightly by the time of my dissertation research in 2007. The 10-year-old grandson (white) of two 50-year members began accompanying them to Crossroads Church and attending the church school, and a white couple who recently joined gave birth to a boy during my study.

Some black members suggested to me that the absence of white children is evidence of racism in the broader social culture. By contrast, white members sidestepped my questions about the meaning of the absence of white children and instead focused on their desire to resolve the situation by figuring a way to attract white families with children. These observations shaped my other two research inquiries. The question “How do members engage in discussions about race?” explores patterns of an individual’s (1) acknowledgement of race and racism in culture and (2) his or her suppression of race words by substituting other coded words. I addressed these patterns by asking several sub

questions: How does the church see itself and describe itself and its vision to others? What mechanisms do church members use to avoid getting pulled into dialogue about race? Why are they reluctant to engage in such discussions in the first place? Where do genuine conversations about race take place and how? My final research question “How does racial identity attitude inform their perspectives?” explores the differing lenses of interpretation.

Significance of the Study

Despite legislative gains made against the most overt acts of racial bigotry and discrimination, the effects of racism have continued to cripple people of color throughout the end of the 20th century and into the twenty-first. Sue et al. (2007) succinctly describe this continued racism by their summary of the 1998 report by the Clinton administration’s Advisory Board to the President’s Initiative on Race, on which the lead author served. The board:

concluded that (a) racism is one of the most divisive forces in our society, (b) racial legacies of the past continue to haunt current policies and practices that create unfair disparities between minority and majority groups, (c) racial inequities are so deeply ingrained in American society that they are nearly invisible, and (d) most white Americans are unaware of the advantages they enjoy in this society and of how their attitudes and actions unintentionally discriminate against persons of color. (p. 271)

The intractable nature of these issues is further evidenced by the heated debates in the media during the long season of state primaries leading up to the selection of Sen. Barack Obama as the Democratic candidate for the 2008 presidential election. In his critically acclaimed speech, “A More Perfect Union,” Obama (2008) addressed the national tension between the African American perspective that sees racism everywhere, and the European American perspective that considers that perspective as incendiary:

The fact is that the comments that have been made and the issues that have surfaced over the last few weeks reflect the complexities of race in this country that we’ve never really worked through – a part of our union that

we have yet to perfect. And if we walk away now, if we simply retreat into our respective corners, we will never be able to come together and solve challenges like health care, or education, or the need to find good jobs for every American. (§27)

Crossroads Church offers a useful case study of these “complexities” because it allows us to narrow the focus from generalized descriptions of what constitutes contemporary racism to *specific* behaviors and situations. By focusing an ethnographic lens on this medium-sized, racially-balanced church community, we can study the diverging perspectives among black members and white members about specific encounters that some people deem racist. Looking at evidence that is familiar to all members of the congregation, we can observe both what African Americans experience as racism and what prevents most white members from understanding that perspective. We can offer clear evidence of how members “simply retreat into [their] respective corners”(Obama, 2008) and of the effects on the congregation, and then identify strategies to “work through” these “complexities.”

What we can learn from this study has implications far beyond Crossroads and the institutionalized church.

Focusing on religious organizations allows us to see what forces are necessary, apart from law or coercion, for organizations to be racially and ethnically integrated. To study these organizations, then, has the potential to teach us *something new about racial and ethnic relations*, something we could not learn by focusing on neighborhoods, schools, government, the military or places of employment. (Christerson et al., 2005, p. 4).

Furthermore, churches occupy a unique position for bringing about change – their connectedness within society and its implications for social capital – and tools unique to Christian theology that motivate them.

Regarding connectedness, Putnam (2000) suggests that people involved in religious institutions typically know more people and give more generously of their time and money for community causes, not just the religious institutions to which they belong. This is particularly the case with members of old-line Protestant congregations.

Historically they have “provided a disproportionate share of leadership to the wider civic community” (p. 77) through socially progressive programs that serve people beyond the membership of their congregations. By contrast, the religiosity of both evangelical Protestant and Roman Catholic churches emphasizes individual piety and church-centered activities that have a tendency to exclude non-members (Putnam).

The theory of social capital posits that networks among people have value and that the strength of the “norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise” from a network determines the productivity of individuals and the group (Putnam, 2000, p. 19). The “Golden Rule” – articulated in the New Testament (Matthew 7:12 and Luke 6:31) and in the teachings of other world religions – admonishes followers to treat other people as they would want to be treated themselves and is based on this type of reciprocity.

While there are many dimensions of social capital, Putnam (2000) suggests that “perhaps the most important is the distinction between *bridging* (or inclusive) and *bonding* (or exclusive)” (p. 22) dimensions. Examples of social networks that emphasize the bonding dimension of social capital include evangelical Protestant congregations, Roman Catholic churches, ethnic fraternal organizations, and fashionable country clubs, because they all tend to reinforce a group identity that has the effect of fostering homogeneity by separating them from those outside the group. By contrast, the bridging dimension of social capital encourages members within a group to reach beyond its boundaries and to provide information to others, to combine assets, and to mobilize solidarity. The Civil Rights movement and religious interfaith organizations serve as examples of the bridging dimension of social capital which Putnam describes as “sociological WD-40” (p. 23).

All institutions – whether they are a church, school, government or industry – must abide by laws that attempt to restrict racism. Unlike the other institutions, however, Christian churches have a unique tool that enables them to more easily disrupt the socialization of racist behaviors. They can appeal to the moral codes embedded in

Scripture that are held aloft as the standards to guide each member's daily living. The first century church (as described in the New Testament in the Acts of the Apostles) was clear in its teachings that all practicing Christians, regardless of race or ethnicity, were welcome to become full members. Observing old-line Protestant practices through the lens of the psychology of contemporary racism can serve to identify ways that white individuals sometimes succumb to racist behaviors that contradict biblical teaching (Barndt, 1991).

Theoretical Framework

Much of the research on multiracial congregations to date is sociological. Multi-million dollar studies funded by the Lilly Foundation have developed a large national database on attitudes (Emerson & Smith, 2000) that has mapped the landscape of multiracial congregations. Smaller qualitative studies have done short term observations to size up a few dozen multiracial congregations (Christerson et al., 2005; Christerson & Emerson, 2003; Emerson, 2006; Kujawa-Holbrook, 2002). These studies of multiracial congregations focused on the descriptions and outcomes of diversity, but none have drawn upon theoretical frameworks from psychology that attempt to explain individual behaviors that when aggregated create the group dynamics that these researchers have observed. The one ethnography (Edwards, 2008) that I located within the literature on multiracial congregations focuses on how race is managed in one congregation and how African Americans negotiate the white hegemony that results. By contrast, my dissertation uses the theoretical lenses of aversive racism (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004), racial paranoia (Jackson, 2008) and racial identity attitudes (Helms, 1990) to understand behaviors that fuel the white hegemony that Edwards (2008) describes. This approach is a unique contribution to the literature on multiracial congregations.

For example, the words “racism” and “racist” are now at the heart of an emotionally charged semantic dispute between European Americans and African Americans. Most white individuals understand racism only as overt prejudice and blatant acts of racial discrimination and therefore they understand it only in terms of an individual’s intent to act according to their racial prejudices. Those white individuals who do not consciously act with racially prejudiced intent cannot understand how anything about them can be associated with racism or how anyone can label them a racist. They fail to understand that black individuals measure the effects of contemporary racism differently from the way white individuals measure the effects of racism (Sue et al., 2007).

The theoretical framework of aversive racism (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004) along with the supporting theory of racial identity (Helms, 1990) and a social commentary on racial paranoia by Jackson (2008) can help to account for individual behaviors that in turn explain the congregational culture described in earlier studies of multiracial churches by sociologists.

Summary of the Purpose and Significance of This Study

The institution of religion has played a major role throughout history in the socialization of racist behaviors, but it also provides a major location of education in American society that can be tapped to counter racism as well. Furthermore, religious congregations – particularly old-line Protestant churches – have many characteristics that make them unique (among other American institutions) for understanding and disrupting patterns of racism. The literature review in the next chapter describes previous studies that have made important contributions by offering global descriptions of how multiracial congregations function. In analyzing these studies which are foundational to the study of race in the Protestant church, I note a facet that has yet to be studied – how the social

interactions between individuals shape the congregational character that they observed. I also illustrate how the theoretical frameworks of aversive racism (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004) and racial identity attitude (Helms, 1990) and a social commentary on racial paranoia (Jackson, 2008) inform the questions that we now need to ask: How do members of a biracial congregation interact across race? How do they engage in discussions about race? How does racial identity attitude inform their perspectives? Once we begin to answer these questions, we can tap the strengths inherent in old-line Protestantism's relationship to the larger culture – its bridging tendency – as a tool for anti-racism education among the broader public.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

This chapter first provides an overview of the literature on racism in Protestant congregations, particularly the work of sociologists of religion that provides the foundation for this study. From there I move into an overview of the research by social psychologists on aversive racism, the primary theoretical framework in which I situate this proposed research study and which differentiates it from earlier studies. This framework leads to a discussion of supporting ideas and theories – particularly racial paranoia and racial identity – and connects them to the theoretical framework and back to the sociological studies.

Racism and Racialization Defined

Scholars suggest that most European Americans define racism in terms of a continuum of overt prejudice to discrimination while failing to recognize the more covert cultural and institutional manifestations of contemporary racism (Sue, 2003; Sue et al., 2007). Definitions of contemporary racism, in turn, tend to focus on the structural aspects of racism and fail to reference the emotional component embedded within these contemporary expressions of racism (Dalal, 2002). While it is not difficult to recognize as emotion the hate and repulsion that underlie the lynching and legalized segregation of the most overt forms of racism in American history, European Americans have difficulty recognizing that emotions also function subconsciously in the more subtle forms of contemporary racism that have replaced overt racism. For this reason psychologists argue that research on racism must explore the territory of psychotherapy and attempt to understand the relationship between emotions, the subconscious, and the acts of racialization and racism (Dalal, 2002).

Blum's (2002) categories of racism offers a useful lens. He notes three general categories of racism that interact with each other: "*Personal racism* consists in racist acts, beliefs, attitudes, and behavior" (p. 9) by individuals. "*Social (or sociocultural) racism* comprises racist beliefs, attitudes, and stereotypes widely shared within a given population and expressed in cultural and social modes such as religion, popular entertainment, advertisements, and other media" (p. 9). *Institutional racism* then addresses the systemic nature of racism that is rooted in power. It refers to "racial interiorizing or antipathy perpetrated by specific social institutions such as schools, corporations, hospitals, or the criminal justice system as a totality" (p. 9).

It is important to note that not all reference to race is racism, particularly as we observe in later chapters the struggles by white individuals wanting to appear colorblind, but saying things that make it clear that they see race. For this reason, it is useful to consider the term racialization as a more neutral term that describes "the process of manufacturing and utilizing the notion of race in any capacity" (Dalal, 2002, p. 27).

Literature on Race and Racism in Protestant Churches

Existing literature on race and racism in Protestant congregations is primarily of two genres. Much of this literature is social commentary by theologians and clergy, which although it is illuminating (illustrative anecdotes and references to the work of a range of scholars on culture and race) contributes little if any empirical research to support its claims (Barndt, 1991; Campolo & Battle, 2005; Davies & Hennessee, 1998; Foster & Brelsford, 1996; González, 1992; Law, 1996, 2000; Matsuoka, 1998; Oglesby, 1998; Wilkerson, 1997). For example, Barndt (1991) describes contemporary forms of racism – particularly the economic manifestations – as well as white privilege and the harm racism does to white persons (anesthetizes them, encourages a pretense that African American pain is not real). He also suggests that the white church inadvertently promotes

racial prejudice by giving the appearance of welcoming African Americans, while expecting them to abandon the spiritual practices of the Black Church. Barndt, however, does not support this with empirical evidence.

Another text (Foster & Brelsford, 1996) uses sociological studies to explain the different approaches to worship and how – because the traditional worship in Christianity is rooted in western culture – the church has fostered preferences for European American culture. While Foster and Brelsford suggest numerous practices for transcending cultural differences, the general observations that they make – like most observations in this small body of literature – have not been empirically studied.

For that reason I turned to a second category of literature on race and racism in the church – the work of sociologists. Many of these scholars rely on the concept of contact theory, which can be traced to Allport's classic treatise (1954/1979) and assumes that social contact between groups lessens prejudice. These studies include aggregate analyses drawn from results of a nation-wide telephone survey of individuals and follow-up interviews (Emerson et al., 2002; Emerson & Smith, 2000), studies of the characteristics of multi-racial congregations (DeYoung et al., 2003; Kujawa-Holbrook, 2002), site visits and interviews for a qualitative study of representative congregations (Christerson et al., 2005; Emerson, 2006) and an ethnography of one congregation on the effects of white hegemony in that church (Edwards, 2008). This literature is described in more detail in the next section.

While these sociological studies provide important observations for understanding group behavior, they do not offer the tools needed to decipher the micro-level behaviors among individuals that are the focus of my own research questions: How do members of a biracial congregation interact across race? How do they engage in discussions about race? How does racial identity attitude inform their perspectives?

In exploring these interactions, I consider other domains of influence – from social psychology – that have yet to be used for studies of race and racism in old-line

Protestant congregations. For instance, earlier studies of race, racialization and racism in churches have not differentiated racial identity attitude among either European Americans or African Americans and the impact of that identity on an individual's racial perceptions. This deficiency is especially important when one considers the variant forms of contemporary racism by individuals and the relationship one can infer between (1) a specific white racial identity attitude and the racial behaviors most likely to be associated with it, and (2) the relationship between a specific black racial identity attitude and the perception of white behavior associated with it. (These racial identity attitudes also inform the racial paranoia of both European Americans and African Americans.) While earlier studies *describe* the character the congregation takes when different racial groups congregate in one church (Christerson et al., 2005; DeYoung et al., 2003; Edwards, 2008; Emerson, 2006; Emerson et al., 2002; Kujawa-Holbrook, 2002), they do not examine the variables among the individual members – such as racial paranoia and racial identity attitudes – that *influence* the character of the congregation that researchers observed.

Studies of Racism in Congregations

Many white individuals throughout all institutions within American society have been reluctant to acknowledge their own racialized habits and the unintended racism they can breed. While a range of research has studied racialized and/or racist behaviors among adults – particularly among college students (Anderson, MacPhee & Govan, 2000; Asada, Swank & Goldey, 2003; Bischoping et al., 2001; Duneier, 2003; Gurin, Nagda & Lopez, 2004; Helm, Sedlacek & Prieto, 1998; Helms, 1990; Myers, 2005; Myers & Williamson, 2001; Nadga, Gurin & Lopez, 2003; Picca & Feagin, 2007; Rothman, Lipset & Nevitte, 2003), only a comparatively small number of studies have focused on racialized and racist behaviors in religious congregations or among people who self-identify as Christians (Christerson & Emerson, 2003; DeYoung et al., 2003; Edwards,

2008; Emerson, 2006; Emerson et al., 2002; Emerson & Smith, 2000; Garces-Foley, 2007; Kujawa-Holbrook, 2002; Marti, 2005).

In analyzing results from the Lilly Survey of Attitudes and Social Networks (LSASN), a nation-wide random telephone survey of more than 2,500 Americans that asked about participants' perceptions of race problems and their ideas about solutions to racial inequalities (if they recognized them), Emerson and Smith (2000) noted a consistent perspective among subjects that race problems are relational and stem from one or more issues. The subjects blamed racial problems on overtly prejudiced white individuals, on members of minority groups who portray their individual problems as larger race issues, and on fabrications by liberals, the media and government (Emerson & Smith).

While respondents spoke out against instances of what they perceived as racist treatment of individuals, they resisted acknowledging the structural factors affecting people of African ancestry (e.g., lower wages, fewer opportunities for training, and racially segregated neighborhoods and schools) that create an environment that fosters cultural and institutional forms of racial oppression (Emerson & Smith, 2000). Nor did they acknowledge that as white individuals they are accorded privileges that people of other races do not share, the role that privilege plays in the more implicit forms of racial oppression described above, or the willingness to address structural problems of racism that would require much effort of them personally (e.g., buying a home in a racially integrated neighborhood or busing their children to a racially integrated school) (Emerson & Smith).

Mining responses from the LSASN, Emerson et al. (2002) analyzed how experiences of those subjects who grew up in interracial neighborhoods or attended interracial schools influenced them to have interracial social networks as adults. The LSASN asked respondents to consider the people with whom they like to participate in activities and engage in conversations, and estimate on a five-point Likert scale how

many were of the same race – all, most, half, few or none (Emerson et al.). The survey also asked participants about the racial composition of their more general social ties – acquaintances they enjoy in their neighborhood, school or workplace networks. While these findings offer partial affirmation of Allport's (1954/1979) mid-20th century theory that suggested that increased contact between races would change prejudicial attitudes, the LSASN method had limitations. It relied on the self-reporting of the research subjects. The desire of some white individuals to appear non-racist to others (as described in the next section on aversive racism) can skew their perception (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; Sue, 2003) and thus their reporting of both the racial percentages in their neighborhoods and schools and of the relationship qualities required to accurately evaluate the responses to these questions. This tendency can undermine the validity of the research.

Regardless, Emerson et al. (2002) demonstrated in their study that an understanding of the complexity of multiracial congregations requires theoretical consideration that explains behavior, something contact theory does not address. Building on Putnam (2000) and his theory on bonding capital (i.e., shared interests that hold a group together) and bridging capital (i.e., relations between groups), Emerson et al. recognized the way multiracial ties incorporate both.

In another study, Christerson and Emerson (2003) drew upon an abundance of literature that explains why volunteer organizations are internally homogenous – including more than nine out of ten religious congregations. This finding led to a transition in focus away from the study of why some congregations are racially integrated and toward a micro-level study of who in a diverse congregation bears the heaviest personal cost. To analyze this theory, Christerson and Emerson performed an in-depth case study focused on 26 individuals within one multiethnic church, deliberately choosing a congregation where white members were not the majority group. That choice reduced the possibility that observed patterns of relationships and levels of satisfaction

could be interpreted as a reflection of majority-minority experiences in society at large instead of the racial structure in the congregation. Building on the experience from this study Christerson et al. (2005) expand the scope of their research in two ways. They (1) interviewed 30 members in each of four multiracial evangelical Protestant congregations, and (2) explored not only the costs of membership, but also the benefits and the reasons behind the choice to join.

Theologian Kujawa Holbrook (2002) offers a study that parallels the timing and focus of these sociological studies but draws more upon theologians in the academy to guide her, as the comparative paucity of her sociological references suggest. Through intensive two-week visits at six congregations where she conducted field observations and interviews, Kujawa-Holbrook examines how members there acknowledge and address the racism in their lives. While her assessment offers a helpful perspective for practitioners within the church – particularly useful for plotting the identity of a congregation on a continuum from monocultural to anti-racist⁷ (see Table 2) – it offers little to explain the psychological factors at work. As I noted earlier, one limitation of the approach used in all of these studies (Christerson & Emerson, 2003; Emerson et al., 2002; Emerson & Smith, 2000; Kujawa-Holbrook, 2002) is that they focused primarily on the outcomes of diversity but not the cause of these outcomes. Theories in social psychology – a discipline that bridges the telescopic lens of sociology and the microscopic lens of psychology – explain the way individual prejudices aggregate into the sociological patterns that those researchers observed.

It is in this area where the work of Edwards (2008) is particularly helpful. She took the sociological studies a step further by focusing an ethnographic lens on one

⁷ While Kujawa-Holbrook describes this continuum in a narrative, Crossroads, a Matteson, IL, consultant that does anti-racism training, has developed a model that illustrates this continuum for anti-racism work.

biracial congregation and examining the ways that white hegemony continues to drive decisions and marginalize African American members. The questions guiding Edwards' research "have to do with how interracial churches sustain racially diverse congregations, given the extent of racial segregation, religious exclusion, and white dominance in this country" (p. 17). I will reference the details of Edwards' research throughout my data analysis because it most closely approximates my own methodology, offering a helpful complement to my analysis of the psychology that drives the behaviors I observed. Indeed, my focus is intended to overcome the limitations of the earlier research by incorporating theory that draws upon the psychology of aversive racism, racial paranoia and racial identity attitude described in the following sections.

Theoretical Framework of Aversive Racism Offers a New Lens

Contemporary forms of racism that emerged in the post Civil Rights era are generally described in three variations: modern racism (McConahay, 1986), symbolic racism (Sears, 1988), and aversive racism (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004). While all of these variations share certain characteristics – unlike overt forms of the Jim Crow era bigotry and hatred – contemporary forms of racism are so masked by appearances of trying not to appear bigoted that they are hard to identify. Sue et al. (2007) cite U.S. Department of Health and Human Services statistics to illustrate how contemporary forms of racism have a harmful effect on the "well-being, self-esteem, and standard of living of people of color" (p. 272). There is a subtle difference however. Modern and symbolic forms of contemporary racism most often are associated with people who are politically conservative and whose covert racism is masked by "rigid adherence to traditional American values (individualism, self-reliance, hard work, etc.)" that are not perceived as inherently racist (Sue et al., p. 272).

This dissertation focuses on the aversive form of contemporary racism which, by contrast, is linked to the type of white person (socially and/or politically progressive) most likely to seek membership in a racially diverse old-line Protestant congregation. The lineage of this vein of thought on racism derives from the discipline of social psychology and Allport's work (1954/1979) that serves as the classic treatise on the cognitive approach to prejudice. Kovel (1970) then differentiated an "aversive" form of racism from the more dominative or bigoted expressions when he recognized a duality in some white individuals that he described as their constant struggle to appear not prejudiced. Drawing upon this work, Gaertner (1973) published the first in a series of empirical research studies that aided in a shift from understanding racism as a psychopathology of prejudice, to recognizing the normal adaptive psychological process embedded in it. By understanding this process better, professionals doing anti-racism work can employ what scholars have uncovered to develop practices that help people to overcome their racializing and racist tendencies. The theoretical framework of aversive racism aids this understanding.

Dovidio and Gaertner (2004) describe aversive racism as acts of unintended racism by people who espouse principles of equality for all people, have no tolerance for overt racism, and believe themselves to be colorblind. Aversive racism is individual and situational: when a well-intentioned white person encounters a racialized situation he or she responds so as to appear not prejudiced. (See Figure 1 for a diagram illustrating this process.)

The theory behind the aversive racism paradigm presupposes two things. The first is a white person who truly believes himself or herself to be non-racist and therefore who Dovidio and Gaertner (2004) using this point of reference refer to as a "well-intentioned white." The second is a racialized situation, which Dalal (2002) describes as any situation in which the notion of race is utilized in any capacity. (At Crossroads Church, where the membership is racially balanced among European Americans and African Americans,

most situations are racialized.) According to the theory of aversive racism, the well-intentioned white person in this racialized situation has a desire to appear not prejudiced. Some situations have a clear non-racist response, but most do not. It is up to the well-intentioned white individual in any racialized situation to determine whether there is a social expectation for a non-racist response and then act according to expectations and repress one's own racist feelings. In most racialized situations, however, there is no clear non-racist response. The well-intentioned white individual has no social pressure to respond in a particular way. The person can succumb to his or her racist feelings as long as he or she can rationalize the response on other factors besides race.

In a situation with clear social expectations about what is an appropriate non-racist response, the individual will repress racist feelings so as to respond in a non-racist way (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004). What researchers observed in situations in which there was no clear non-racist response, an individual with aversive racism tendencies typically responded in covertly racist ways, often attempting to justify their decision on factors other than race (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1996, 2000; Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami & Hodson, 2002a; Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986; Dovidio, Kawakami & Gaertner, 2002b; Gaertner, 1973; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1977; Rollman, 1978).

Dovidio and Gaertner (2004) explain this phenomenon by suggesting that white individuals are socialized in the United States in ways that cause them to harbor feelings ranging from discomfort to distrust and even to fear people of African ancestry. Picca and Feagin (2007) use the metaphor of "stored bits" (p. 9) to describe these feelings that are racial stereotypes and racialized or racist ways of thinking that are passed from person to person, group to group, and generation to generation, with variations in extent. These bits become "common cultural currency" in kinship groups. "By constantly using selected bits of the dominant racial frame to interpret society, by integrating new items into it, and by applying learned stereotypes, images, and interpretations in discriminatory actions, whites imbed their racialized frame deeply in their minds" (p.9).

Many white individuals – particularly those who adhere to egalitarian principles – repress these racist feelings they harbor much of the time and this creates an internal conflict for them, according to Dovidio and Gaertner (2004). They find people of African ancestry “aversive,” while at the same time they find “aversive” any suggestion that they themselves might be prejudiced. To guard against such accusations, white individuals who researchers identify as acting in aversively racist ways, often demonstrate “*more positive reactions* to whites than to blacks, reflecting a pro-in-group rather than an anti-out-group orientation, thereby avoiding the stigma of overt bigotry and protecting a nonprejudiced self-image” (p. 4). Numerous research studies document these behaviors (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1996, 2000; Dovidio et al., 2002a; Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986; Dovidio et al., 2002b; Gaertner, 1973; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1977; Rollman, 1978).

Aversive racism surfaces in indirect and subtle ways and “is presumed to characterize racial attitudes of most well-educated and liberal whites in the United States” (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004, p. 3). Newer studies (Dovidio et al., 2002a; Dovidio, Gaertner, Nier, Kawakami & Hodson, 2004) document evidence of aversive racism and suggest that the effect of it disadvantages people of African ancestry in ways comparable to overt racism. (See also Sue, 2003, 2004.)

Some psychologists suggest that although aversive racism is damaging, it is not intended by the perpetrator to harm anyone. Rather, aversive racism is rooted in an individual’s desire to protect one’s self-image, which is bolstered by stereotypes that the perpetrator holds of others. Challenges to the self-image evoke a passionate response of cognitive dissonance – the desire to reduce or eliminate the discomfort induced by an encounter that is inconsistent with a strongly held belief. Rarely does a person simply change his or her belief (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; Sue, 2003).

White Americans are enculturated in myths of meritocracy, equal opportunity, and fair treatment but are not taught that an invisible social barrier prevents people of African ancestry from benefiting from these principles (Sue, 2003; Sue, 2004). When

white individuals refer to themselves as colorblind, they deny differences. Indeed, “trying to be seen as a nonracist by others is another way of being racist” (Barndt, 1991, p. 65) because this stance denies the power imbalance put in place by white-imposed norms. By denying the power imbalance, they deny the existence of white privilege, their own unearned privilege that results from it, and the supporting role it casts them in the system of racial oppression (Sue, 2003, 2004).

Secondary Frameworks

Racial Paranoia

A secondary idea to consider here is Jackson’s (2008) social commentary on *racial paranoia*, which attempts to explain the divergence between European American and African American perspectives about what is racist and what is not. Jackson describes three dimensions. One is the paranoia of European Americans: they worry about (1) appearing racist, and/or (2) inciting “black anger” – fears which lead many white individuals to avoid encounters where either might occur. In Figure 1, the diagram of aversive racism shows how both aspects of this form of racial paranoia are apparent in the well-intentioned white person as he or she encounters a racialized situation.

Another dimension of racial paranoia is the African American perspective: lifelong experiences of racial prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination lead to a heightened ability to sense racism that is not readily apparent to white individuals. For these African Americans, the *effect* of the action determines what is racist. It is “more powerfully felt than statistically proven, more intuited than seen. ... The racial slights are real ... at least partially because they feel real, and no visible displays to the contrary can completely refute that” (Jackson, 2008, p. 149). In Figure 1, the diagram shows how

racial paranoia is apparent both in the ability of African Americans to identify aversive racism and in the tendency of this perception to further fuel their paranoia.

The final dimension of racial paranoia involves yet another difference between African Americans and European Americans in their methods of analysis for determining when racism has occurred. Where many African Americans see most racialized behaviors as part of a larger pattern of institutional racism, white individuals are more likely to study every charge of racism in isolation from that larger pattern. Furthermore, for most European American individuals, the *intent* of the actor determines whether something is racism, not the *effect* of the action as most African Americans perceive racism.

Prior to the wave of legislation and public censure that followed the Civil Rights era and banned overt expressions of racial prejudice and discrimination, racism was easily identified so racial paranoia was not an issue (Jackson, 2008). He uses paranoia to describe the “social form” of paranoia that developed among African Americans during the post Civil Rights era as they became less clear about when they were

victimized by silent and undeclared racisms. This uncertainty can make people all the more paranoid about the smallest slights, the subtlest glances, the tiniest inconveniences. Any of those can be telltale signs of “two-faced racism,” of hidden racial animus dressed up to look politically correct, racial conspiracies cloaked in public niceties and social graces. (Jackson, 2008, p. 9).

Myers (2005), Myers and Williamson, (2001) and Picca and Feagin (2007) offer research that supports Jackson’s (2008) framework by describing the *back stage* performances of this *two-faced racism* described in the next sections.

Performance Theory and Two-Faced Racism

Drawing on Erving Goffman’s work on *performance theory*, Picca and Feagin (2007) describe European Americans’ racialized talk and behavior in terms of *front stage* and *back stage* performances. Front stage is “a space where an individual or a team of

individuals performs roles appropriate for a particular audience” (Picca & Feagin, p. 44) – multiracial, or one with expectations of social politeness regarding race. In the “action” of the aversive racism schematic in Figure 1, the well-intentioned white person determines the front stage behavior required – what society would deem as the non-racist response in the racialized situation – and acts accordingly. Picca and Feagin developed categories of these front stage interactions:

(1) White performances attempting to signal tolerance, such as acting very politely, attempting to prove one is not racist, (2) Avoidance strategies, such as avoiding any mention of racial characteristics or avoiding people of color altogether; [and] (3) Other defensive performances, such as defending oneself from perceived wrongdoing of the racial others and defending whites’ cultural ways. (p. 85)

Picca and Feagin (2007, p. x) suggest that “much of the overt expression of blatantly racist thought, emotions, interpretations, and inclinations *has gone back stage* – that is, into private settings where whites find themselves among other whites, especially friends and relatives.” In the schematic in Figure 1, this would be the context that the well-intentioned white person finds himself in – harboring subconscious thoughts and feelings that he finds aversive. Picca and Feagin describe the movement between the two racialized performances as *two-faced racism* and suggest that slippages occur between back stage and front stage performances when the speaker realizes that there is a person of color in their midst or something else in the context calls for politeness (a reassessment of the situation by the well-intentioned white person, as indicated in the “action” section of the schematic).

Race Talk

The practices of *race talk* help to illustrate two-faced racism and the shift between back stage and front stage performance. Myers and Williamson (2001) describe race talk broadly as any communication that demeans race or ethnicity, and they offer examples of

race talk that convey this communication both verbally and nonverbally, intentionally and subconsciously. These forms of race talk “helps to normalize – if not justify – racist attitudes and practices (p. 4) through “semantic moves” (p. 5) intended to convey racist information without making the actors appear racist themselves. Myers and Williamson suggest that few people challenge race talk.

Pollock’s (2004) theory of *colormute* behaviors falls into the category of race talk because of the colormute speaker’s “purposeful silencing of race words” (p. 3) pretending as if race does not matter to them when their behavior shows otherwise. Pollock recorded how the use of racial terms such as “black” or “African American” caused teachers and administrators in a multiracial urban high school to predictably stutter, mumble or pause, a behavior she did not notice for other race groups. This colormute behavior had a negative effect because the use of “de-raced words” reduced discussion about racial inequalities confronting students to simplistic analyses or quashed them altogether.

Racial Microaggressions

“The invisible nature of acts of aversive racism prevents perpetrators from realizing and confronting their own complicity in creating psychological dilemmas for minorities” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 272). As psychologists, Sue et al. are particularly concerned about practices by white therapists working with people of color⁸ that do not consider the clients’ racial perspective and which, therefore, have a racist effect. This team of researchers catalogued behaviors that they described as *racial microaggressions*, and set out to describe how they are manifest (as *microinsults and microinvalidations*), their impact on both the perpetrator and the victim, and strategies to address them. The

⁸ While Sue et al. (2007) in their theoretical framework on microaggressions consider racism against *all* “people of color,” I use their work only in my more limited focus on relations between European Americans and African Americans.

taxonomy of aversive racism behaviors that they developed describes manifestations of aversive racism that fly under the radar of public censure regarding racism and are useful for studying interracial encounters in many venues.

Racial Identity Attitude

Dovidio and Gaertner (2004) suggest that strategies to combat aversive racism must be directed at individuals and their unconscious attitudes, the type that tends to surface in two-faced racism and race talk. Earlier studies of race and racism in congregations have considered this concern in their use of contact theory (Christerson et al., 2005; Christerson & Emerson, 2003; DeYoung et al., 2003; Emerson et al., 2002). However, they have limited the effect of this approach by treating European Americans and African Americans as undifferentiated groups, rather than trying to account for the varying racial perspectives within these racial groups.

Such a generalized treatment of the racial identity among white individuals overlooks the complex relationship between the range of white racial identity attitudes and their effect on racism and prejudice (Carter, Helms & Juby, 2004). Likewise, there is a relationship between racial identity of a black American and his or her perspective in regards to prejudice and racism (Helms, 1990). For instance, there are stages in the racial identity attitude development among both white and black individuals in which the individual avoids contact with people of other races, or in which the individual lets external influences guide his or her behavior and/or perceptions (Helms, 1990). See Figure 2 for a diagram that attempts to describe the continuum of white racial identity attitude development, and Table 1 for a schema describing the continuum of black racial attitude development. Sociologists might interpret racialized and racist behaviors of a subject differently if they considered the attitude unique to the individual's stage of racial identity that might be influencing the behaviors sociologists are observing.

Another disadvantage of treating white people as an undifferentiated group is that it focuses solely on their attitudes about other groups without articulating their orientation toward their own racial group (Carter et al., 2004). Aspects of self-image and self-esteem are often formed through stereotypes held of others and, particularly when those stereotypes are challenged, they cause the individual who holds them to become defensive about their own identity (Sue, 2003). An individual's orientation toward his or her whiteness varies according to one's racial identity attitude (Helms 1990) which can, in turn, affect the behaviors of individuals in multiracial congregations.

Racial identity is not assigned. Rather, it is a reference-group orientation acknowledged by the individual. It "refers to a sense of group or collective identity based on one's *perception* that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group" (Helms, 1990, p. 3). In the case of African Americans, racial identity development separates out (from identity development shared by all humans) those aspects that occur in response to racial oppression (Helms, 1990).

Efforts to measure racial identity date to the work of psychologist William H. Cross and his attempts in the 1970s to create a scale for clinical counseling based on his theory of nigrescence. One of the instruments longest in use is the Black Racial Identity Attitude Scale (BRIAS) that Parham and Helms (1981) developed for use in therapy to match interventions with racial identity attitude development for African American patients. The BRIAS recognizes four distinct stages. Individuals within each stage have a distinct world view that causes their racial identity to differ in its emotional, cognitive and behavioral expression (Helms, 1990). Not everyone enters the continuum at the same stage. While a person can progress through the stages of racial identity attitudes - described as being from the least to the most healthy - individuals often do not progress in linear fashion and instead cycle back to earlier stages.

The Black Racial Identity Attitude Scale (BRIAS) (see Table 1) describes a black individual's movement from a world view shaped by European American frame of

reference, through critical analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of other perspectives, ultimately to an inner sense of satisfaction in black identity. In the first three stages – pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion – the divergence in perspectives of the individuals is apparent in reference to the victimization of African Americans.

In the *pre-encounter* stage, the individual's world view mirrors that of white people. He or she either identifies with white individuals or does not acknowledge an ascribed identity, and spends considerable energy disassociating from an African American perspective or worldview. A person at this stage may engage in "massive denial ... to maintain a fiction of racial equality" (Helms, 1990, p. 22). This stage of the theory is particularly salient for my study because it may help to explain the resistance of a handful of African Americans to acknowledge race issues at Crossroads Church or to downplay them.

Helms (1990) acknowledges that some theorists disagree that the second stage – *encounter* – is actually a distinct stage and claim that it is difficult to measure because it is so fleeting. Entry into this stage is often triggered by an event unique to the individual. The first phase of this stage is marked by the individual's awareness that he or she was not extended all the privileges of the white world, never will be, and now must find another identity that accounts for his or her separation from the white world view. The second phase of this stage is marked by emotions ranging from confusion and depression to anger.

The *immersion/emersion* stage is characterized by psychological and/or physical withdrawal into an ascribed identity and reference group orientation of African ancestry and sometimes even white stereotypes about their worldview. An individual in this stage experiences a generalized anger directed at oneself for succumbing earlier to the white influences, at white people for racial oppression, and at people of African ancestry who have not reached this stage of awareness yet (Helms, 1990). The *encounter* and *immersion/emersion* stages of this theory are less apt for my study because they are

characterized by a withdrawal from multiracial venues so few people in these stages would choose to attend a church like Crossroads.

The fourth and final stage of *internalization/commitment*, according to Helms (1990), is the first stage of healthy racial identity attitude because it is personally relevant and not externally defined by either white individuals or by fellow people of African ancestry. An individual at this stage can function in the white world with a measure of confidence that enables him or her to critique whiteness for both its positive and negative aspects. People at this stage do not necessarily think, believe or feel alike. It is *how* they think and believe – with a positive racial identity that is internally defined and not externally influenced – that aligns them in this stage. In the second phase of this stage, the individual develops an orientation towards activism in matters of racism. This *internalization/commitment* stage of black racial identity attitude is particularly important to consider because church members who dwell in this stage are most competent responding to both perspectives on racial paranoia.

The White Racial Identity Attitude Scale WRIAS (see Figure 2) measures a European American individual's attitudes about white people and oneself as a white person, as well as attitudes about black persons and one's relationship to black individuals. The WRIAS stages of contact, disintegration, reintegration, pseudo-independence and autonomy are aligned from the least sensitive toward racism, to the most conscious of the range and aspects of racism (Helms, 1990).

In the initial *contact* stage, a white person approaches the world with a colorblind naïveté about his or her own culture, privileges associated with it, and the impact of racism on people who are not white (Helms, 1990). During the *disintegration* stage which follows, a white person has become aware of the implication of race and feels caught between recognizing the negative impact of racism on people of African ancestry, and not wanting to acknowledge his or her own complicity as a member of the white race. The

reintegration stage occurs next as the idealization of everything associated with whiteness and the denigration of everything that is associated with black culture (Helms).

As a person enters the fourth stage of *pseudo-independence*, he or she is beginning to develop an intellectual recognition of personal responsibility in racism (Helms, 1990). This development evolves in the *immersion/emersion* stage into redefinition of stereotypes into which one has been socialized, the acknowledgement of the meaning of whiteness and white privilege, and the purgation of the emotions denied or suppressed in earlier stages (Helms).

By an individual's arrival in *autonomy* – the final stage within the WRIAS – race no longer symbolizes a threat to the individual because he or she has achieved a “racially transcendent world view” (Helms, 1990, p. 68). Furthermore, the individual explores other “-isms” constantly allowing oneself to be informed by perspectives of other cultures, to recognize similarities and differences without threat, and to work actively against racial oppression (Helms). European Americans are scattered along much of the WRIAS continuum of stages.

By considering the BRIAS and WRIAS perspectives, researchers studying interracial interactions and characterize them in ways that reveal intentionality (e.g., discomfort by white people when the issue of race is raised, their behaviors or decisions that involve race but are rationalized on factors other than race, avoidance of social situations with congregants of African ancestry, privileging the voice of white members over those of African ancestry.) The racial identity attitude scale also helps to “assess the differential impact of racial dynamics” (Helms, 2007, p. 236) on African Americans, which helps to articulate the racial paranoia described by (Jackson, 2008).

Summary of the Literature

As I have described above, the discussion of race, racialization and racism in religious congregations to date falls into two categories: (1) theoretical treatises that are primarily narrative in nature and offer anecdotal evidence to support their claims but little, if any, empirical evidence, and (2) sociological works that have emerged in the last decade and that build on the theoretical work with a macro level survey of patterns of race, racialization and racism in congregations. The limitation of these approaches is that they both focus solely on the outcome of racialization and racism. For this reason I have chosen as the framework for my dissertation theories from other disciplines (e.g., an understanding of racial identity and racial paranoia and the role they play in aversive racism) that provide tools to explore the cause of the outcomes that sociologists have observed. My strategy is outlined in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS AND DATA

This chapter on the methodology for my study begins with a discussion of the qualitative research in general and segues into a focus on the ethnographic method within this larger paradigm. I argue that ethnography is the best research strategy for observing behaviors that can be attributed to aversive racism (my conceptual framework) and exploring how and why they occur. From there I move into a description of the site (an old-line Protestant congregation), the nature of my field observations there, and the purposeful sample of 17 members whom I eventually interviewed. I describe the data sources I used for this study, beginning with a lengthy discussion of the interviews which were the primary source of data, followed by my field observations, and analysis of congregational documents. I conclude this section with a description of my data analysis, my efforts to validate my findings, ethical considerations I made as I undertook this study, and a reflection on my role as researcher.

The Qualitative Research Paradigm

The qualitative paradigm offers several advantages in answering my research questions: How do members of a biracial congregation interact across race? How do they engage in discussions about race? How does racial identity attitude inform their perspectives? The qualitative methodology allows me to look at relationships within the system (social behaviors, dialogue, and other interactions) as a way of understanding the whole (Janesick, 2003) – in this case the dynamics in this biracial congregation. This paradigm allows me to expand my focus to address how and why a phenomenon is occurring (Lofland & Lofland, 1995) while a quantitative paradigm would limit me to measuring whether something occurred and, if so, at what frequency.

The qualitative data collection process fostered an opportunity for me to engage in a holistic, panoramic view of the social phenomenon of covert racism in a way that allowed the data to emerge and not be prefigured (Creswell, 2003). The process allowed each participant to make observations to me and articulate answers to my questions according to his or her sense of what is important, rather than be subjected to leading questions (Creswell, 2003).

Another advantage that the qualitative research paradigm provided was the use of multiple interactive methods of data collection that offer different lenses through which to observe, gather data and interpret the data (Creswell, 2003). I tried to discover the participant's experience and relate my understanding of what occurred to the the participant who confirmed, clarified, or rejected my attempts at analysis (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). This paradigm allowed me to draw upon this sustained experience to continually refine the research questions, hone the focus of my observations and adjust my data collection (Creswell, 2003). My observational field notes lead to insights and questions that I posed and corroborated in interviews, and the participants' responses heightened the acuity of my subsequent observations and interpretations.

These postures of looking and listening, analyzing and asking, fostered a mutuality between myself and the members and staff of Crossroads Church and set the stage for a process which Janesick (2003) compares to the performance of dance. Dance ranges from the minuet, which is the most confined (precisely choreographed movements that have been rehearsed), to improvisation, which is the most interpretive and reflective (Janesick, 2003). My ethnography began like the minuet with some fixed movements (protocols for observations and interviews) then moved into improvisation in which I reflected on what was happening and then responded to it in the moment (Janesick, 2003). "The qualitative researcher is like the dancer or the choreographer, then, in seeking to describe, explain, and make understandable the familiar in a contextual,

personal, and passionate way” (Janesick, 2003, p. 72-73). The results of my qualitative study are more illustrative than exhaustive (Lofland & Lofland, 1995).

The Ethnographic Strategy of Qualitative Inquiry

Within the qualitative research paradigm, ethnography offers the strategy that allows researchers to observe the shared culture of individuals within a group and in a setting that is natural to them (Creswell, 2003). Creswell (2005) identifies several characteristics to define a culture-sharing group. The group must have at least two members, but can be quite large. The group meetings must occur over a long period of time and provide a regular opportunity for members to interact. The group must be representative of a larger group and have adopted shared behaviors, beliefs and norms. The shared culture enables the researcher to contextualize the interpretation of the data to respond to the realities of that culture that the researcher encounters in the field setting (Creswell, 2003). Ethnography allows the researcher to partake in the culture.

In many spheres of life, people can learn only by doing things together, so sociologists who want to understand meaning-making in everyday life have to observe and experience these embodied practices, as they unfold in real time and space, and materialize in real bodies. We, like the people we study, must learn the practices—be they boxing or fiddling or perhaps even shuffling papers in a cubicle—till they become second nature.”
(Eliasoph, 2005, p. 160)

The culture I observed is an old-line Protestant congregation that has undergone a transformation in the last 35 years from an all white membership to a biracial one, providing the principal location of diversity in the lives of most of its white members. My life experience as a white American and my long and often painful journey of reflection on my own racism, aids in my “meaning-making” because I can relate to the challenges white members of Crossroads Church face. I employed a realist form of ethnography, which strives for (but can never achieve) an objective, third person account based on

information learned from the participants through observations of them and conversations with them (Creswell, 2005).

Relation of the Qualitative Paradigm to the Theoretical Framework of Aversive Racism That Informs This Study

This research project derives its conceptual framework from theories in social psychology (aversive racism and racial identity) and sociology (two-faced racism) as well as a social commentary on racial paranoia. The theory of aversive racism suggests how a white person who perceives herself or himself as not racially prejudiced will respond when confronted with a decision to make in a situation that involves race (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004). As I described in the review of the literature, the person typically responds to externally set norms when there is a clear non-racist response, and to the internal pressure of repressed prejudices when there is no clear non-racist response.

A qualitative approach is the best research paradigm for identifying possible instances of aversive racism that occur in this biracial congregation and exploring how and why they happened. Within the qualitative research paradigm, ethnography provided the best strategy for answering the research questions designed to explore aversive racism in one cultural setting – a particular congregation. Ethnography allowed me as researcher to observe the situation, observe and interview participants about their interpretation of the situation and the appropriate response, and then articulate the divergence of interpretation that I observed among participants.

Site and Sample Selection

Description of the Field Site

This research project explored the dynamics of racialization and unintended racism by white individuals within old-line Protestantism through in-depth observations of members within one stably diverse congregation. This paper defines a diverse congregation according to the distinction set by DeYoung et al. (2003) – a congregation in which the majority racial group represents no more than 80% of the membership. By “stably diverse,” this study refers to a degree of diversity that is characteristic over a long period of time, and not simply characteristic of a congregation in transition from one predominant race to another.

Because of the emotional angst that the label of racism causes white individuals when they perceive that those labels are directed at them, I chose not to identify the participants, the congregation, or its locale. In my dissertation, I refer to the congregation as “Crossroads Church” and its location as “Crossroads,” an urban neighborhood in one of the colonial cities that predated the formation of the United States of America. Throughout the first half of the 20th century, this congregation was socially and economically well-to-do, white, and one of the most prestigious old-line Protestant congregations in its region. During the past half century, however, the formerly middle and upper socioeconomic status neighborhood surrounding the church has been in economic decline and racial transition to a predominantly low and middle socioeconomic status and black. As a result, the church shrank nearly 90% from its heyday of more than 2,000 members before a concerted effort encouraging diversity in the early 1990s helped the congregation’s rolls rebound to a membership of 400 today.

Description of the Participants

Nearly all of the white members travel to the church from all or predominantly white neighborhoods and pass numerous churches from the same denomination on their weekly Sunday morning commute. Of the members who are of African ancestry, nearly half live in the neighborhood of the church while most of those who are of middle and upper middle socioeconomic status commute from nearby racially diverse communities. Leaders point out that most members (both black and white) who have joined in the last two decades have sought out the congregation for its radical values of inclusiveness, but remark that luring white people to join is a continual challenge. It does not help, as one man complained, that “news reports often link crime to Crossroads even when it is not actually in Crossroads” (Field notes, 9-13-03) but in nearby parts of the city that are not easily referenced because they are not well-known. Rather than ignore these perceptions, the church website acknowledges the trepidation which many individuals feel about traveling to Crossroads Church and attempts to persuade them that the benefits outweigh the perceived risks.

According to records I kept during an eight-week pilot study in the fall of 2003, an average 150 people attended worship on a given Sunday – 65% European American and 35% African American (Herring, 2003).⁹ I confirmed these racial identities with either the individuals themselves or by asking leaders in the congregation who were aware how the different individuals I observed self-identify racially. Of those in attendance on Sundays, approximately 15% were children and youth.

It is important to note that the racial diversity of this child and youth subset is very different from that among the adults in the congregation. During the pilot study, there were no teenagers who self-identified as white in either the choir or the youth group

⁹ The membership of Crossroads Church shifted to 50-50 by the time of my dissertation research in 2007.

– most self-identified as being of African ancestry, and a few self-identified as being of racially mixed ancestry. These inverted racial proportions – more than 90% of African ancestry among children and youth, compared to 35% in the overall congregation – are due to the fact that no white families attended with children during this period.¹⁰ This is similar to urban residential trends in which white individuals are most likely to live in urban areas when they have no children, children who have not yet reached school age, or children who are grown.

Access and Permissions

The pastor of Crossroads Church wrote me a letter to say that governing body of the church voted at its November 1, 2006, meeting to allow me to do this research at the church. Once I began my fieldwork, the pastor introduced me – as “the lady with the yellow pad” – in an article in the church newsletter and at any meeting of a group or committee that I attended for the first time. Throughout my study – particularly as I conversed with church members casually – I routinely made a point of saying that I was writing a dissertation on “how people interact across race” at Crossroads Church.

On 11 occasions (meetings of the program staff and the church’s multicultural group, as well as a discussion during a car trip with several members of the congregation) the discussion was so rich that I asked to tape-record the conversation. I first raised this issue with the multicultural group – whose sole purpose was to discuss issues of diversity in the congregation – at the beginning of the second meeting that I attended with them. I explained that I would need to distribute consent forms, a detail that created

a bit of concern about my presence at the meeting. I suggested that I go outside while the group discussed their issues. I took Simba (Nzinga’s 2-

¹⁰ This changed slightly by the time of my dissertation research in 2007. By then, a 10-year-old grandson of long-time members began accompanying his grandparents to church, and a baby was born during my fieldwork to a couple who joined after my pilot.

year-old son) with me and we played for nearly 10 minutes before Nzinga called me back inside. I was nervous – so much at stake. The group agreed to the tape-recording, but said they would need to raise the issue with each new person that came in future meetings. I put the tape player in the middle of the floor in full view. At the end of the meeting I distributed the consent forms. (Field notes, 3-28-07)

Within weeks, the presence of my tape recorder became routine and people became accustomed to witnessing and signing each other's consent forms for my record keeping for the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Temple University. Near the end of my field work, people even paused to say something when they saw me reach for my tape recorder so that I could position it and turn it on before they resumed what they had to say. On one occasion someone urged me to get out my tape recorder because he wanted to tell me something that recently happened and he knew that I would want a recording to capture all of the details for my research.

Data Sources

I collected data in varied ways over the course of this dissertation research. I began my research slowly to allow people to become acquainted with me and to remind them that I was not a prospective member, but rather a researcher looking at a very personal aspect of their life together. During the first two weeks I attended only the Sunday worship and two public gatherings – the congregational brunch that followed my first Sunday worship, and a coffee house performance – and collected church literature. By week three, I logged 11 hours of observations and met with the head pastor, Christine, for 1½ hours to discuss my research questions, and to learn her insights about the way members of the congregation interact across race. She agreed to let me tape-record this interview.

Field Observations

At that time, Pastor Christine consented to let me attend any meeting at the church as long as I informed her of my plans ahead of time so that she had opportunity to alert the leadership of any committee meeting where I would be present. There was one exception: the staff meeting. Pastor Christine told me that the director of music – who I knew from my pilot study there three years earlier – was resigning two months later to take a new position out of state. Because there had been a lot of contention between the music director (European American) and the staff social worker (African American), Pastor Christine said that she would prefer that I not attend staff meetings until after the music director left. I did not attend my first staff meeting until the 11th week of my nine-month fieldwork.

I used the early weeks of my field observations to determine which gatherings would yield the most useful data for answering my research questions and began attending those meetings. Most of the time, I assumed the role of a non participant observer. However, I changed my observational role to that of a participant observer in more social events. In this way I could gain a sense of the participants' experiences but still be able to remove myself to the edge of the activity where I observed things without calling attention to the nuances of what I was observing. (See Observation Protocol, Appendix A.)

Purposeful Sampling Used in This Study

For this research study I employed purposeful sampling, a deliberate selection of participants who through observations of them and interviews with them can best help the researcher to understand the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2005). I used two types of purposeful sampling – maximal variation sampling and opportunistic sampling – to select

interview subjects whose experiences and perspectives would be most helpful in answering the research questions.

Maximal variation sampling requires a researcher to plan in advance the number of interviews that will be sufficient to acquire the range of data needed to answer the research questions without saturation (Seidman, 1998). It also requires the researcher to select people based on a range of certain characteristics determined in advance of the study (Creswell, 2005; Seidman). From my analysis of my pilot study data, I determined that I should interview the two clergy, two key staff members and a maximal variation sampling of at least 12 members of the congregation. Based on my experience in the pilot study, I knew that field observations of the congregation would result in field notes describing interactions that spotlight between 40 and 60 members of the church, from which to select my sample.

The second type of purposeful sampling I used is opportunistic sampling, which is undertaken after the study begins and the researcher identifies key individuals whose participation might lead to the most significant insights (Creswell, 2005). The process of selecting this opportunistic sample began in the earliest field observations of worship, events and meetings with attendance ranging from 150 (in worship) to eight (a staff meeting or committee). First, I identified members who met the following criteria: (1) regular attendance at both the worship services and other church functions and (2) regular interaction with the diverse range of congregants at the church. From the subgroup who met these criteria, I selected a purposeful sample intended to represent the membership (seven European Americans and eight African Americans – an over-sampling of one; and ten women and seven men). I deliberately chose a sample of interview subjects that spanned the range of ages and socioeconomic backgrounds of adults in the congregation and who represented various interest groups within it.

I began identifying those subjects within the first weeks of my study – approaching many of them during field observations to explain the nature of my study

and inquire whether they might submit to an interview. I also shared my research questions with the clergy and program staff and then asked their recommendations about which members I might select to interview as a representative sample of the congregation, based on the criteria described earlier. While these research subjects were the principal sources of data, I used field observations of and conversations with other members of the congregation to contextualize the experiences of the opportunistic sample.

Interviews

Interviews plumb deeply into the connection between humans. The central human experience is to symbolically transform that experience into language. The listener in turn understands human behavior through that language (Seidman, 1998). The purpose of interviews in qualitative research is to understand the person's experience of something and the meaning he or she derives from that experience, particularly the "inner voice" which divulges more deeply held thoughts than the voice intended for an audience. It is a process of reconstructing an experience and its meaning and not just recalling it from memory. It de-centers the interviewer in the analysis and allows the storyteller to place his or her meaning in the context as he or she sees it (Seidman, 1998). This process required me as the interviewer to ask clarifying questions, including the way a participant defined words he or she used, which I could otherwise misconstrue with other meanings (Seidman, 1998). When I needed clarification, I tried to avoid interrupting the subject (potentially skewing the data) and instead jotted down keywords to remind me to ask a clarifying question at the conclusion of his or her train of thought.

The process also required me to avoid asking leading questions that through phrasing, tone or syntax might have influenced the direction of the response that the participant provided (Seidman, 1998). I developed open-ended questions (see Appendix

B for the Interview Protocol) to encourage participants to talk about their experiences at the church and to allow them to reconstruct those experiences according to the meaning that those experiences held.

Initially I planned to conduct the interviews over three sessions of 60 to 90 minutes, beginning with questions about how the person came to be a member and progressing through their observations of diversity and the race issues. I wanted people to become comfortable with me before we arrived at what I perceived to be the most challenging questions – those that had to do with racism because they might reflect negatively on the speaker or others in the congregation. My first interview subject caused me to rethink these plans when he agreed to be interviewed, but on somewhat different terms. This interview subject invited me on the spur of the moment one Sunday to conduct my interview at his country club where he had reservations for brunch with his wife who woke up that morning too ill to accompany him. He suggested that I go in her stead and interview him over brunch. Furthermore, he told me that he was only available for an interview on this one occasion, which included the 30-minute trip from the church to the club, the 90 minute interview while we ate, and the 30-minute return trip. Collapsing the three interview segments into one long interview worked so well for this interview that I decided to conduct all of my interviews in one sitting, save for interviews with two elderly women which totaled five and six hours, respectively, over two sessions.

At the outset, I planned to interview everyone separately. However, one interview subject suggested that I meet him together with his wife – who I had not planned to interview – because they (African Americans) had somewhat different perspectives about Crossroads Church after more than 20 years there. I agreed. This joint interview worked so well that I decided to conduct another joint interview, this time with a young white couple married only a few years and who joined the congregation since my pilot study.

Aside from the interview conducted at the country club, and two conducted in a meeting room at the church, all other interviews with members were conducted in people's homes.

The first set of interview questions (see Interview Protocol, Appendix B) guided participants in two things. First I asked what occurrences in their lives led to their decision to begin attending Crossroads Church – including characteristics that drew them to the congregation. Here I listened for personal experiences that shaped each individual's outlook on diversity and observed whether the participants raised this issue. Next I focused on the participants' experience in the congregation. Certain activities and groups within the congregation are more diverse than others and I asked participants about the ones in which they were most active and their experiences within them. I listened for whether participants raised the issue of diversity, talked about difficulties they have negotiated, admitted to racial encounters that reflected on them in a less than positive way, and how they described those experiences.

The second set of interview questions raised the issue of diversity directly. I showed the interview subjects a copy of a statement from the weekly worship leaflet that refers to the congregation as people “from diverse experiences, points of view, and racial, educational and economic backgrounds. Yet we are all one in Christ.” Then I posed questions to the participants about how they experienced diversity in the congregation, how it compared to other aspects of their life, and the impact it has had on their lives outside of the congregation. The final set of questions began with a reference to the same quote, but this time asked directed questions about the person's experience of the racial diversity at Crossroads Church and their perceptions of it.

Other Data

Lastly, I collected documents as data: church publications (e.g., website information, brochures, service leaflets, sermons, meeting minutes and newsletters to parishioners). These documents captured language and descriptions by the staff and leadership of the congregation through the lens that they want the congregation and its members to be seen. Such documents also provided historical and theological context necessary for situating the current life and function of the congregation. I also examined a history of the congregation which provided an important context for the congregation's identity today.

Data Collection

I was embedded at Crossroads Church as a participant observer attending worship and social activities – even bringing covered dishes to potlucks, participating in ice-breaker activities, and joining “game nights” in a round of Balderdash® and Taboo®. Over the course of this ethnographic study I did more than 240 hours of field observations in 80 visits to Crossroads Church during two periods: a two-month pilot study in 2003, which led to my more formal nine-month dissertation study in 2007. My field observations included 34 Sundays – three hours weekly alternating among the morning activities (e.g., worship service, coffee hour, adult education classes, and meetings occasionally scheduled at that time). I attended every all-church meeting, and most social events. As often as I could, I attended the meetings of the staff, the governing body of the church and the multicultural group, which amounted to about half of each. In addition, I sampled – as needed to address my research questions – the monthly meetings of the multicultural coffee house, committees for worship and music, mission and outreach, multicultural life, Christian education, evangelism, and communication.

Over the course of the study, I took copious field notes. On 11 occasions I asked for permission to tape-record small meetings (the program staff and the multicultural group) one gathering (a conversation during a car trip) to supplement my field notes. Throughout these observations I studied the ease or discomfort of European American members as they engaged in seemingly ordinary interactions with African Americans, and the effects of these encounters on African American members.

In selecting interview subjects, Seidman (1998) suggests identifying interview participants who have similar experiences and practices of meaning-making, then writing about those commonalities for the reader to explore. This process, in turn, allows the reader to relate his or her own experiences to the subjects at Crossroads Church and to be better able to understand the complexities of the topic of my study (Seidman, 1998).

Open-ended questions allowed the subject to explain his or her concrete experiences of race, racialization and racism and to explain the meaning (intellectual and emotional) of those experiences to me (Seidman, 1998). The practice of interviewing allows the participant to explain how their experiences in life have shaped the meaning he or she makes of a particular situation in the present (Seidman). In this case, it is the different meanings influenced by one's racial identity.

I conducted (and tape-recorded) structured interviews with 13 members of the church (seven African Americans and six European Americans) and less formal interviews with the two pastors and two key staff, often using this time for feedback on my preliminary analysis. All total, I compiled nearly 1,000 single-spaced pages of data that offer compelling evidence of how practices long used to maintain the status of white people continue to survive in a biracial setting.

Data Management

I typed most field notes within 24 hours. Lareau and Shultz (1996) suggest that qualitative researchers never go into the field unless they have scheduled time that night or within the next 24 hours to write up the field notes. This discipline is intended to prevent distortion that occurs when trying to recall something from too great a distance in time from the experience of the event (Lareau & Shultz). On a handful of occasions when unanticipated events prevented me from meeting that deadline, I allowed myself a 24-hour grace period. On six occasions I could not write up my field observations in a timely manner, so I set aside my handwritten observations and deliberately made a point of not including them in the analysis for my study.

I kept a detailed chronology of my work at Crossroads Church. I created a calendar to record the date, time, and duration of all visits, details that I also recorded directly on the field notes and interview transcripts so that I could decipher the context of my data as well as my analysis over time. I maintained chronological files of all field notes, transcripts, and any other data collected in their original form, in addition to the computer coded versions of those documents.

In addition to tape-recording all of the interviews and transcribing them verbatim, I also took notes of things that I observed (such as body language) that were not captured in the dialogue and I added details of those observations to the transcriptions.

Data Analysis Procedures

Unit of Analysis

My unit of analysis is the *encounter* between an African-American and a European American at Crossroads Church. "An encounter is a tiny social system formed when two or more persons are in one another's immediate physical presence and strive to

maintain a single (ordinarily spoken) focus of mutual involvement” (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 105). An encounter is one of the most micro-level units of analysis that a qualitative researcher can study, ranging from a duration of a few minutes (typical length) to not more than a few hours.

Lofland and Lofland (1995) suggest that there are three aspects to encounters – the cognitive, the emotional and the hierarchical. The cognitive aspect refers to “the meanings embedded in or associated” with the encounter that “make up the participants’ views of reality and which define their own and other’s actions” in the encounter (p. 113). This definition includes ideologies or worldviews that attempt to explain something – cultural rules or norms (often unarticulated) which vary across culture accounting for differences in perspective between many African Americans and European Americans. The emotional aspect of the encounter addresses feeling: “Humans ubiquitously, routinely, and simultaneously *feel as well as think*” (p. 117) [emphasis in original]. The third aspect in this unit of analysis which must be taken into account is the hierarchy in encounters and relationships, more pointedly described as the “inequalities” (p. 118).

My task as an ethnographer is to search for the latent meanings behind the encounter. Meanings are self-serving devices by which those who wield power justify their possession of that power, and by which the power disadvantaged accommodate themselves to their position. We can uncover the meaning of an encounter by posing research questions that help to reveal the cognitive, emotional, and hierarchical aspects of encounters between African Americans and European Americans. By asking research questions beginning with “how,” I traced back to glean the process by which the encounter occurred. My research questions – and the framework of aversive racism and racial paranoia upon which my inquiry was constructed – address the consequences of the encounter, particularly the effect on African Americans. The research questions are also intended to reveal the function that racialized and racist behaviors play in this congregation as Crossroads Church seeks an equilibrium following a radical evolution in

its identity over more than three decades. The intent of this inquiry is to search for irony by “documenting a contrast between a surface or official understanding of a social arrangement and additional, *also real*, but muted or hidden social facts” (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 161). As a result, this research looks beyond the white perspective that these interracial encounters are colorblind and neutral, to recognize that many of these encounters are racialized and often laden with power, making them racist.

Field Notes, Memos and Codes

Qualitative research entails a “derivative ordering of the data” (Lareau & Shultz, 1996, p. 181) that emerges over time and through a number of processes of in handling the data. Analysis begins in typing up the field notes, particularly as the researcher writes descriptive entries and reflects on them by inserting questions and insights directly into the field notes to prod oneself during later analysis. Lofland and Lofland describe a hierarchy of three types of memo writing that takes place in the qualitative data analysis process: elemental, sorting and integrating memos. The elemental memo is “a detailed analytic rendering of some relatively specific matter” (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). The sorting memo builds upon the elemental memos by analyzing them in comparison to one another. The researcher uses the subsequent integrating memos to make connections between the sorting memos.

As I wrote up the field notes and transcribed interviews I reflected on them in memos that analyzed both the process of my observation and the data I collected in light of my research questions. This practice provided a regular opportunity for me to assess what I discovered and helped me to determine the adjustments that I needed to be make to my approach as an observer and an interviewer.

Another practice in qualitative data analysis involves codes – “mnemonic devices” or “tags” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 277) used to highlight themes and sub

themes in the text. The first codes are typically derived from the literature (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003a). Once I began writing up my field notes, other coding themes emerged. Lewins and Silver (2007) suggest this coding can be both inductive and deductive. Much of my earliest coding was deductive, especially in terms of codes that related easily to the literature or codes that surfaced in my analysis as a seemingly direct answer to a research question.

For example, early in my data analysis, I recognized that there were different *locations* of interracial encounters so I created codes that captured the essence of each location. These codes included: (1) Sunday morning (the primary opportunity for interracial encounters at worship, coffee hour, Bible study, and meals that take place on Sunday morning); (2) formal context (the “work” of the congregation that occurs in committee meetings, community events and outreach projects); and (3) informal context (social events that take place outside of Sunday morning and are not task oriented (the monthly coffee house, potluck dinners in member homes, private social gatherings of members of the congregation. I recognized that it was important to develop codes for data that described (4) how some European Americans members do *not* interact across race and (5) how other European American members interact across race in other venues besides church.

As codes emerged, I followed the guidance of Denzin and Lincoln (2003a) by compiling all the codes into a hierarchical list, with a descriptions of each code, criteria by which text was included (and excluded), and examples of its use. Approximately halfway through the data collection when I felt some certainty that my coding categories were appropriate, I subdivided codes that were too saturated and winnowed out others that proved less useful.

Inductive coding came much later in the analysis process and occurred in two ways. Many inductive codes surfaced as I revisited the literature and my reading triggered thoughts about how key concepts described in the literature played out in my

research site. Other inductive codes emerged as I wrestled with the analysis. From the beginning of my data collection I used Inspiration software (<http://www.inspiration.com/>) to create schematics of all the encounters, clustering them in relationship to each other and to research questions. This process of concept-mapping aided the inductive analysis.

Throughout the entire analysis process I used ATLAS.ti, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software program (<http://www.atlasti.com/product.html>) designed to aid the analysis of textual data. By using the software to assign codes directly on the documents (approximately 1,000 pages, single-spaced), I was able to code and manipulate the data more thoroughly and more creatively than by the old process of sorting cards manually.

Analysis Through Writing

The final write-up of qualitative data and its analysis begins with an elaboration of the detailed thought behind the proposition used in the structure and analysis of the data (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). It demonstrates a balance between the conceptual scheme and the presentation of the data to avoid excess of both description and analysis. This process requires that qualitative data references comprise slightly more than half of the write-up and that they alternate with analysis of that data – a process that Lofland and Lofland refer to as interpenetration.

In developing and carrying out my study, I have been guided by Duneier's (2003) standards for qualitative research. To meet these standards, I tried to articulate the conceptual framework, the procedures used for my study, the uncertainties inherent within it, and the effect of my presence as researcher. All of this disclosure serves the purpose of aiding future researchers to replicate the study as closely as possible as it can be done in qualitative research in other ethnographic settings. Furthermore, these

standards demanded that I continually worked throughout the research to modify, improve and develop the theory in an effort to present reliable data.

Methods of Validation

I validated my analysis through multiple strategies. The primary strategy was member-checking, which generates negative and discrepant perspectives that I explored more deeply and described in my paper as alternate explanations to the analysis I chose (Seidman, 1998). In discussing methods of validation, Janesick (2003) questions the emphasis on triangulation (employing a variety of data and multiple investigators, theories and methods) that most qualitative researchers use. In its place, Janesick (2003) suggests thinking of one's research in terms of a multifaceted crystal. This mindset provides a constant reminder that the researcher's "multiple ways of framing the problem, selecting research strategies, and extending the discourse across several fields of study" (Janesick, 2003, p. 73) are partial understandings of a complex object.

Between my pilot study and dissertation research, I spent approximately 240 hours in the field over eleven months, a significant enough amount of time to provide my reader with some assurance of the validity of my analysis. In addition, I tried here to provide a careful narrative of the data collection, rich and thick descriptions of the data, and a clear rationale for my interpretation of it, in an attempt to gain the reader's confidence in the validity of my methods and analysis.

Reflections on My Role as Researcher

There are three influences on my role as researcher: my first career as a journalist, my second career as a lay professional in an old-line Protestant church, and my growing awareness of (and reflection on) race, racialization and racism in my life. For nearly a decade I worked as a newspaper reporter at several different daily papers where I

developed I keen eye for observations and a knack for interviewing people about sensitive topics. In my next career as a seminary-educated Christian educator I worked on projects at the congregational, diocesan and national level of the Episcopal denomination, including 11 years spent on the staff of a church with a similar budget to my research site. The church where I worked was located in the same metropolitan region as Crossroads Church and, as a result of this proximity; I worked with both the pastor and social worker there on collaborative projects in which both churches were involved. Because of this relationship, I chose Crossroads Church as the site for my student research project in the fall of 2003 when I spent 50 hours over eight weeks there practicing qualitative data collection in anticipation of doing my dissertation research there.

The primary influence on my research, however, is my reflection over the last two decades on what it means to be a white American and on ways that I have engaged unawares in racialization and racism, which I now recognize and repent. Indeed, the reason I gravitate toward the theories of aversive racism, racial paranoia and racial identity used in this study is because they resound so profoundly with my own experiences and reflections – often in a very painful and embarrassing way.

Ethical Considerations

I submitted a detailed description of this research to Temple University's Institutional Review Board and then abided by all of the IRB requirements throughout the course of this study. Ethics also requires reciprocity in the researcher-subject relationship. Without reciprocity, data gathered through human interactions (e.g., participant observer and interviews) risks objectifying a person for the sole purpose of appropriating his or her story for my own research interest (Seidman, 1998).

So out of consideration for the congregation's participation in this study, I have offered to do a series of workshops for the congregation on how they might address the

issues of racialization and racism identified during the course of this research study. In November of 2007 – after I completed my fieldwork – the Crossroads Church pastors asked me to do a presentation on white privilege for the multicultural group which I had attended regularly as an observer. A year later, the clergy asked me to report on my findings in a short presentation to the governing bodies of Crossroads Church (September 2008) and lead an evening session on racism (October 2008) that was part of a social justice series. Several members indicated an interest in having me return to Crossroads Church to lead a series of workshops to facilitate discussions about how to address the types of racial challenges that my research highlighted – a series tentatively planned for the spring of 2009.

Telling the Story

I decided to treat Crossroads Church anonymously because this story is not a story of a congregation as much as it is a story about race that could occur anywhere, but which happens to take place in this congregation. For that reason, I chose pseudonyms to describe Crossroads Church, the people there who have contributed to this story, and the nearby institutions and places that could otherwise betray the real name of the church. While I had no compunctions about assigning a pseudonym to the congregation – the idea for “Crossroads” came from a mantel ornament described in the next chapter – I did not realize until much later how problematic it would be to assign pseudonyms to people. Although I told everyone that I interviewed that I would not use their name, it never occurred to me during my field work to ask anyone to pick a pseudonym by which they would prefer to be called. Because I remained in periodic communication with the clergy and staff and because they played a central role in telling the story of race at Crossroads Church, I emailed them about selecting their own pseudonyms.

Had I been in closer contact with parishioners I might have done the same for them, but in the absence of such a relationship I was concerned that making contact a year later about the need for pseudonyms would have an alarming effect. On the two occasions in the fall of 2008, that I returned to the site to give presentations I was able to speak to a handful of the research subjects about this dilemma and ask them to suggest their own pseudonym. These choices ranged from Anglo to African (Nzinga), from a middle name to a favorite name, and from a beloved movie character (Simba for a two-year-old) to a beloved “brother” now deceased (Billy T. for a retired man). For most other research subjects, I estimated their birth year and assigned a pseudonym from a list of the most popular baby names that year, taking care to avoid selecting names of other people in the congregation.

A handful of people had multiple pseudonyms. I assigned one pseudonym when describing anything someone told me directly about their own experience, or that I observed about them during my field observations in a public space. On the handful of occasions when I received secondhand information from someone about an encounter that I did not witness or that the third party did not tell me as well, I assigned an additional pseudonym for each of these occurrences. On the few occasions where names were not necessary for aiding the reader to follow the narrative, I avoided pseudonyms altogether.

Summary of the Methodology

By approaching the research questions with an ethnographic research method, I was able to study interracial encounters between individuals and characterize them in ways revealed intentionality and effect. This qualitative approach allowed the data to emerge over a sustained period through multiple interactive methods of collection, including the interpretive lens of the research subjects who also provided feedback on my

preliminary analysis. This approach ties directly into my theoretical frameworks aversive racism and supporting theories of racial identity attitude and racial paranoia by enabling me to identify encounters that illustrated them and describe the effect of these encounters.

CHAPTER 4

CROSSROADS: “A WHITE CHURCH WITH BLACK MEMBERSHIP”

To best understand the data in the chapters that follow – describing interactions across race, dialogue about race, and the way that racial identity attitude informs perspectives about these encounters – we need to know the context in which they take place. Here, in Chapter 4, I describe changes in the neighborhood that precipitated the changes in the membership of the church and which ultimately influenced its still emerging identity as a biracial congregation.

During the Civil Rights Era when Martin Luther King Jr. described 11 o’clock Sunday morning as the most segregated hour of the week, Crossroads Church was all white and very affluent. In 1971, the church began a slow process of desegregation and by the time of my dissertation research in 2007 had transformed itself into a biracial congregation with equal numbers of European American and African American members. Looking at the racial balance at Crossroads Church, most white people inside and out would consider the congregation to be a model of the diversity about which King could only dream. However, the more I observed the congregation during my 2003 pilot study, the more I began to suspect that King would not be satisfied with the diverse appearance of Sunday morning at Crossroads Church unless it reflected a deeper reality – integration.

Many individuals often use “diverse” and “integrated” interchangeably, but there is a nuanced difference. While the word “diverse” is defined as “different in character or quality ... not alike in nature or qualities” (Simpson et al., 1991, p. 866), the word “integration” is defined in terms of bringing formerly segregated people into “equal membership” (Simpson et al., 1991, p. 1065). Pastor Jason, the associate pastor at Crossroads Church, described for me the evolution in his understanding of the difference between the two terms which he no longer conflates. An African American in his 40s,

Pastor Jason said that he grew up in a racially mixed neighborhood, attended racially mixed schools and worshipped at a racially mixed church a few miles from Crossroads. Because of this situation, Pastor Jason said he was sheltered from personal experiences of racial prejudice and discrimination until the heightened media coverage about King at the time of his assassination. Pastor Jason was seven years old. In the media replay of King's most famous orations, Pastor Jason said that he remembered hearing King "talk about the day when little black boys and little white boys would hold hands and play together." It made no sense to him, said Pastor Jason, because,

"I was that little black boy. ... I grew up in an integrated school system ... back then it seemed as if it was 50-50. ... I had, you know, black and white friends. And the church I grew up in was a mixed church. ... A lot of my institutional life and things like that were mixed institutions ... so hearing another King quote where Martin Luther King talked about Sunday mornings at 11 o'clock as the most segregated hour in the nation wasn't true for me. (Interview, 10-31-03)

Pastor Jason said he awoke to a deeper understanding of the meaning of integration many years later – in his late 20s – when he took a seminar course on King while a divinity student preparing for ordination. The topic of Sunday morning segregation surfaced and Pastor Jason said that he proudly told his professor about the "integrated" congregation in which he grew up. Pastor Jason recalled that the professor (an African American) responded "with a twinkle in his eye" saying, "I'd like to see one of those." Pastor Jason said his professor went on to explain that he knew of, "white churches with black members and black churches with white members," but no integrated churches. Through these finer points of analysis Pastor Jason recognized that his own church was not integrated as he always had thought, but was "definitely a white church with black membership" (Interview, 10-31-03).

Changing Neighborhood, Changing Church

To understand how Crossroads Church fits within this nomenclature, it helps to gain a deeper understanding of the congregation's beginnings and its evolution as a racially diverse church. Crossroads Church began in the early 18th century relocating to a succession of increasingly larger worship spaces, until the congregation settled in the 1870s into its sizeable stone sanctuary near the heart of the business district in the town of Crossroads.¹¹ About 20 years earlier, the large city centered several miles away annexed this small town, and people still refer to this neighborhood of the city by its original name, which I refer to by the pseudonym "Crossroads." It was predominantly European American and affluent through the first half of the twentieth century. Its history is marked with contrasting values regarding race. On the one hand, the location here of several "safe houses" used by the Underground Railroad to shelter fugitive slaves gives testimony to the values of many of the residents regarding the injustice of enslaving people of African ancestry. On the other hand, the exodus of middle and upper socioeconomic status white residents – begun in 1945, when the community lifted a ban in white neighborhoods on the sale of homes to African Americans – testifies to a history of a deep racial prejudice. This neighborhood exodus, in turn, caused what one long-time member describes as a "slow leak" (Field notes, 9-21-07) in church membership over the 1960s, 70s and 80s as the congregation shrunk to one-tenth of its heyday of more than 2,000 adult members. Remaking itself as a racially diverse congregation over the last two

¹¹ I have chosen not to cite the historical references for either the church or its neighborhood because they would reveal the identity of the congregation, which allowed me access for my research in exchange for anonymity. All of the historical details about the church are from materials published by the congregation. Many of the historical details about the neighborhood are from those materials, or from publications by the local historical society, including columns in the neighborhood newspaper.

decades, Crossroads Church's membership rebounded to the 400 stalwarts that comprise this old-line Protestant congregation today.

This strategy to counter declining membership puts Crossroads Church in marked contrast to the city's many churches and synagogues which abandoned urban sanctuaries to follow their memberships to the suburbs where they built new worship spaces. "This church would like to think it is intentional about its diversity, about staying in the city, but it was not," suggested Ken (the director of music from 1987-2007) in an interview during my pilot study (Interview, 11-3-03). Ken, who is white and in his late-40s, said that he learned that Crossroads Church also considered relocating in the 1940s to property that is less than three miles away but in an affluent suburb bordering the city. One of the motivating factors in the decision by the church to stay put was that the organ needed re-leathering – the costly replacement of the leather elbows on several thousand pipes, Ken explained. He noted that the re-leathering could not wait out the many years it would take such a large congregation to relocate and that the congregation did not want to spend a substantial amount of money only to leave its investment behind in a few years later.

Ken suggested that the leadership questioned whether a move was necessary. For many years after demographic changes had begun in the neighborhood, they were not apparent in the church, as evidenced by the standing room only attendance through the 1960s and the luxury cars (some driven by chauffeurs) in which many members traveled to church. Ken surmised, "I am quite sure Crossroads Church was so successful that they couldn't imagine *not being* so successful" even in the face of demographic shifts (Interview, 11-3-03).

So an unusual factor – the cost of re-leathering the organ – played a key role in congregation's decision to remain in the neighborhood and it continues to play a key role in shaping the church's identity.

Crossroads Church is a Bright Spot on the Avenue

The front doors of Crossroads Church open 20 feet from one axis of the principle crossroads of this part of town, where narrow side streets pre-date the automobile and where most businesses and many homes share a wall with at least one neighbor. Within this tightly packed urban space, Crossroads Church is a freestanding stone fortress that, with its flanking parking lots, takes up nearly half of the frontage on its side of the block of this wide avenue. One long-time member described being caught off-guard by its grandeur when he approached it just before dusk one evening night as he was driving towards it from a direction he rarely traveled. From a distance of four or five blocks, “I looked and I saw how inspiring that steeple is, how it rises up above all the other buildings. ... I had to stop and look at that. It is ... impressive” (Interview, 9-24-07). Crossroads Church is what Price (2000) describes as a “prestigious ‘signature’ building of architects that define the skyline,” a “symbolic cathedral” (p.57) due to its location at the heart of this urban business district. The architecture of its neighbors – multi-story masonry buildings with gargoyles and expansive windows surveying the streetscape – hints of the economic prosperity in the early 20th century when this crossroads served as an urban center. The oldest church members recalled to me how this business district with its upscale department stores, cinema and many restaurants lining the avenues was second only to downtown as a Saturday destination before the advent of suburban malls.

“Coffee Colored Stockings”

The theater and department stores closed long ago and their buildings have been carved into smaller spaces, of which many are vacant (evidenced by rental signs offering massive square footage), save for the ones that front directly on the street. The businesses there cater to the newest neighbors, so much so that one line – “I can go ... into a hairdresser's shop and find someone who can deal with my hair” – in a article on white

privilege (McIntosh, 1990, ¶8), – sparked these comments by two white women who live nearby:

Sasha: We can't buy the kind of stockings we want in Crossroads. We have the opposite problem. ... When I read that one I thought, "No, I can't go to a hairdresser and expect them to know how to do my hair." No. I can't expect to go and find what I need. I have the opposite thing. They are all coffee colored stockings. I have to go to a white community to buy stockings. [Emphasis in original]

Connie: It's all black, African-American products. When I get my hair dye, I can't find my color. They don't have it. I have to go downtown to get that.

Sasha: It does happen in the reverse. I don't feel bad about it, but I just think it's funny.

Connie: It's the reverse problem here because the drug stores all cater to their market which is African-American. ... And so the products that I take for granted – that I used to be able to get – I can't find in my local drugstores. I have to shop downtown. ... But it makes you more conscious. The assumptions are that everybody will have access to everything they want. And what I understand is that if you went into one of the tonier neighborhoods ... you probably wouldn't find African-American products – [an African American woman shakes her head in agreement] hair coloring, hair treatments and stuff. (Field notes, 11-28-07)

Another thing that I never noticed in wealthier neighborhoods is a sign like the one I saw at a bookstore about six blocks from Crossroads Church advertising, "we ship to prisons" (Field notes, 6-7-07).

The racial and socioeconomic transformation of the neighborhood is so profound that I rarely saw middle socioeconomic status white individuals among the pedestrians walking near the church, except those walking between their car and the church doors. Indeed, I noticed many people staring curiously at me – an upper middle socioeconomic status white woman – as I rode the bus in Crossroads, or strolled anywhere in the neighborhood beyond the church frontage.

In late afternoon when school gets out, the sidewalks at the main intersection near the church are awash with teenagers from Crossroads High School, the alma mater of

many of the elderly white members of Crossroads Church. Students at the enormous old neighborhood high school – about four blocks away – are mostly African American, except for a small population of other economically oppressed minority groups. The only white youth I see at that hour are driving past, youth who I surmise – from the clothes they wear and the cars they drive – are students at a nearby prep school returning home to predominantly white neighborhoods a few miles away. While the prep school – which made a commitment to keep its large campus nearby – has no problem attracting white children and youth because of its elite status, Crossroads Church has not been so lucky. One year into her tenure as the head minister, Pastor Christine (white) told me of her dream to have a “youth program that is so dynamic that you’re going to have people coming from all different places” (Interview, 10-20-03). After all, the predominantly white prep school has succeeded, and the predominantly white regional children’s choir that rents space at Crossroads Church continues to attract white families. If they “can do that, and they’re located down here in Crossroads ... why can’t we offer something that is dynamite for these kids but where people say, ‘I want my kids to go there because it’s diverse’” (Interview, 10-20-03).

Keeping the Problems of the Neighborhood at Bay

Things happen here that the city does not allow in its wealthier neighborhoods, such as a carelessly placed dumpster that for weeks blocked an entire 12-foot sidewalk near the busiest intersection and which could have been positioned to use half the space. Violent crime is significantly higher here – as I was writing this dissertation, the 20-year-old son of a shopkeeper whose business is within a block of the church, was murdered by a gunman in a midday robbery. Comparatively low real estate prices for large homes and multi-unit buildings have led to a proliferation of boarding homes that attract low income and mentally ill tenants who cannot afford housing in other parts of the city. The

vagrancy, homelessness and drug use that encroach on church property – evidenced by lots of crack vials and occasionally even human feces found during church grounds cleanup – testify to a neighborhood economy that fails to support a living wage.

To some degree, Crossroads Church tries to distance itself from these problems. The church and its flanking parking lots are walled in from the community by a series of six-foot fences – an attractive iron-look in front and industrial chain-link topped by three strands of barbed wire behind. Most of the time – except Sunday morning and during activities with large crowds – the place is locked and admittance monitored with a series of buzzers, surveillance cameras and intercoms at the main parish house door. Parishioners who need entrance other than Sunday mornings are given key cards to access the electronic gates of one of the parking lots and the code for an electronic lock on a back door that admits them into the parish hall. (I received a key card and the code as well.) Once the sextons leave the property, the security system is activated and no one can gain admittance until the sextons or a senior staff member arrive the next morning to turn off the alarm.

Security is an issue inside the buildings as well. The choir suite has an area lined with lockers that remind me of a school gym – complete with padlocks – installed for choir members to keep their coats and purses safe, a practice necessitated by numerous thefts over the years. I learned of this problem when I talked to two men (long-time members in their 60s) as they worked in the church office to pack away four silver coffee service sets in the church’s walk-in safe following an elegant coffee hour honoring former members. They told me that the silver used to be stored in an unlocked closet, “but a lot of it walked,” and then they segued into a litany of other precautionary measures the church has had to take over the years.

Despite these measures to safeguard its property, Crossroads Church welcomes everyone who comes to the door and devotes a significant portion of its budget – including the salary of a full-time social worker – to minister to its neighbors. In addition,

the congregation has turned over several rooms to outside groups because the modest-sized congregation cannot otherwise justify the cost of maintaining such an immense property. A community recreation league and a drill team (made up mostly of neighborhood children and youth) are allowed use of the gym and locker rooms in the basement while a counseling service and a regional children's choir rent former church school classrooms. The remaining classrooms get their heaviest use during the twice-yearly visits by homeless families who bunk there overnight as "guests" of the church for three weeks at a stretch, as part of a program transitioning them into permanent housing. All of these uses require the building to be accessible seven days a week.

Crossroads Is to a Church What a Mansion is to a House

A significant piece of that identity is tied to its property, which is the envy of many other churches. The sheer size and ornamentation of the property make Crossroads compare to most churches in the way a mansion compares to a modest house. Constructed without pillars to block the eye, the sanctuary looks like the chancel of a cathedral. It once seated more than 800 people. Throughout the 1950s and 60s when membership topped 2,000 (adults and teenagers who had been confirmed, but not counting children), there were not enough pews to seat everyone at the principle Sunday service. Nowadays, an average of 140 people attend Crossroads Church each Sunday, spread so thinly through the main part of the sanctuary that many rows and most of the transept are empty.

The sanctuary remains true to its 19th century Gothic architecture and understated elegance. Priceless stained glass windows by some of the nation's finest artisans – including several by Tiffany – pierce the white plaster that stretches from the walnut wainscoting to the vaulted walnut ceiling. Aside from the windows, the adornments are elegantly utilitarian, such as many of the 6,000 pipes of the organ – the largest church

organ in the region – that command attention at both the front and back. Music is so important here that the congregation covered a huge stained glass window over the back of the church in 1919 to make room for more pipes for the organ, which is centerpiece to the music program.

The Importance of Music at Crossroads Church

Music is a hallmark of Crossroads Church. It is a vital part of the congregation's identity and – aside from the church property – is the only link to its past as a prestigious congregation in the region. "In many ways, the music program keeps the church together," said one 20-year staff member explaining that the music program not only has the largest budget in the church, it "draws the most white people" there (Interview, 10-31-03). Despite the ethnic changes in membership at Crossroads Church, Anglo music continues to be the cornerstone the church's music program, so much so that I overheard an African American woman, remark in surprise: "We have tambourines in this church?" (Field notes, 8-12-07). The liturgy closely follows the denomination's service and hymn books and ventures little beyond their European influences even as the liturgy draws upon the cultural heritages of the members of the congregation and staff. If one assigned a personality to the worship, one might characterize it as an introvert who makes a noble attempt occasionally to venture outside of his or her comfort zone to act as an extrovert.

Most people that I talked to during the course of my study told me that they are attracted to the church's traditional old-line Protestant style of worship – a common denominator among all three categories of membership that I identified in Chapter 1.¹² Music is a key component of this worship. Crossroads Church has a reputation for

¹² (1) White individuals who joined the church when it was all or mostly segregated, (2) African Americans, and (3) socially progressive whites attracted to the multiracial diversity of Crossroads Church.

excellent music marked by both the largest church organ in the region so powerful that it reverberates through the floor, and by paid section leaders among a volunteer choir of more than 30 voices. The music program accounts for the largest program in the church's budget and is seen as key to attracting and retaining white parishioners, although many black members are attracted to it as well.

As part of its music program, Crossroads Church hosts a monthly Sunday afternoon concert series (now in its 47th year) described in a glossy music brochure rivals that of any concert series I have seen offered in the region. Highly regarded throughout the metropolitan area, the concert series offers a fare ranging from performances by the regional children's choir based here, to sacred jazz, organ recitals and large choral performances accompanied by a full orchestra. Concerts are the only times I have seen the church filled – mostly by music aficionados from across the metropolitan area and families of the performers (particularly of the children's choir), although a small percentage of parishioners attend.

Crossroads Church offers one of the finest concert spaces of any church in the region, thanks to an extensive mid-1990s renovation that updated sound and lighting systems and made the sanctuary transform more easily into a concert venue. Drawing out \$1 million from its then \$10 million endowment, the church removed nearly a third of the pews to make way for a huge marble platform and oak risers to accommodate a full orchestra and a chorus of 100 voices. To hide the accoutrements of worship during concerts, the church installed a lift to drop the organ below the floor, and spaces hidden behind the paneling large enough to store the massive but moveable pulpit, communion table and clergy seats. In less than an hour after the close of worship, two workers can complete an entire set change from worship space to concert venue – a far cry from the entire day a crew of workers once spent setting up temporary risers.

Spaces Outside of the Sanctuary

As big as the sanctuary is, the parish house is larger. This building wraps the sanctuary on two sides with a full basement and two stories of office, reception and classroom space, and even a small apartment and other rooms that are no longer used. Double doors at the left transept of the sanctuary provide a link to the parish house. The bulk of the parish house was built in the early 20th century Sunday school model, which stressed that children and youth gather together in one space (a huge auditorium and balcony) for an opening convocation before going off to classrooms for each grade. The size of the auditorium, the moveable mullioned oak and glass partition walls intended to cordon off parts of it for classrooms, as well as designated classrooms down the hall give testimony to the huge number of children who once attended Crossroads Church. Classrooms were not the only spaces dedicated to the youngest church members. During the first half of the 20th century the congregation converted the basement of the parish house into a half-court gym (complete with showers) and a huge youth lounge with a full size kitchen (now musty and dated).

Meeting rooms for adults at Crossroads Church are spacious and attractive. In addition to the large auditorium where stained glass backlights the stage and a wall of leaded glass windows looks out onto an adjacent park that takes up half of a huge city block, there are three other large meeting or reception areas. The largest of these is about 30 feet wide and 40 feet long with 12-foot ceilings. It is paneled with oak wainscoting above which the women of the congregation commissioned a famous mid-twentieth century woman artist to paint gold-leafed murals depicting Biblical scenes with “female figures as active agents for unification and change,” according to the church brochure. An oversized bronze bust of the early 20th century Crossroads pastor for whom the room is named is prominently displayed. The room is serviced by a dated, but fully-equipped

kitchen – complete with a set of china to serve several dozen guests – which is secondary to the large industrial grade kitchen off of the auditorium.

If Only These Walls Could Talk

Next door in a smaller meeting room (25 by 25 feet) the staff and governing body of Crossroads Church hold their regular meetings and it is here where I observed much discussion of the church's struggles that stem from racial diversity. The juxtaposition of these difficult conversations at the center of the room and the imagery that surrounds the discussants, offers silent testimony to the nature of the struggles that Crossroads Church has faced over the years. One aspect of this imagery is the principle artwork in the room – three very large prints. Two are artist renderings of Jesus and both depict him with the pale skin of a European American and time has faded the flesh tones to appear even more sallow than the artists' renderings. From these prints and a large prominently displayed photograph of the former pastor for whom this room is named, people of color can read that the cultural norms and expectations at Crossroads Church are rooted in European American norms.

A second aspect of the imagery of this room is visible through the a leaded glass window, the focal point that spans most of one wall of the room and is positioned to look out on the expanse of grass and trees provided by a city park next door. What would be a beautiful vista, however, is marred by the chain link and barbed wire fence the church installed in the 1960s along its back property line which is just four feet beyond this window. A final piece of imagery that I note is a tastefully designed but now chipped and tattered carving of wood letters that spell out "Our Church at the Crossroads" that from its position on the fireplace mantel hints at the dilemma of the current congregation.

Everyday maintenance and security of the church fortress requires a maintenance staff of two full-time and one part-time workers, at least one of which is on site every

hour the church buildings are in use. Larger maintenance projects, such as the removal, refurbishment and reinstallation of every leaded glass window on the property are contracted out at a sizeable cost to the congregation, which funds these projects from its \$7 million endowment. The endowment is envy of many area churches – even the more affluent congregations that are predominantly white – and the root of many hotly contested arguments about whether and how the principle should be spent. One member of the finance committee Crossroads Church is so alarmed by the pattern of spending down the endowment that he estimates that at this rate, the endowment will be gone by 2019 (Interview, 2-2-07).

The financial overhead at Crossroads Church is so enormous that the congregation has consulted a non-profit organization that helps churches secure foundation funding to sustain the property that shelters so many community services. Together they have determined that church activities account for only 19 percent of the building use, while use of the property by community groups and for community outreach account for the remaining 81 percent of the building use. The consultants calculated this in-kind service that Crossroads Church provides to the community at \$140,000 – the cost those groups would have to pay to rent space for their activities if the church did not provide the space for free.

Conclusion: History and Spaces Have Had a Profound Influence on the Church's Identity

Crossroads Church did not become biracial in a vacuum. Indeed, had it not been for demographic changes (both racial and socioeconomic status) in the community of Crossroads, the church probably would still be a bastion of European American cultural norms and white privilege. The relationship of the church to the neighborhood has had a racializing and sometimes racist effect for African American members on encounters at Crossroads Church, as the next three chapters will illustrate.

CHAPTER 5
INTERACTING ACROSS RACE: LOOKING BENEATH
THE VENEER OF DIVERSITY

This chapter addresses the question: How do members of a biracial congregation interact across race? It begins with a description of the membership changes at Crossroads church, both what members describe as the beneficial effects (i.e., members drawn to its emerging multicultural identity) and the adverse effects (i.e., the drop in membership, particularly among white families with children). This history provides a backdrop against which to examine the encounters between European American and African American members of the church – the ones they negotiate with ease as well as others which cause them discomfort.

I observe the interracial encounters in a way similar to the way a therapist approaches client relationships – with an eye for helping one party (European Americans) understand how the other party (African Americans) perceives certain behaviors. Uncomfortable and difficult encounters have much to teach us about interracial relationships and about how to address what Obama (2008) described as the “complexities of race in this country that we’ve never really worked through” (¶25). For that reason, I focus on practices long used to maintain the status of white individuals and show how they continue to survive in biracial settings, such as Crossroads Church. In particular, I provide data that illustrate ways that white individuals continue to assume dominant roles in relationships with African Americans, and with little or no awareness of this hierarchy.

Near the end of this chapter and throughout the two others that follow (Chapters 6 and 7), I give primacy to the voices at Crossroads Church to let their narratives paint a picture of their interracial experiences, without an analytical intrusion. Later in the

chapter, I will connect the speakers' narratives to the framework of aversive racism and racial paranoia and the literature on contemporary forms of racism which offer additional insights. By the conclusion of the chapter, one of these findings is evident: that if we ever hope to address these "complexities of race" in our nation, then European Americans must make a more concerted effort than just sitting next to African Americans.

Effects of Changing Membership

The story of Crossroads Church's biracial identity begins in 1971 when two African American couples joined Crossroads Church. Approximately seven years later the first African American family with school age children joined. The slow influx of African Americans over the last three decades "has happened naturally. ... There was not the commitment to diversity and inclusivity" that some think, said one African American who observed the shift (Interview, 10-31-03). The slow influx of African Americans could not offset the decline in overall membership at Crossroads Church as the deaths within the aging remnant of original membership eroded the percentage of white members.

As the racial balance of the membership shifted, two consecutive pastors decided that the staff needed to reflect that racial change as well, so each of these pastors took a step during his tenure to hire one African American to a key staff position. In 1986, when the pastor hired Antoinette to oversee the church's outreach program to the neighborhood, she became the first African American on staff and one more of a small but slowly growing number of African Americans at worship.

Eight years later during a search for an associate minister in 1994, the next pastor thought it would be appropriate for the increasingly diverse congregation to hire an African American for that clergy position. He had Pastor Jason in mind. While members now revere Pastor Jason for his pastoral abilities and intelligence (he holds degrees from

two Ivy League universities), he told me that in 1994 the minister “didn’t think the congregation was necessarily ready” for an African American clergyperson (Field notes, 10-31-03). To accommodate the congregation’s hesitancy yet still achieve the goal of hiring Pastor Jason, the minister hired him to serve as interim pastor for a few months while a search committee reviewed a pool of applicants to permanently fill the position. The minister knew that the congregation would get comfortable with Pastor Jason and that eventually someone would suggest that Pastor Jason be included in the pool of candidates under consideration. The strategy worked. The congregation “had gotten so used to me being here,” said Pastor Jason, that by the time the search committee was ready to make a decision, “they chose me” (Field notes, 10-31-03). Pastor Jason said he stayed for three years, left for another position, and then returned to Crossroads Church, in 2002, at the request of Pastor Christine. A white woman in her 50s, Pastor Christine knew of Pastor Jason’s reputation because she also had a previous tenure at Crossroads Church, serving there as a part-time associate pastor for several years after Pastor Jason left. When Pastor Christine invited him to return in 2002, she asked him to serve as co-pastor with her, but Pastor Jason said he declined that position (and the administrative headaches that accompany it) in favor of being an associate pastor.

Today the staff is as diverse as the congregation. Besides Pastor Jason and Antoinette, the Crossroads staff includes three African Americans: an administrative assistant, the director of maintenance, and a custodian. As for the rest of the staff, two are Latino (the pastoral visitor and the assistant director of maintenance) and four are white (the head pastor, musician, director of Christian education, and bookkeeper).

Perspectives on the Diversity at Crossroads Church

My research at Crossroads Church indicates that an individual’s life experiences shape one’s perspective on and response to this diversity, so I have clustered members

into three general categories for the purpose of my field observations. First there are white members who joined the church when it was all or mostly segregated and who live a distance from Crossroads, although many lived in or near the neighborhood at one time. Within this category are two subsets: (1) people who are subjects of my field observations because they attend worship regularly and (2) other members who no longer attend but who remain on the membership rolls.¹³ Some members still wield influence – even though they rarely attend – by voicing their opinions to other members who are active in the leadership, and with whom they maintain contact. A second category is comprised of members of African ancestry, some of whom live in Crossroads while others – particularly those who are of middle and upper middle socioeconomic levels – live in culturally diverse communities nearby. The African American presence at Crossroads Church, in turn, has attracted a third category of members – socially progressive white individuals who find the diverse character of the church appealing.

Whereas the first category of members accommodate or tolerate the diversity, these last two categories of members typically sought out Crossroads Church as a worship community that reflects their radical values of inclusiveness. The arrival of these two groups and the appointment, in 2002, of Pastor Christine – who takes great pride in the diversity – are credited by some members for stabilizing the congregation of approximately 400 members. Pastor Christine recognizes that, “This is a filtered group for sure.” White or black, “they are here because they want to be in this diverse

¹³ Catherine, who serves on the church staff as “parish visitor” maintaining pastoral contact with the sick and elderly, explained that while some of the elderly are too infirm to attend, others “have chosen not to come as the church changed.” However, “everyone has a strong memory of the church and they don’t want to drop membership” (Interview, 6-6-07). The many elderly who surprise Catherine by how well they keep abreast of news of the church by reading all of its communications, offer evidence of this type of allegiance.

community,” she said, acknowledging that some white individuals attend “because they want to be good liberals” (Interview, 2-22-07).

Where Have All the Children Gone?

Even “good liberals” have their limits when it comes to comfort with racial diversity, and this is most apparent in the programs for children and youth at Crossroads Church, which church members describe as “all black.” While socially progressive white individuals often extol the virtues of desegregation, they often set limits on the personal sacrifices they are willing to make to achieve integration. These limitations on personal sacrifice become particularly evident when we look at a snapshot of the racial composition of the youth group at Crossroads Church during each of the last four decades. Forty years ago, the youth group was all white. Thirty years ago – “by now we had integration” (Interview, 4-1-07) – neighborhood teenagers started attending the youth group but were quickly segregated after what one long-time member described as the verbal sexual harassment of his daughter by “one of the black boys.” After the sobbing 14-year-old girl arrived home and told her parents about the incident, “We made just all sorts of stink about that,” said her father, “and with that the fellowship was changed” (Interview, 4-1-07). Crossroads Church separated the youth into two sessions – members’ children (mostly white) at the usual 7 p.m. Sunday time while the “local kids were asked to come to fellowship at 4 o’clock in the afternoon” (Interview, 4-1-07). The church leadership rationalized this segregation by claiming that the children of church families were unaccustomed and therefore uncomfortable with the newcomer youth’s behaviors. As in the aversive racism paradigm (Figure 1), the decision to segregate the two groups of youth was rationalized on other factors besides race, even though all of the youth segregated into one of the groups were African American. Twenty years ago, the evening youth group reflected the diversity of the congregation – most were white and the only

African American youth were children of member families, most of whom were middle socioeconomic status and higher. By the nadir of church membership ten years ago, the youth group died.

While the youth program has been resurrected and a European American hired as director of Christian education to lead the program (among his other responsibilities), these changes have not been enough to attract white families with children. Today there are no European Americans in the youth group and only two European American children in the entire congregation – the 10-year-old grandson of long-time members who bring him to church with them, and a baby born during my fieldwork to a couple who joined in recent years.¹⁴ His birth heralded much excitement because – although the church has baptized a few grandchildren of long-time members (white) over the last two decades – no one could recall the last white child born to a family that attended.

The absence of white families with school age children at the church marks a sharp contrast to a healthy representation of black families with children in this modest size congregation. It took me many visits to accept this dearth of white families. One Saturday in my seventh week of my pilot research, I saw five white children playing on the steps and noticing their comfort there I assumed that they were children of church members. Later I learned that the regional children's choir which is housed at Crossroads Church was practicing that day and that the children were siblings or others waiting for the rehearsal to attend, that they were not members of the church after all. During my dissertation research four years later, I noticed a white couple in church with three very blond children and wrote a jaded observation in my field notes: "I have come to expect

¹⁴ All of the other children and teenagers are African American, except a biracial teen (Chilean, European American, African American and Native American), and a biracial toddler (Puerto Rican and European American).

that any white child is merely visiting with someone and not considering joining the church” (Field notes, 8-5-07). My presumption proved correct. I later learned that the family of five was attending with their grandfather, a long-time member.

The attendance pattern of white individuals at Crossroads Church is similar to residency patterns among white individuals in the urban core of cities: single people and couples with no children or whose children are not yet school-age or who are grown. This pattern also harkens to school choice decisions that Saporito and Lareau (1999) observed among white families in an urban school district that allows school choice, a circumstance which I suggest is not so different from choice of church. Saporito and Lareau note that in school choice decisions, the “first order decision” among the majority of white individuals they studied was to exclude from consideration schools perceived as black – those with 90 percent or more African American students. Only then is a second order decision made on factors such as test scores and school climate – the primary considerations made by black families faced with the same school choice decisions for their children (Saporito & Lareau). The same considerations appear to be occurring at Crossroads Church. In eleven months of observations over two periods (my pilot in 2003 and my dissertation study four years later), I never saw one white family visit the congregation as prospective members – evidence of such “first order” decisions (Saporito & Lareau).

This avoidance reflects what occurs in the aversive racism paradigm – white families can make decisions to attend churches where their children are in the majority group and never have to acknowledge that race was a factor in their decision. It also reflects the decision patterns that Christerson et al. (2005) observed among a demographic of white families with small children attending multiracial congregations, and who leave in disproportionate numbers as the children approach adolescence. Christerson et al. explain that these decisions are not rationalized on race, but on the perception that the community youth are a rougher crowd and that the white children

might be uncomfortable as a numerical minority. There is little value in attempting to establish proof that these decisions are evidence of aversive racism or that these white families acted with a racist *intent* because we are trying to understand the *effect* of these types of decisions. Christerson et al. note that white families' avoidance of and departure from multiracial congregations "undermines" the African-American congregants "faith in the possibility of interracial social contexts" (p. 79). The theory of racial paranoia explains the effect this avoidance and departure has on African American members – they cannot see it apart from similar experiences in other contexts (e.g. neighborhoods and schools as they become increasingly diverse.) The *effect* is spiritual as well. "The decline of white presence in the church is particularly disappointing because African American members trusted that white Christians would be more accepting of racial integration with blacks" (Christerson et al., p. 79).

Recall Pastor Jason's description of his own childhood growing up in a church so diverse that Martin's Luther King's observation of Sunday morning is the most segregated hour of the week, did not ring true for him. Today, just one neighborhood away and one generation later, the vision of black children and white children playing together has come and gone at Crossroads Church, revealing a chink in its multicultural façade. This re-segregation begs a probe of the nature of the interracial relationships at Crossroads Church and the nature of the interactions between them that might help to explain what occurs behind the façade that could lead to such an imbalance.

Social Interactions Across Race

Crossroads Church is like a community water well. Some people come Sunday morning just for the water of worship, then leave. Other members chat briefly after worship – lingering in the sanctuary or stopping by coffee hour. People who contribute to the work of the church – some doing tasks, and others assuming leadership positions –

return to the well more frequently than those who come just for worship. The answer to the research question “How do members interact across race?” is determined by watching how people use the community well, a gathering space that encourages a range of interracial experiences in lives that often are segregated. I observed how white members allowed the diversity there to transform their worldview and behaviors and strategies by which they avoided that and I observed how black members experienced these encounters of unintended racism.

Members gather at Crossroads Church at other times than Sunday morning. Sometimes the context is formal, such as the many meetings and functions where attendance is expected and certain norms (typically rooted in assimilated European American culture) are proscribed. Fewer members participate in the more informal interactions – those that involve social or educational activities that occur at a time other than Sunday morning, and/or in a place other than the church. As we consider how members interact across race, it is important to describe ways that parishioners (1) do *not* interact across race, (2) interact in a way that minimally affects their worldview, or (3) engage in deeply meaningful interactions that reshape their worldview. This type of encounter will be explicit at times and more complexly related at others.

For many if not most of the European-American members, Crossroads Church is the one place in their lives that holds the possibility for interracial interactions that could lead to genuine relationships between peers. This situation is particularly the case for those white members whose encounters with African Americans outside of Crossroads Church often are hierarchical relationships, such as with service industry workers. It is even the case with many white members who have African American colleagues – many described those relationships as more task oriented with little opportunity for the type of deep story-sharing that leads to new perspectives. Christerson et al. (2005) suggest that for white members, “Being a part of an interracial church has provided them with opportunities to understand people of another race, to develop cross-racial relationships,

and to expand their faith and worldview” (p.65). In order to recognize the ways that these relationships occur, I immersed myself in the life of the congregation observing where this type of transformative story-sharing took place, and who took advantage of this opportunity. The first level of interaction occurs in worship.

“Handshakes and Hugs”

“We have some unique opportunities due to our ... location and congregational history. These include ... building a healthy, diverse congregation,” Pastor Christine read from Crossroad’s mission statement to a meeting of prospective members. She continued reading the mission statement line by line through the end: “We welcome all people to this church. We are a diverse congregation of many racial, ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds.” She interspersed her own thoughts. “When you look at us, you see diversity in the color of our skin, ... but there’s even more diversity,” she said referring to differences of socioeconomic status, educational attainment, and theological perspectives among members. “When you see that best is in coffee hour after church” (Field notes, 9-28-03). It also is the best time to see members transcend those differences.

“When we – my wife and I – came to the church we were greeted by so many warm people,” said one new member, a European American near age 30 who is helping to redesign the website as “a tool for ministry” that he hopes will “communicate the heart of the church.” During a meeting with the staff he told them that “it was the handshakes and hugs” that drew the couple, not the other assets such as the impressive buildings, music program, etc., that so many members claim attracted them to Crossroads Church (Field notes, 9-12-07).

Throughout my field notes, this degree of hospitality is a strong theme, as captured in this entry describing my arrival at Crossroads Church on an ordinary Sunday morning 11 weeks into my study:

As I reach to push open the door someone, as always, opens it for me. This time, Carl is on the other side. He greets me by name and extends a warm, lingering and firm handshake and waits for me to respond in all three aspects and be fully present to him before he lets go. He gives me a leaflet. I walk inside the center hall doors where a petite black woman whose name I do not know, greets me with great warmth, “Good morning! Where would you like to be seated?” (Field notes, 4-22-07).

Interactions across race begin at every door of Crossroads Church on Sunday mornings where greeters position themselves to welcome everyone before an usher appears to escort them to the seat of their choice.

From there, interactions ripple across the pews, so many occurring all at once that it is impossible for me to describe – except as a medley from multiple field notes – all that happens in those few minutes between the gathering and start of worship. From my seat I watch as Richard, a white man in his 50s, takes his seat then turns to greet two African American men in the pew behind him, admonishing himself for having forgotten their names from an earlier introduction (Field notes, 3-11-07). There is Yvette, a black woman in her 50s, who takes her seat then turns to the elderly white couple in the row behind her and graces them with a warm smile, lingering handshake and a few pleasantries (Field notes, 5-27-07). Gwen, a white woman in her 70s, selects her seat then walks the full length of the pew to greet the three African Americans her age – the Johnsons at the far end and Florence behind them – before she returns to her seat (Field notes 4-22-07). An elderly white woman with a cane, chooses her seat, then briefly engages in discussion with two African American men who are a decade younger – one in the pew next to her and the other in the pew behind her (Field notes 4-22-07). Thomas, a white man in his 70s, walks in from the parish hall with his wife. She selects a seat a few rows from the front and after Thomas settles her there, he walks a little further back to greet a young white couple before striding the rest of the aisle to hug the usher positioned there, an African American woman in her 60s (Field notes, 4-22-07). Jane, an African American in her 60s who oversees the ushers, travels down the center aisle

toward the back of the church when she sees Harold, who is white and in his 60s, sitting next to the aisle. She reaches her hand out and they exchange a kiss on the cheek (Field notes 4-22-07).

Clearly, on this level of encounter the congregation is very comfortable interacting across race. Encounters in the sanctuary immediately following worship appear the same. It is not until I exit the left transept of the sanctuary and head into the parish hall to attend a congregational lunch, do I sense that that I am seeing only a veneer of diversity, at least in the lives of some of the white members.

Fissures in the Veneer of Inclusion

Aside from friendly handshakes and warm greetings in worship, cordial interactions at meetings and on tasks, many white members of the congregation make only modest efforts to interact with members who are African-American. I noticed this lack of deeper interaction during my field observations and I confirmed it in casual conversations with members of the congregation during field observations at Crossroads Church. During a conversation with a seminarian (black) during my pilot study, I learned that she has been a member of this old-line Protestant denomination and predominantly white congregations in it for most of her life (she is in her 50s). I asked how hard it was to be a black woman in those white congregations. “Well this one is no different,” she answered matter-of-factly (Field notes 10-12-03). She told me she comes to church with no expectations “of the people being friendly or not.” Considering all of the public relations efforts by Crossroads Church extolling the virtues of being multicultural, I half expected a more circumspect response suggesting a more positive experience for African Americans.

In formal interviews with 13 members, seven of whom are African American, I addressed my observations about these interactions with the question: “How has the

diversity at Crossroads Church had an effect on how people socialize across race?”

Orinthia, an African-American retiree who has served in the leadership of the church since she joined in 1992, burst into laughter when I asked her this question during our interview.

Look, I'll be honest with you. ... There is a level, a certain social level ... that will never be broken. I mean, the people who are old members, um, who are wealthy members. They have – I didn't *know* about it for years! – that they have an annual get-together party. Of course they don't talk. They don't invite. And I mean it's *their* party in *their* home.” (Interview, 10-17-07)

The social glue of the many of white members (particularly those who joined many years ago and some newer white members they have brought into their social circle) is so tight that when some of them have parties, few if any African-Americans are invited. I heard numerous people refer to these gatherings as “white parties.” They have become a joke among the Crossroads Church staff and newer white members of the congregation whose lives outside of the congregation are among the most diverse of the people (particularly the white people) who attend the church. Laughing, one white woman recounted in an interview, how another white member jokingly told her, ““Oh, the Joneses are having their annual white party – be thankful that you got an invite.’ To be included among the ‘well-to-do, older well-to-do white couples’” (Interview, 8-15-07). She said that she did not go.

I figured that church members were just one among many categories of friends of the hosts invited to the party, but when I attended the staff meeting the week following the party, the staff told me otherwise. Everyone who was invited to the party was from Crossroads Church. None of the staff attended, but they each heard reports of the members who did. The guests even included one former member who left Crossroads Church over a dispute with Pastor Christine (and in doing so gained the sympathy of one man and his cronies who previously did not include him in their social circle). “He is enjoying being with the big boys,” Pastor Christine said. “What does he call them? ‘The

rich boys.’ ‘The richies.’ That is what he calls them” (Field notes, 9-12-2007). Although many of the guests were upper middle class professionals, others were not, so while socioeconomic status may play a factor in who was extended an invitation, it is not as apparent as the race factor. Besides, there are numerous black professionals at Crossroads Church who are middle and upper middle socioeconomic class and they have not been included in this social circle like white members in the same socioeconomic status. The staff noted one person of color who was invited – a Latino physician who has been a member of the congregation for two decades and is friends with others who have been on the Jones’s guest list for a long time. “But gosh, Isabel is Hispanic. Gosh, do they know that?” Pastor Christine quipped (Field notes, 9-12-07).

When Crossroads Church held its annual church picnic the following morning in the park outside the back door of the church, I noted that Isabel was one of only three people at the party the previous evening who came to the picnic (Field notes, 9-13-07). I was not surprised. In nine months of observations, I noticed that comparatively few white members attend the social events at Crossroads Church, including periodic Sunday morning brunches, and evening events planned specifically to encourage social interaction in this diverse congregation. For example, at the same event in 2003 when 55 of the 100 people at worship were white, only 25 of those white individuals went to the congregational brunch that immediately followed worship while nearly every black person in worship attended. The lack of commitment of members to engage in the diversity “is very frustrating,” said Antoinette. “It’s not bad people. It’s just they’re trying to get their needs met. And they don’t have the time or the energy because they’re not invested enough in it here” (Field notes, 9-12-07).

Intentional Efforts by the Staff to Encourage Interactions Across Race

To foster interracial relationships, the Pastor Christine has charged one committee with the task of creating fellowship opportunities, which she that she hopes will “break down walls.” The challenge is great.

This church in the recent past has had this problem. In the recent past? I mean, probably forever. That you know you have something and it's this only one kind of person that's going to go. ... The social events – it's just amazing. I'm trying to think of the some of the ones they had. You know, they had a trip to [a distant factory outlet] – a bus trip. It was mostly blacks. They had a progressive supper going from home to home and it was mostly whites. When you come to the brunches after church, it is mostly the blacks. When you come to *any* kind of meal at the church, it is mostly black. (Interview, 2-22-07)

My observations concurred with her assessment that the modest effort by many white members to interact across race was made apparent by the choices they made not to attend social events planned primarily to encourage people to get to know one another. For example, at a “game night” in February (an intergenerational event with supper followed by board games), only eight white individuals (three of them staff) were among the 27 people who attended – an event so fun people stayed an hour longer than planned. At a weekend retreat (planned for all of the women in the congregation) at a camp and conference center in a resort area a year earlier, only three white women were among more than two dozen women who attended.

Between my pilot study at the church in 2003 and field observations in 2007, I did notice a positive development in the social interactions across race at one of the meals following worship. At a parish brunch I attended the in 2003, the round tables that seated eight to ten people each were segregated largely by race. At the church picnic four years later (the one that followed the party described earlier), the young adult members of the congregation (five European Americans, two African Americans, and one Puerto Rican) sat together briefly then got up and spent most of the rest of the picnic visiting at other tables with people in the congregation of all ages. All tables that day were racially mixed.

I surmise that one factor was that few of the attendees at the “white party” that been held the previous evening were here at the picnic, and they tend to be members who sit at segregated tables.

The one white member at Crossroads Church who makes the greatest effort at interacting across race is Gwen (white) who joined the church in the 1960s. A retired literacy specialist who, as a publisher’s representative, consulted at schools all over the city, Gwen traveled comfortably to neighborhoods where other white individuals might not venture. She continues to travel to urban neighborhoods four days a week as a coordinator for a literacy initiative that buses urban schoolchildren to retirement homes for one-on-one tutoring in a program where most of the children and tutors are African American.

The value Gwen holds for diversity and her comfort in settings where she is the only white person, is apparent at Crossroads Church in the deliberate way she interacts with African Americans.

I feel committed to that congregation, and I feel committed to integration. And because I feel committed to integration, whenever there is a luncheon – like celebrating Black History month – I will make *sure* that I am sitting there. And I will also make *sure* that I am sitting with an integrated table. That is part of my personal commitment to what integration is all about (Interview, 6-19-07)

During my field observations in 2007, Gwen always was true to her word and the most intentional – among all white members of the church – about putting herself in a diverse situations. I observed few white members (except for two young white couples who work with the youth) make the same degree of effort.

When I asked Gwen which aspects of the diversity at Crossroads Church that most frustrate her she said, “My biggest disappointment is that the whites do not make a special effort to come to those congregational lunches and mix. Okay? So I am very conscious of it” (Interview, 6-19-07). I asked her if she knows why the white members are not more intentional about attending the lunches, which are conveniently scheduled

following worship. In softly spoken, but sharply measures words of criticism, she answered, “They always ‘have something else’ to do” (Interview, 6-19-07). Many of the church members who have the least diversity in the rest of their lives are the same ones avoiding these more informal social events that are intended to deepen the quality of relationships begun in the pews.

I found some disconfirming evidence. One couple (long-time members) are known for frequently entertaining overnight guests at their vacation home and, on at least two occasions, welcomed African American members as their guests. One occurrence was a weekend hosting the young adult group comprised mostly of white couples under age 30 but which included two African American college students – a 20-year-old woman and 21-year-old man. Inviting African Americans to this particular resort town is not insignificant because “You just don’t find Blacks there,” I was told by an upper socioeconomic status businessman who also received an invitation with his wife (both black) on a different occasion (Interview, 8-27-07). Other disconfirming evidence include two white men in their 60s inviting an African American peer to a baseball game, and a close friendship between a white woman in her 80s and an African American woman in her 20s. One Easter when a famous baseball player (black) came to church with his girlfriend (an African American who grew up on the congregation) and her family, the father invited an elderly baseball fan (white) to sit next to their guest.

It is only the social events that parishioners avoid. In addition to interacting across race at worship, white members of the congregation participate in *tasks* of the church, particularly leadership on all committees, which raises another issue – power. White individuals occupied eight of the 18 positions on the governing body of the church and comprise six of the 21 deacons overseeing pastoral concerns of the church, totaling 14 of the 39 leaders of the congregation. Although barely one third of this leadership is white, “in the end, the *power* is in the purse,” and the administration and finance committee is controlled by a handful of white men, explained one African American woman

(Interview, 10-19-07). During my observations, the make-up of the committee included five long-time members (white) and one elderly African American woman whose primary concern was guarding the modest finances of the women's group and who, as a result, was considered by many people to be a token presence on the committee. Although many people raise the issue of the group's disproportionate power, those who wield that power never acknowledged such power except to dispute it or make light of the suggestion. "We're reveling in our new power," quipped one of these men to the amusement of several members of the governing body of the church at one meeting when Antoinette pointed out his committee "has the power to say 'no'" to other committees' proposals (Field notes, 9-5-07). The white male members of the administration and finance committee fail to understand the effect of this hierarchy on the African Americans, particularly because it reflects the racial hierarchy in the broader culture in the United States. The encounter between Nick (white) and Antoinette (black) described in the next section provides an insightful example of this hierarchical role play from the perspective of an African American relegated to the non-dominant role.

Nick Fell Down and Broke His Crown

Prior to my research at Crossroads Church, I had been an acquaintance of Antoinette for years, including several spent as a board member of a tiny non-profit that she directed. I always observed her to be a formidable presence with exceptional interpersonal skills honed by a master's degree, twenty years of social work experience, and professional encounters with dozens of organizations. So I was stunned when Antoinette, an African American in her mid-40s, told me in an interview that "there are times when I am sitting in a meeting that I have to make myself speak because, yes, I am intimidated by people around me" (Interview, 10-31-03).

The consequence of this type of intimidation is apparent in an encounter Antoinette had with Nick (white), a member of the administration and finance committee who is perceived to be among the most powerful members of the congregation. The encounter seemed ordinary at the outset. Antoinette had been providing social work assistance to the daughter of a Crossroads Church member, a young African American trying to “get her life in order” so that she could be reunited with her own daughter who had been placed in foster care. The woman found an apartment, but she needed to furnish it. Meanwhile, another parishioner had a sofa, chair and lamp table to donate. Antoinette needed to coordinate volunteers for the delivery. She asked Nick if he could move the furniture in his pickup truck. To assist with the lifting, Antoinette lined up Abel, a middle aged African American without steady work who Antoinette knows as client of the crisis ministry and a willing volunteer there who is experienced at moving jobs like this one.

The destination apartment was on the second floor of a cramped public housing building with a staircase so narrow that it is hard maneuver large furniture up the staircase. Nick – a retired engineer who Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich (1979) would describe as an example of the “mental workers” (p. 10) who comprise the professional managerial class – assumed the lead position going up the stair. That left Abel to take his position at the bottom which meant taking direction from Nick and lifting most of the weight. Antoinette told me that she knew, from the beginning, that allowing Nick to assume the leadership position was a bad idea: “I know that Abel knows how to move things” and “the skill needed to come at the top maneuvering.” Instead, “Nick being the dominant presence went to the head. ... If it would have been any other parishioner, I would have said, ‘No!’ ... I’m really commanding, but I couldn’t it do it” (Field notes, 3-22-07).

Antoinette, like Abel, accepted a subordinate role when Nick assumed charge – characteristic of the hierarchical role play that often takes place between a white individual and an African American (Trepagnier, 2006). One might argue that gender

played a role in Nick's treatment of Antoinette and that socioeconomic status played a role in Nick's treatment of Abel but these factors are not as strong as race and power in Antoinette's perspective. Indeed, the experience had the effect of racism for Antoinette. In her subordinate role, Antoinette stood out of the way and waited, resuming her authority only when Abel shouted, "Miss Antoinette, come right away!" and rushing inside she found the sofa on end and Nick lying unconscious on the floor. Although Nick regained consciousness within moments, a large bump on the side of his head was rapidly swelling and Antoinette had the task of convincing him that he needed to go to the hospital in the ambulance that she had summoned. She worried: "Now I have to deal with this white strong man. What if he says, 'No?' I can't in good conscience let him get in his truck and go back home!" (Field notes, 3-22-07).

With Nick on his way to the hospital, Antoinette still had to deal with the sofa. She gave Abel the lead and following his directions, carried the heavy bottom end of the sofa herself. As they moved the bulky sofa, they encountered the same problem that caused Nick to fall, but this time, "the minute Abel felt that resistance, he shifted the sofa so there was no accident." Abel's intuitive response "speaks to the skill set" he has developed, she explained (Field notes, 3-22-07).

Antoinette recognized the cost of assuming a subordinate role to Nick's dominance. She told me that if she had stood firm and insisted that Abel assume the lead position in moving the sofa, "I could have prevented this. I knew I didn't want Nick at the lead, but I didn't want to insult him." While she admitted that race played a role in her dependent role, she also suspects that Nick's position of power in the church – serving on the administration and finance committee of the church – played a role as well. "The presence of Nick, that's what got me – who he is and the group he represents." After the accident, she was worried: "Is he angry? Is he regretful that he did this? What's he going to think of me?" (Field notes, 3-22-07). "I don't know that I would have been any less concerned for someone else, but I would have been less stressed," Antoinette said

recalling the wait for the rescue squad. “Those were the longest seven minutes of my life” (Field notes, 3-22-07).

That scenario was a far cry from what Antoinette planned. She said that she had envisioned Nick going into the apartment, seeing that this woman really had to live without furniture, and recognizing that his role in moving the furniture “was really changing her world. ...That’s what I wanted for him.” By virtue of the influence Nick wields as a member of the administration and finance committee at Crossroads Church, “he has the power to affirm or become a stumbling block” to the work of the crisis ministry, Antoinette said. In the end, Nick “didn’t get a chance to meet [the woman], to hear her story” (Field notes, 3-22-07).

Fortunately, Nick suffered no serious injuries and the hospital chaplain who spotted Nick upon arrival turned out to be a member of Crossroads Church – an African American woman in her 50s – who was very attentive to Nick. During the next five hours at the hospital waiting with Nick as he underwent numerous tests, Antoinette stayed by his side trying to make the best of a difficult situation and later admitted, “We really had a good time to bond.” Still she was worried that the experience could have a negative impact. Upon her return to the church, Antoinette checked with the secretary who deals with finances and insurance, to “make sure it doesn’t cost him anything” (Field notes, 3-22-07).

Throughout my field operations, I watched the staff take very seriously their work to broaden the cultural experiences of white members of the congregation, and diminish stereotypes with which the lowest socioeconomic status are viewed. While this encounter provided needed furniture for the woman receiving the delivery, Antoinette also planned for this encounter to enlighten Nick about the needs of the clientele of the crisis ministry and the contributions that some clients like Abel make. Instead, it turned into a debacle – not just the injuries that Nick sustained, but the fact that he saw none of what Antoinette planned, while the whole encounter had a racist effect. It stemmed from the simple act of

Nick's taking charge in the situation, and Antoinette's and Abel's conditioning – as African Americans – to acquiesce to the paternalistic assumption by a white man that he should be in charge. Such an assumption offers evidence that “that racism sometimes arises from a sense of goodwill” when “dominant group members [perceive] themselves as superior to those in a subordinated group” (Trepagnier, 2006, p. 40). Antoinette conceded that while Nick had no conscious racist *intent*. However, the lack of intent does “not mitigate the racist structure of ... hierarchical relationships” but rather, “they illustrate the complexity found in some of them” (Trepagnier, 2006, p. 38).

The Task of the Multicultural Group

Negotiating the complexities of relationships with African Americans is a challenge for many white members of Crossroads Church, something that interracial contact alone has not resolved. The staff is “very aware of what we’ve got going on here at Crossroads Church and it all looks good on one surface,” said Pastor Christine acknowledging that “underneath we know there’s another surface that is racially influenced” (Interview, 2-22-07). Because the staff also is aware that the undercurrent of racialized thoughts and racist behaviors among many of the white members is an impediment that keeps Crossroads Church from becoming truly multicultural,¹⁵ it has attempted to facilitate the progress. A year and a half prior to my dissertation research more than a dozen people from Crossroads Church (the clergy, program staff and church members) attended a national conference on multicultural and urban ministry. The “staff decided this is something that we need to go to,” Pastor Christine said describing how they studied the list of workshops offered, invited a diverse group of parishioners, and assigned them to attend particular workshops (Interview, 2-22-07). Everyone was asked

¹⁵ See “Continuum on Becoming an Anti-Racist, Multi-Cultural Church,” Table 2, for a description of the characteristics.

to report back to the whole conference group about what they learned in their respective workshops and then continue meeting as the newly formed “Multicultural Group” to discuss issues of diversity. Pastor Christine acknowledged, “Not all have kept that covenant to stay together. But ... we continued to meet as what we are calling here the multicultural group” (Interview, 2-22-07) which is still trying to define its work.

We see our task ... is racial, for lack of anything else. And the first thing that we’ve now finally agreed is we need to just be able to get along together. Not that we don’t get along together, but we need to be able to feel free about talking and about race and who we are (Interview, 2-22-07).

For years, the staff has recognized that this type of work needed to take place in the congregation, preferably “outside of just the ring of the staff,” Pastor Jason explained in an informal interview.

“We thought the natural place then would be the church officers. But if you have pushback from the officers, well then you develop another group so that you still do the work within in the life of the congregation. And that’s when the multicultural group came to be” (Interview, 8-29-07)

Pastor Jason described the work of this group before my arrival: In the months following the conference, the multicultural group reconvened to watch and discuss *Crash*, a movie released in 2004 whose plot examines racial tensions of characters whose lives intersect through a 36-hour sequence of events. The next time the multicultural group met members shared stories about their memory of the first time in their life that they felt like a minority or a member of an out-group. Meetings were sporadic and several of those who attended the conference dropped out of the group while a married couple – who were new to the church – was added to the group. Since then, membership of the group has been closed to enable the group to develop trust among each other to achieve the level of personal sharing that the staff thinks that this work requires. After testing several meeting times and places, the group finally settled on a pattern of taking turns to host a potluck supper meeting in their homes on the last Wednesday of the month. My field

observations of the multicultural group which are described in the next section coincided with the second meeting in this series and the first time that I observed this group.

Pastor Jason assumed leadership of the meetings and told me that he designed them around three activities: fellowship over supper, an activity to get to know one another a little better, and a “didactic” activity – “something to take away.” He kept a range of exercises in a three-ring binder. I heard Pastor Christine describe the group to others and her hope that its experiences would “ripple out to the congregation” and that the multicultural group will serve as the “equal representation police” for every committee within the church (Field notes, 3-17-07).

Roles of Racial Hierarchy

One discussion of the multicultural group was an exercise that Pastor Jason learned at a diversity training program about in-groups and out-groups and what he described as “power up” and power down” (Field notes, 2-28-07). He distributed a handout that addressed a type of hierarchical role-play that – often subconscious to the players – takes place between European-Americans and African Americans. It described the dominant (white) group’s effort to retain its power “by making the decisions and rules” and the acquiescence of the dependent (black) group to this power, “to cooperate” in its own oppression by abiding by those decisions and rules. Antoinette forced the group to address this with concrete examples when she asked: “How does that relate to our multicultural group work?” Do people see evidence of dominant and dependent roles “happening to our groups at church?” (Field notes, 2-28-07).

After half an hour of lively discussion describing how *other* people fall into these roles while never acknowledging that they themselves ever succumb in any way, members of the group suddenly and inadvertently played into these roles. Pastor Jason had asked for volunteers for the next gathering. The meetings had been the fourth

Wednesday of the month, and the next would be March 28. Connie told the group that she wanted to host because that date preceded her busy season at the bed and breakfast she runs in her home. Nzinga also wanted to host – something that she had mentioned to Antoinette in the past – but because Nzinga is a school teacher and single mother of boys ages 2 and 16, she cannot get home and be ready in time to welcome the group by its usual 6 p.m. start. During this meeting Nzinga suddenly realized that March 28 was an early dismissal day at her school and she excitedly told the group that she would get home early enough to host, explaining that she would not have another opportunity. Connie pressed for the date, so Nzinga conceded.

As everyone else started writing the next meeting into their calendars, Antoinette pressed Nzinga loudly enough for the whole group to hear: “Why did you defer? You really wanted to do it.” Nzinga mumbled, “I don’t know, I just did.” The group seemed to realize what just happened – that members played out the hierarchical roles – and a hush fell over the group for several awkward seconds before someone attempted a problem-solving tack to avert the discomfort. They looked ahead to the following month (April) and Connie offered to host that meeting and relinquished to Nzinga the March date that just minutes earlier she had so adamantly pursued (Field notes, 2-28-07).

Antoinette’s interrogation of Nzinga was the only acknowledgement of the hierarchical role-play that just occurred, apart from the awkward silence and the lively problem solving to distract from what occurred. Zerubavel (2006) suggests that silence is “the simplest way not to acknowledge something of which we are personally aware” (p. 4) and as our conventional images of the sound of silence (e.g. deafening) imply, silence is a very public form of denial.

Like silence, denial involves active avoidance. Rather than simply failing to notice something, it entails a deliberate effort to refrain from noticing it. Furthermore, it involves refusing to acknowledge the presence of things that actually beg for attention, thereby reminding us that conspiracies of silence revolve not around those largely unnoticeable matters we simply

overlook, but on the contrary, around those highly conspicuous matters we deliberately avoid. (Zerubavel, p. 9)

Both the silence and the active avoidance (the distraction of trying to solve the calendar problem) served as mechanisms for maintaining the status quo that privileges the white desire to not have to confront their own racism. Connie recognized the dominance-dependence role playing but did not *acknowledge* it and simply responded in a way to stop Antoinette's interrogation of the situation so that she would not have to confront its implications of racism. Three weeks later, during the Sunday morning coffee hour I approached Connie to get her reflection on what happened following the dominance-dependence exercise and conversation at the multicultural group meeting. I began with small talk and then segued to the questions about the discussion of the dominant and dependent roles the group discussed at the last multicultural group meeting. "That seemed to polarize everyone," was all that she would say (Field notes, 3-18-07). When she described polarization during the activity at the multicultural group meeting, it appeared that she was referring to her own discomfort but trying to paint it more broadly as everyone's discomfort – another mechanism of avoidance.

I never heard the issue discussed directly in the next few meetings of the group, but Antoinette never forgot it. She spoke about it to me and other members of the staff on several occasions. Then seven months later in another multicultural group meeting, she made direct reference. Pointing to the host of the meeting where the encounter between Connie and Nzinga took place, Antoinette said:

And it's happened before when we were at your home when we were talking about the dynamics of power and stuff and Nzinga really wanted the meeting. ... Nzinga works in a public school. That's not a weak person. That's a person who is used to authority, who has to make quick decisions – and, really, decisions that revolve around people's security and life and yada yada ya. But for some reason, in this setting, she doesn't always find her voice. (Field notes, 9-26-08)

Antoinette could not engage the group. They responded by pointing out that Nzinga (who was not present) was "overly burdened" (Field notes, 9-26-08) by her many

responsibilities at home, work, and church, making it appear as the problem was solely her own.

Conclusion: Sitting Next to Each Other in the Pews is Not Enough

In answering the question “How do members of a biracial congregation interact across race?” we find a picture of racial harmony in the worship service, but also an undercurrent of discord outside that many if not most white people are unaware. While half of the members, staff and governing board of this formerly all-white congregation are now African American, there are chinks in the multiracial identity that make their experience of Crossroads Church less than one of full integration. These chinks include the absence of white families with children, the limited efforts most white individuals make to socialize across race (outside of worship and committees), the tendency of white members to slip into hierarchical role-play in which they assume the dominant role, and the tendency to not acknowledge the racialized feelings that drive the behaviors which have the effect of aversive racism on many African American members. Clearly, sitting together in the pews does not, alone, integrate a congregation. This limitation becomes even more apparent in the next chapter as we observe another level of discomfort among European American members of the congregation when the issue of race surfaces.

CHAPTER 6
DIALOGUE ABOUT RACE: THE EFFECT OF NOTIONS
ABOUT WHAT IS “POLITICALLY CORRECT”

European American members at Crossroads Church have become adept at certain interactions across race there but, as I have attempted to show in the previous chapter, they lack the quality that I suspect that Martin Luther King Jr. was envisioning. They do not provide parity. In this chapter, I rely of the voices of Crossroads Church members to articulate what is undermining race relations at as I explore answers to the research question “How do members of a biracial congregation engage in discussions about race?” The encounters described in this chapter demonstrate how the socialization and enculturation of white Americans stymies them so much that most do not know how to talk comfortably about race issues with African Americans.

As I attempt in this chapter to explain the way that members of Crossroads Church talk about race, it is useful to first address several preliminary sub questions which help to illuminate the overarching research question: How does the church see itself and describe itself and its vision to others? What mechanisms do church members use to avoid getting pulled into dialogue about race? Why are they reluctant to engage in such discussions in the first place? Where do genuine conversations about race take place and how? In studying race talk at Crossroads Church, I not only found answers to these questions, but also evidence of racialized thoughts and feelings that well-intentioned white individuals repress, as the paradigm of aversive racism (Figure 1) would suggest.

Race talk takes many forms (Myers & Williamson, 2001). In the data below, I offer examples of how white people attempt to code their language “to conceal a racialized subtext or assumptions” (p. 7) by substituting words that are assumed to refer to African Americans. Race talk may be a commentary. It can take the form of pretense that a person does not see race. Although coded language and colorblind references are

examples of “semantic moves” (p. 5) that allow a speaker to veil racist statements or arguments in ambiguity so as not to sound racist himself, race talk also can be nonverbal, such as acts of avoidance. Myers and Williamson suggest that “*everyone* engages in some form of race talk” (p. 7) so in their study of it they focused not on “racist individuals “but rather on racist practices and their implications” (p. 7). Race talk illustrates “how race is racism is evolving” (p. 5).

At Crossroads Church, race is the metaphorical elephant in the room – a characteristic that could not be more apparent in a congregation that was once all white and is now half black, but a characteristic which members nevertheless pretend to ignore. Researchers of human communication recognize that silence is an integral part of the communication system of a group of people, so integral that it is “comparable with speech” (Zerubavel, 2006, p. 8). “It actually has an unmistakable sound, and as our conventional images of ‘thick,’ ‘deafening,’ ‘heavy,’ or ‘resounding’ silences seem to imply, it often speaks louder than words” (p. 8).

To a large degree, white members of the church are not comfortable discussing race because – as several have told me – they think that it is not “politically correct” to discuss this in the company of black individuals. Jackson (2008) suggests that one of the primary reasons white individuals are hesitant to talk about race is because of the white dimension of *racial paranoia* – fear of incurring black rage. Other theorists also suggest that because white individuals suppress most dialogue about race issues and restrict the nature of the discussions that do take place, they wield more power than black members (Cone, 2002; Zerubavel, 2006).

“Diversity” as Niche: The Way Crossroads Church Presents Its Racial Self

To explore the dimensions of race conversation at Crossroads Church, it is helpful to first study the church’s presentation of its racial self as a “diverse congregation,” and

its decision to tout that identity to a claim a market “niche.” Crossroads is “a community overflowing with churches” (Field notes, 10-19-03). Two other diverse congregations – one Protestant and one Roman Catholic – also are trying to claim part of that market niche while holding their own against an overwhelming presence of black churches, ranging from storefronts to two mega churches.

Considering that saturation of churches, “Wouldn’t it be great to see ourselves as the number one church in our community?” Pastor Christine asked in one Sunday sermon before pausing to add, “But at what cost?” (Field notes, 10-19-03). She told of an encounter with another minister – someone who was not familiar with Crossroads Church or its community – and how she bragged about her congregation: “Believe me, I went on and on.” She said she told him about the cultural diversity of the congregation, the fabulous staff, the social outreach program, the website and the many efforts at growth through communication. She described the conversation:

“But are you growing?” was the other minister’s only response.

“Yes,” Pastor Christine replied.

“How many?” asked the other minister.

“About 20 last year,” Pastor Christine answered.

Pastor Christine recalled that “the other minister then asked who the competition was.” Almost as an aside on stage, Pastor Christine explained, “Churches do that. They can look at people as potential customers.” Sometimes churches “market” their services to “appeal to the consumer/customer” and “give them what they want,” Pastor Christine said. “Church consultants are telling us to market the goals” ... to “not be too churchy,” ... to “do what others are doing and do it better.” But is that what the church really wants? “Is that what we’re about?” she asked. “Sure,” she admitted emphatically, “I want to see our church grow.” Then she lowered the volume of her voice, leaned forward grabbing both sides of the pulpit and described with incredulity that consultants for mega

church growth advocate: “Sermons that are self-help but don’t challenge,” ... “remove the old creeds”... and while the church is at it, “eliminate the prayer of confession – you know, it’s not a very uplifting part of our service,” she quipped (Field notes, 10-19-03).

Pastor Christine segued into the capacity for the church to accommodate needs of a culturally diverse congregation. Some want old hymns. Some want contemporary music. Some want spirituals. The church offers a sampling of many – the music program even has two kettle drums that are pulled out on occasion for music during the liturgy¹⁶ – Pastor said, but noted, “I am not sure we need to be all things to all people.” By and large, Crossroads church remains tied to the theology of its old-line Protestant denomination and Western European influences on its music. While other churches do things differently, “I don’t see them as competition,” said Pastor Christine explaining that they fulfill a need for people whose spiritual needs are not met in a setting such as Crossroads Church (Field notes, 10-19-03).

“I don’t want us to sell out” by drastically changing liturgy and music style “so that we can be number one,” explained Pastor Christine. Winning the game is not about who has the highest membership or attendance. “It is about being faithful to our call. ... I believe people will be attracted to us because of our acceptance of all people. Many churches say that. ... We *live* it” (Field notes, 10-19-03).

At Crossroads Church, racial diversity is both the market niche and the crux of its evolving identity and the reason the church makes generic references to race (as one of its many positive variables of diversity) in its public relations materials.¹⁷ As a result, these

¹⁶ I never saw the drums used in the 34 Sunday liturgies I observed.

¹⁷ Crossroads Church’s promotional literature is impressive – among the finest of any church that I have ever seen. It is full-color, professionally designed and printed on a heavy stock of paper. The church’s informational brochures, service leaflets, website and the banners and billboard that dress up the parking lot all include the same symbols: a cross, harp, dove and human figures in a trendy blend of plum, ochre, teal and burgundy.

materials have become one of the principal places where race is mentioned (either directly or indirectly) at Crossroads Church. The Sunday worship leaflet proclaims that Crossroads Church is a vibrant community that welcomes everyone to the church, regardless of racial, ethnic or socioeconomic status. The mission statement of Crossroads Church lists five objectives, one of which is growing the congregation to be diverse and healthy in that diversity. Even the photographs on a promotional mural (an 8 by 16-foot canvas on the wall of a commercial building abutting the church parking lot) features African American and European Americans together – photos used throughout the church’s publicity materials.

Throughout my research I was so overwhelmed by this barrage of imagery used to paint a picture of the diversity at Crossroads Church that I started to experience it as discordant. I wondered whether these words and images are meant solely to draw in people who would be attracted to a diverse church, or whether they also served another function inside the church where perspectives varied. To explore this, I referenced the literature claiming that Crossroads Church that welcomes everyone regardless of racial, ethnic or socioeconomic status and asked interview subjects about their impressions of that public image. “I remember when the P.R. place put it together,” said a woman in her 50s who grew up in an African American congregation that – while not of the same denomination as Crossroads – is a member of a sister denomination. She chuckled as she added that Crossroads Church is the first church she attended that had “a more business-like” approach to market itself. “And I am not saying again that churches aren’t businesses, but to hire a P.R. firm?!” She laughed again, then added, “It was a little beyond me” (Interview, 9-21-07).

Race Talk: Words Spoken and Unspoken

I heard the generic applications of the words “diverse”, “diversity” and “multicultural” used frequently and said with pride at Crossroads Church, but members seemed to avoid direct references to race (and racism). Antoinette explained that there are some parishioners “who would die if we did something on ‘racial’ anything. And that is what pushes us toward ‘multicultural’ because it’s a safer word than ‘racial’” (Field notes, 9-12-07). Throughout my observations, I listened for references to race. Sometimes I heard race referenced in liturgy as a category of people, such as in the phrase, “people of all nations, races and languages,” as described in one sermon (Field notes, 4-1-07). Another example of this is in the Ghanaian hymn, *Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love*, in which one line is translated into English as an image of harmony: “neighbors are varied in color and race.”

While this generic reference to race seemed to create no concern, the unspoken protocol I observed among many church members – mostly European Americans but a few African Americans as well – is that direct references to race are not to be mentioned. For example, when I first described my research on multiracial congregations and the limitations of my own “white” perspective, one elderly black man tried to redirect me from using race to identify myself and others. “Say ‘people,’” he told me (Field notes, 2-18-07). Where I could understand why he would not want me to racialize other people’s identity, I was surprised that he tried to dissuade me from racializing the limitations of my perspective in a culturally diverse society. His promotion of the type of colorblindness that I rarely have seen expressed among African Americans – particularly middle aged and older men – may indicate that he has assimilated white norms of race evasion and the cultural practice of the church. It appears that he wants to belong to a colorblind church. In Helms’ (1990) theory of black racial identity (see Table 1), this man’s behavior here would indicate that his “reference group orientation” is

“white/European American,” meaning a world view that often mirrors that of white people. This tendency is problematic (as I will show in later chapters) for other African Americans whose perspectives and opinions differ, because when racialized issues surface in the congregation some white members regard him as the voice of reason.

By contrast, other African American members are so sensitized to the way that white individuals avoid using race words that they tell me that they sometimes “hear” reference to race even when other words are substituted by the speaker. I addressed this observation in my interview protocol by asking each interview subject (both African American and European American) if he or she ever hears conversations alluding to race when direct references (e.g., race, black, African American) are not used. Bonilla-Silva (2003) describe as *race talk* these “specific linguistic ways of articulating racial views” (p. 64).

“I’ve heard the word ‘change.’ I’ve heard the word ‘transitioning,’” said Diane, an African American who interprets these words as inferences to the shifting racial balance in at Crossroads Church (Interview, 8-28-08). Orinthia, another African American, mentioned disparaging references by white members of the church about the behaviors of the congregation’s youth, all of whom are African American. “I don’t know that they would say the same thing if all the kids were white,” Orinthia noted (Interview, 10-19-07).

One example comes from a conversation that I had with Catherine, a staff member at Crossroads Church who is assigned to oversee the pastoral visitations to the sick and to elderly members who no longer attend. While Catherine and I waited for the staff to arrive for one of its weekly meetings, she told me that during her visits to some of the elderly white members it is not uncommon to hear, “that ‘the church has changed so much’” (Field notes, 6-6-07). Catherine interpreted this phrase as a code for racial change – the code being the substitution of “words, phrases, and/or ideas that may camouflage its

true racist intent or purpose” (Coates, 2008, p. 223). At Crossroads, code words include “them,” “diversity,” “balance.”

Catherine suggested that these members use coded language because “they may assume they have to be more guarded” about what they say because Catherine is a member of the church staff (Field notes, 6-6-07). Regardless of the caution these speakers exercised in not saying anything blatantly racist, these comments still demonstrate the speaker’s assumption that Catherine is Caucasian and would understand their perspective. What they may not realize is that Catherine grew up in Chile (the child of a Chilean father and European American mother) and is married to a biracial man (the son of a German mother and an African American and Native American father). Had the speaker known Catherine’s background they may have exercised even more caution – what Goffman’s (1967) theory on interaction rituals refers to as a *front stage* performance.

Picca and Feagin (2007) suggest that the most overt expressions of racism “has gone back stage – that is, into private settings where whites find themselves among other whites, especially friends and relatives” (p. 44) compared to the multiracial *front stage*. White individuals negotiate these two stages and adjust their performance accordingly. In this congregation where white members struggle constantly to be what they perceive as “politically correct,” I noticed that even the back stage performances among white individuals are tempered by the desire to appear non-racist. With so much concern about the appearance of being colorblind, the aversive racism framework is particularly appropriate at Crossroads Church because white members there seem to constantly assess what might be perceived as racism.

In an interview with Ed (white), a long-time member, I asked him if there are ever times when he hears in conversations words that allude to race when the words typically used to describe race are not used. Ed responded with three examples that shed light on the many dimensions of this practice of substituting non-raced words. Such practices allow white individuals to express an opinion or pass a judgment about African

Americans without having these words reflect back on them (or so they think) as being racist in nature (Myers & Williamson, 2001). In this congregation where all of the youth and all but two of the children are black, “I think now whenever they say ‘children and youth’ everybody just assumes that they’re all black,” Ed told me (Interview, 9-24-07). This reference carries an added level of meaning based on contexts such as this one that Ed described: “You’ll hear, uh, I think the other thing about the kids, you know, being unattended and running around” (Interview, 9-24-07).

Ed cited another example of coded reference in regards to the music program, which I noted earlier is central to the identity of Crossroads Church and which became a flashpoint of controversy near the end of Ken’s 20-year tenure as director of music. The controversy arose as Ken began relying less on professional singers and more on a volunteer choir (including many youth, all of whom are black), and as he introduced more music from cultures outside of the canon of western church music. When Ken left Crossroads Church for another position out of state, Pastor Christine wanted to continue – to some degree – the cultural diversity that Ken introduced in the music program. Because the interim organist was not skilled in other types of music, Pastor Christine hired a musician who specializes in sacred jazz to lead the music during four Sunday liturgies, which proved to be too much change too quickly for many white members and a few African Americans. In response to my query, Ed cited this controversy as an example of the subconscious tactics white members of the congregation use to avoid direct references to race while speaking about it:

I think it’s sometimes more what they are describing. Whatever the situation might be. In other words, um, ... even that time we had that discussion about the [sacred jazz music] and stuff like that. I never heard anybody say it in racial terms. I heard ... talk about it in the style of music. Okay? And yet you kind of knew that the style of music was more black-oriented than white-oriented. (Interview, 9-24-07)

While this coded reference to the sacred jazz refers primarily to what Ed perceived as preferences of taste among white members of Crossroads Church, another coded reference that he described hints at stereotypes they hold of African Americans.

“I’ve heard people – not in group conversations but in individual conversations – refer to them as blacks or whites or you know. . . . I’ve never heard people as described as “Well, they’re the poor people” or “they’re the people with all the money,” you know. But they’ll refer to things like the late arriving, that’s colored people time – “CPT,” somebody calls it. They always come to everything late. Okay? Uh, you’ll hear, uh, I think the other thing about the kids, you know, being unattended and running around. (Interview, 9-24-07)

This hesitancy to speak of race is due, in part, to a white individual’s recognition that while race references might be tolerated back stage among his or her in-group and they must be avoided in more public front stage settings where they might be considered racist. The theory of aversive racism is at work here too. The front stage performances described here offers evidence of the desire to appear nonprejudiced, which according to the performer’s assessment of the situation, requires him or her to use non-raced words.

Front Stage Performances Are Exercises in Caution

Goffman (1959) describes this shift in behaviors as a *performance* – the contrast between behavior within one’s in-group and the care taken to act politically correct in mixed race setting where there are certain expectations against racism. When choosing words and expressions, Ed acknowledged that, “I try to be a little more careful when I know it’s a mixed group, uh, just because I am kind of a free speaker and I might say things that could be taken the wrong way” (Interview, 9-24-07). Here as the theory of aversive racism suggests, Ed stated his desire to not appear prejudiced in this racialized situation and he determined the need to be cautious about the words and expressions that he used so as not to appear prejudiced. When I asked how comfortable he – and other

white members that he knows – is when the terms such as “race, racial, and racism” come up in mixed race settings at Crossroads, he said

I think that is one of the subjects that they tiptoe on. Okay? I think you don’t do that. In other words, if you kind of know the answer is race, you’ll listen to people talk and they’ll never say that. They’ll always use some other. (Interview, 9-24-07)

In Goffman’s (1967) theory, both of these examples that Ed described would be a front stage performances – Ed’s careful choice of words in mixed race settings, and the hesitancy of white people to reference race at all, as he described.

Ed’s candor with me demonstrated that he does not think that he needs to exercise caution with me because I am white like him and I would understand the predicament that reference to race creates for him. In this congregation that is so evenly balanced between African American and white members and where, because of that, all work is done in racially mixed groups, Ed explained the caution the he perceives people must exercise.

Ed: It’s so balanced that people don’t want to push, tip it one way or the other. In other words, you and I get along and we don’t talk about race. So why should we mess that up?

MHH¹⁸: You and I did.

Ed: “You and I” meaning two opposite.

MHH: Okay. So a black person and a white person?

Ed: That’s right, that’s right. (Interview, 9-24-07)

These performance maneuvers by white members are transparent to some black members. Referring to white members of the congregation as a whole, Orinthia, an African American, explained, “I think that they guard what they say. Particularly [she

¹⁸ I reference myself in interview transcripts by my initials: MHH.

names one long-time member] and I mean he's determined to be a *P.R.* man!" (Interview, 10-19-07).

Racial Hesitancy Stems From Not Knowing How to Talk About Race

While this calculated avoidance of race words can be attributed to an attempt both to avoid feeling guilt over the legacy of slavery and segregation, and to avoid raising the ire of a black person as Cone (2002) suggests, my research reveals another factor as well. I notice that this racial *hesitancy* also relates to the concern by a white person that he or she might make a racial misstep and that such an indiscretion might reflect negatively on oneself as racist – again, an affirmation of the aversive racism theory.

In the staff meeting described in Chapter 5, where the clergy (Pastors Christine and Jason) and key program staff (Antoinette, Paul and Allen) talked about the “white party,” they tried to make sense of why parishioners resort to segregated gatherings. Hoping to elicit the staff’s interpretations of my observations – an aspect of member-checking intended to verify my analysis – I asked the staff about the reluctance of many of the white people to participate in programs where there is personal story sharing. Although new to the staff, Paul (white) surmised that it relates a larger social problem: “We are all taught today – no matter what your mind set is – to be socially correct” (Field observations, 9-12-07). I suggest that this racial hesitancy also stems from the fact that many white people do not know how to speak of race to people of African ancestry, that their own socialization about what is politically correct has not worked well at times.

For example, Ed described to me a conversation he had with Ron, a fellow leader in the church – an African American with whom he has such an affable relationship that he invited Ron to go with him to a professional baseball game recently. Ed described how he and Ron were trying to get help for the church website and had been brainstorming ideas about who they could tap for help when Ed approached Ron with his latest idea. Ed

described how he told Ron, ““You know who might be good for that website thing? That tall girl that [sits] in the back, ... because I think she is an engineer or something”” (Interview, 9-24-07). Ed said that he did not know the woman’s name but he knew that Ron might know her because Ron has learned so many members’ names through his involvement as an usher in worship. Ed described the encounter with Ron and how he kept guessing the identity of the woman to whom Ed was referring but without success, and then Ed started to chuckle as he told what eventually happened:

So what I really wanted to say was ‘the tall *white* girl.’ But I am smart enough that at that particular incident and not say that. So we’re going through all these other descriptions and then he says, “Oh!” he says, “You mean Lynn” or whatever the hell her name was. He says, “The tall *white* girl!” [Ed paused with a hearty laugh.] Now, I would *never* have said. I would have thought that it wouldn’t have been politically correct or even *right* to say “a black person” or “a white person.” (Interview, 9-24-07)

By mentioning that he is “smart enough” to know what is *not* appropriate in mixed raced settings, Ed alluded to the source of his hesitancy – what he has been socialized to *not* utter in the presence of black individuals. Hall (1959/1973) describes this unquestioned adoption of social cues as the process of *formal learning* that begins in infancy. It is a two-way process that occurs when we make a mistake and someone admonishes us in binary fashion about what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior, a process that is repeated until we learn the community norms.

At this point Ed, again, directed his words to me as a fellow white person – someone who he assumed would have learned the same social cues about racial etiquette and who therefore could understand why he was so flummoxed:

In other words, if you and I were talking, I’d say, “That black person.” But if you were a black person, I wouldn’t say, “Well, she’s a black person” or whatever. So here I am sitting here trying to, grasping at straws as to how to describe this person. Well, when it comes all down, I could have just said, “That tall white girl.” (Interview, 9-24-07)

The formal learning that Ed, a white man in his 60s, has learned from white culture about interacting with black individuals has failed to help him negotiate this setting where he is among African Americans all of the time.

Trepagnier (2006) suggests that while that some people would argue that the identifying characteristic “black” has an “otherizing” (p. 55) effect on people of African ancestry, the use of the adjective “black” can be instrumental in certain contexts. For example, its use is appropriate as an identifying characteristic that does not reproduce stereotypes, such as Ron’s response to Ed: ““Oh! ... You mean Lynn ... The tall *white* girl!”” By contrast, the deliberate avoidance of a race adjective “when its use would serve a purpose is tantamount to pretending that race does not exist or was not noticed, a prime example of racial etiquette,” according to Trepagnier. Clearly, Ed avoided using the adjective “black” because the racial etiquette that Ed learned in white culture, lead him to think – like so many white members I observed at Crossroads Church – that using that word would be perceived as racist. In the aversive racism framework, they chose what they perceived was the “not racist” response when, in actuality, it can have the *effect* of a racist response for African Americans for whom such behaviors are transparent.

Many of the scenarios that Ed described in this chapter illustrate the inadequacy of cultural teachings about racial etiquette for white people like Ed who genuinely want to negotiate the interracial landscape, of which they have little experience. Clinging to assumptions that mention of race must be avoided at all costs, white members of Crossroads avoid the most effective antidote to this misinformation – talking directly to African Americans about their notions of what is polite and what is not.

Cone (2002) suggests that white people avoid talk of racism “because they do not *have* to talk about it” (p. 6) [italics in original]. While I agree that a white individual may spend much of his or her life blissfully oblivious to racism, my field observations suggest additional factors come into play when a white individual encounters such a diverse institution as Crossroads Church. Brian, a European American in his 30s who joined

Crossroads in recent years, suggested that much of the hesitancy that white individuals have about race talk stems from being totally unaware of what life is like for African Americans.

I just think there is such a chasm. There's such a divide, you know? I mean, [I] don't even know what the problems are except in a very abstract way for an African American family, or mother with a high school kid. Or, you know, the problems going on in Crossroads High ... the gun violence, the lack of library books and the things you hear about. ... I just, I feel there *isn't* a lot of conversation, I think, with the other racial groups. (Interview, 10-10-07)

Brian offered this assessment during a structured interview in his home when I asked whether he thinks that the diversity at church has had an effect on how people talk about race. I interviewed Brian jointly with his wife Emily (also a European American) in a 2½-hour conversation in the living room of their home – an insightful conversation for this couple about each other about experiences they never discussed.

Emily, described how she once had a conversation with Pastor Christine (the pastor, who is European American) and Pastor Jason (the associate pastor, who is African American) that touched on race and racism. This caught her husband unawares.

Brian: Pastor Jason is the *last* person in the world I'd want to [talk to] about racism! [laughs]

Emily: Pastor Jason? Why?

Brian: I don't know.

Emily: I mean, I think he's, he's. It'd be easy because, you know, he's familiar with the way. He grew up near here and he's involved in *this* church and, you know, we know of his personality and experience just from the pulpit. And he's a sensitive guy. I think anything he would say would be honest. And I wouldn't ...

Brian: I could more easily talk to Pastor Christine. I think, I think Pastor Jason is, um, scary smart. And I only know about the *surface* of anything about him. I think he's got like this *whole* level of, you know, ...

Emily: But I think what he would have to say would be interesting.

Brian: Yeah. Sure! Sure! Sure!

Emily: And even if he had some rough experiences ...

Brian: I wouldn't mind hearing him lecture but [belly laugh] no dialogue!

MHH: And why? I mean, not necessarily Pastor Jason, but just what is easier about lecture than dialogue with somebody? I am assuming that there is some ...

Brian: You want to open? Yeah, there's a level of, sort of, insecurity and, you know, opening yourself up to criticism or maybe being challenged too much.

MHH: Beyond your comfort zone?

Brian: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

MHH: Okay. So it doesn't necessarily have to do with Pastor Jason, per se, as much as a dialogue?

Brian: I just think so. I really don't know Pastor Jason at all, you know.

Emily: But I think if there is ... if we would be hesitant to have a discussion with Pastor Jason, does that come from being like hyper-sensitive about race issues that ...

Brian: Oh! Yeah. Maybe. You know. Sure. (Interview, 10-10-07)

For Brian, the hesitancy does not stem from discomfort from the *hearing* about race – “I wouldn't mind hear him lecture” – but from feeling personally unequipped to *engage* in the discussion about race. Cone (2002) suggests that white guilt and fear of black rage are key to this type of silence, and that by avoiding conversation they wield power that assures that the discourse never takes place. Again, while I agree with Cone's assessment – that power, guilt and fear all play a role – it still does not account for a hesitancy I observed, a hesitancy that stems from limited experience with discussing race issues. Tatum (2004) observed something similar in the “white culture of silence about racism” among college students, explaining that they “often have little experience engaging in dialogue about racial issues” (p.117). She suggests that this inexperience fuels the cycle of silence – without practice in such a dialogue these young white adults

cannot overcome their inhibitions to engage in interracial conversations about race so the silence deepens.

Racial Hesitancy Is More Obvious Than White People Might Think

The hesitancy of the types that Ed and Brian described above may seem subtle to white individuals, but it is quite obvious to the seven African Americans I interviewed, when I asked about the effect the church's diversity had on how people talk about race. "They don't talk about it," said Diane with a laugh. "They don't! They find it hard to" (Interview, 8-28-07). I asked her whether this is the case for both European Americans and African Americans in the congregation. "No. We can talk. We do. African American people, we talk about it. ... Quite a few. Most of us do. Most of us do." But as for conversations with white members of Crossroads Church about race and racism, this African American woman in her 50s summed it up: "I have been on a lot of conversations in that church in 19 years and they really don't" (Interview, 8-28-07).

Orinthia – an African American retiree in a separate interview – also responded with a hearty laugh to my question that suggests that conversations about race issues take place at Crossroads Church because, "It almost never happens" (Interview, 10-17-07). Hannah and Billy T.¹⁹ (an African American couple near 60 who have been members for 20 years) laughed during light-hearted moments through much of our 2½- hour interview, but answered this question in a much more serious tone. Said Hannah: "I don't believe that we are even anywhere near having a discussion at Crossroads Church, really, about race and class and diversity. I don't think we are" (Interview, 8-29-07).

¹⁹ Lest the reader think that it is presumptuous of me (a white woman researcher) to assign the pseudonym "Billy T." to a man of his age (near 60), upper middle socioeconomic status and professional accomplishments, I should point out that he chose this pseudonym himself because it is the name of a beloved "brother" from his youth who has since died.

Orinthia, suggested reasons for this hesitancy: “I think that is something that we, as a nation, do not want to talk about because there is a lot of guilt,” on the part of white individuals and sometimes even concern that such conversations are not polite (Interview, 10-17-07). This echoes both Cone’s (2002) theory and my own thoughts. Orinthia made a point of adding that some black individuals – particularly those of her generation – also are hesitant to engage in this subject with white individuals because they have been socialized not to trust white people.

There is a lot of feeling that if you let out your feelings, I mean, we never, we grew up saying, “You don’t talk about this.” ... You would not talk to a white person about it. ... Our parents have always said, “You don’t tell white folks your business. You *don’t tell them* your business because they can *hurt* you.” You don’t tell them what you have, because they’ll want to take it away. And, in some senses, you know, that’s true. [Emphasis in original.] (Interview, 10-17-07)

Here, Orinthia offered an example of black racial paranoia – a fear based on life experiences with certain white individuals who have used information they gleaned from African Americans against them.

How Comfortable Are African Americans Talking About Race?

Although Hannah is biracial (her mother is German) she self identifies as an African American, like her father. When I asked Hannah how comfortable she is – and how comfortable she thinks other church members are – when someone in a racially mixed group brings up the terms race, racial, and racism, she explained that it is not an issue.

Hannah: It *rarely* comes up. Right? But I am very comfortable in discussing, I have no problem, I’d be happy to discuss anything about race, racism, culture, being biracial, anything. I’d be happy to discuss it with you, with anyone. I don’t care who that person might be. I would *relish* some opportunities, actually, [she giggled] to sit and talk about not just *my* experience but to hear what the other [interrupted herself]. Because all of us have a story. We all have a story. And I am *not* uncomfortable in speaking about race. I believe others might be, might

experience a whole level of discomfort if they every really wanted to engage me and really find out what is it that I really, truly think honestly. Um.

MHH: When you say “others” do you have ...

Hannah: White people. And also some of the black folks there that I know are very, very conservative and they don’t want to talk about race. They don’t want to ruffle any feathers. They just want to be the pew people. ... They just want to go to the pews and leave. ... But to get to engage in a series of conversations or dialogues, I think there would be discomfort on anybody’s side, depending on who they are. (Interview, 8-27-07)

I asked all interview subjects about their comfort “when somebody talks to you about race issues” at Crossroads Church and Orinthia made a point of telling me: “You, know, I am quite willing to talk to them” (Interview, 10-17-07). Cone (2002) suggests that this willingness by Africans Americans, such as Hannah and Orinthia (and Billy T., as we will see below) to talk about race stems from the power imbalance between European Americans and African Americans. The former hold “most of the power in the world – economic, political, social, cultural, intellectual, and religious” (Cone, p. 6) and people with these forms of power also wield the power over discourse. By contrast, because African Americans have little power, Cone (2002) suggests that they have much to gain and little to lose from talking to European Americans about issues which stem from racism. Orinthia’s observations of Crossroads give credence to Cone’s theories. She noted that whether race talk is spontaneous or planned, “If people of good will are really willing to struggle through this, it can be a very positive experience” (Interview, 10-19-07).

Tatum (2004) suggests that “For many people of color, learning to break the silence is a survival issue. To remain silent would be to disconnect from her own experience, to swallow and internalize her own oppression, the cost of silence is too high” (p. 118). Helms (1990) describes this cost as the passive phase of the *pre-encounter* stage of the black racial identity stages, which I described in Chapter 2. (See also Table 1.) This observation helps to explain the willingness, desire and genuine efforts by

numerous African American members to nurture a dialogue at Crossroads Church that would help white members to understand the African American experience. All but the youngest African Americans that I interviewed spoke of how profoundly their experiences of racism have shaped their perspective on life, and white members will never understand those perspectives without first listening to their stories. For example, Billy T. and Hannah, a couple near age 60 who have been members for more than 20 years, noted that fellow congregants at Crossroads Church do not have a clue about their experiences of racial prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination.

Billy T.: I'd love to share my story or my experiences. Um, you know, I grew up in a white town. I went to a white elementary school, junior high school, high school, and the first few years of college I was an athlete on the football team at an all men's school of 800. You look at the picture of my freshman class. There's five or six Blacks: two are African and three are athletes – you know, we're on the football team.

Hannah: He was banned from a swimming pool. He and his brother couldn't swim.

Billy T.: I grew with the YMCA and I wasn't allowed to go to well, my coach, who is still a mentor and a close friend of mine.... He was my swim coach at the Y when I was a kid. And he's got the picture of a nationally ranked relay team and one of us was Black. And I wasn't allowed to join a suburban swim club in the town, and it was *public*. But, you know, the experiences are there. And the emotion is there. And I remember a lot of this stuff vividly. I would *love* to engage people in a conversation. But [reduces his voice to a whisper to explain] no one opens their mouth. [returns to normal voice] No one dares tread ...

Hannah: And, you know, it's not to share baggage.

Billy T.: No. No. (Interview, 8-27-07)

The goal of this sort of dialogue, they said, is to enlighten European Americans about the experiences that shaped the perspective of African Americans, as well as the racial realities they face today. Regardless of the benefits of this type of discourse at Crossroads Church, said Orinthia, "It is *rarely* arranged to do such a thing. And people don't want to do it because they are not going to be honest" (Interview, 10-19-07). She

said that this includes most white members, but also some black individuals because they “don’t want to do it because they risk unmasking attitudes or feelings that they don’t want to face” (Interview, 10-19-07). Orinthia explained:

And so they don’t do it. You *avoid*. You know, I said, I don’t talk to a lot of people I know about religion, about sex, or about politics. You just leave those things out and then you can get on with a person. You can talk about the weather. You can get on about clothing and stuff that really doesn’t matter anyway. You can get along with a person forever that way. (Interview, 10-19-07)

The racial paranoia that Orinthia described here is a survival strategy.

Regardless of the hesitancy of Crossroads’ members to talk about race and racism, Orinthia was adamant that the congregation must “deal with the fact of racism in this country and how it has affected everybody” (Interview, 10-19-07). There are a variety of ways. “I think one of the most important things is to get it out orally in the open,” Orinthia said. This can be done with drama, discussion groups, or even Bible study focused on passages issues of prejudice and discrimination and discussion of how those passages speak to the same themes in contemporary society, she said explaining:

You know, there are many ways to do it that are not insensitive. But, I think that, you have to, I think you have to try to help people be honest about it and to see their role in it. And it’s not easy. I mean, I am still struggling to see what my role is in racism! So, I think everybody else has to do the same. And, um, not let people off the hook by having one little program and think, “Ah! We are wonderful now.” I get kind of tired of hearing about this diverse church that’s not so [she pauses to laugh] diverse. You know? You can be kind of hypocritical when you think, you go around boasting about how diverse you are and yet you are not putting any effort in to *really* being diverse. (Interview, 10-19-07).

Orinthia was referencing the public relations effort by Crossroads Church – not just the public relations materials, but the constant back-patting by the leadership about Crossroads Church being a model of diversity.

Naturally Occurring Discussions of Race Issues

Except for back stage among one's own racial group where it is discussed as an issue, race is rarely discussed at Crossroads Church, particularly not in a way that creates the type of racial understanding that effective interracial dialogue can provide. However dialogue about race does occur in two places. One is in a book group which – although begun by several women at Crossroads Church – is not a formal program of Crossroads Church and has many outside members, so I did not observe any gatherings of this multicultural group of women. Another place that discussion of race surfaces is in the personal story sharing that occurs naturally is in the Sunday morning Bible study (that follows worship service), a program which very few white members attend.

“You need to be there,” insisted Gwen – the lone white person who regularly attends the Bible study – the first time I talked to her about my study on “How members of a biracial congregation interact across race” (Field notes, 4-22-07). Gwen told me that discussions of race frequently surface in Bible study when African Americans – who account for nearly everyone in the group – respond to the passages in scripture by recounting experiences in their own lives.²⁰

At Crossroads Church, “people don't think there are race issues under the surface, but there are,” Gwen said, referring to many of her peers who joined the church decades ago as she did (Field notes, 4-22-07). The trick with the negotiating the race dynamics at Crossroads Church, she later told me, is “getting the white people to listen to the black

²⁰ Bible study requires a close reading of the text. Some of it involves exegesis – a study of what the text meant at the time and for the audience that it was written. Other times it involves hermeneutics – a study of the way Scripture speaks to contemporary readers and situations. In hermeneutical study, the reader often relates the words of Scripture to one's own life story and for people who feel oppressed by the dominant culture, that story cannot be told without reference to racism.

people. And it will take a great deal of patience.” Her voice choked up and her eyes brimmed with tears as she emphasized, “A great deal of patience to just listen and not react” (Interview, 6-19-07). To illustrate this, Gwen described her own learning in one Bible study session:

It got very heavy, a very heavy racial discussion. And I don't even know what the racial discussion was. And I sat quietly and listened to it. I mean I wasn't counteracting. I thought whatever had to be said had to be said. When it is said then you know what people are thinking. And she turned around to me and she said – I'll cry over this one [Gwen's voice choked up a little] – “I think of you as Gwen. I don't think of you as white or black. I think of you as Gwen.” Which was a statement saying, “I don't see you in concert with ... what they are experiencing from the white community in that church.” (Interview, 7-10-07)

Indeed, the Bible study class is the only place – outside of the informal discussions among the clergy and program staff following the more formal staff meetings – where I witnessed genuine discourse on race and racism at Crossroads Church. Answers to reflective questions posed in Bible study are rooted in a person's experience of the world in which he or she lives and at each of the seven Bible study sessions that I observed, at least one African American referred to a painful encounter with racism.

Unfortunately, very few white members of Crossroads Church benefit from these frank discussions about race and racism because so few people attend Bible study and those who do are predominantly elderly African American women. Attendance never exceeded more than 10 members during my observations and on those Sundays accounted for less than 7% of the people who had been in worship, and none of the members perceived as key leaders of the congregation. During my observations, Gwen was the only white person who regularly attended, although I did notice two other white members (both women and both over age 70) attend one time each during the seven sessions I observed. The only men who attended were Pastor Jason (who lead the Bible study) and Paulo (a native of Angola who came to the U.S. as a young man in 1963). At 47, Pastor Jason was one of the youngest who attended, along with a Philippine woman

in her 40s who came once a month and an African American visitor in her 50s who attended about twice a month.

The group uses the *Serendipity Bible*, which Pastor Jason said he chose for its user friendliness, particularly the sidebar questions it poses to aid study groups in sharing deeply, but even this aspect reveals the Eurocentric assumptions held by the publishers. Gwen told me about one sidebar question that asked readers to reflect on their family tree and she described how she excitedly told the group what she learned from her own genealogical study and a trip to the Netherlands, where her father was born. In mid-story, Gwen said, an African American woman cut her off saying she was not interested in the story. “And there I realized – and I should have known better – that to have a family tree when others in the room cannot document a family tree ... I should have been sensitive to that,” said Gwen (Interview, 6-19-07).

By contrast to that encounter which I did not witness, all of the race dialogue that I observed in Bible study was non-confrontational, and a natural progression such as one discussion that spring boarded from the story of the leper in Luke 5:12. The group compared the prevalence of leprosy in the biblical era with the prevalence of AIDS today, and then listened as Paulo (the Angolan) described how the contagion of leprosy continues today in parts of Africa. Pastor Jason encouraged the group to broaden their perspective on illness. Cynthia responded, “We can “look at something like racism as a really profound disease” (Field notes, 5-13-07). Pastor Jason journeyed with Cynthia down this path, suggesting that, “We cannot change the facts of the past, but we can change the meaning” of how those facts are interpreted. For example, Pastor Jason suggested that while “we cannot change the facts of slavery, we can focus on the how and why” slavery occurred. This attempt to reframe the events of the past – in this case slavery – in a way that is constructive for addressing injustices today is “life-giving” because it is a quest for “abundant life,” Pastor Jason explained (Field notes, 5-13-07).

At another Bible study session a few months later, the story of the centurion (Luke 7:1) segued into a discussion of power in first century Roman Empire to discussion of power expressed in U.S. military activities in the Middle East. Gwen (white) suggested that citizens do not protest loudly enough about the atrocities, such as the shooting a day earlier in this city of a 14-year-old boy (black) on a bike by an 18-year-old driver (white) who was angry that the bike slowed him down on the narrow city street. Joyce (black) responded to Gwen (white) by speaking without reference to race of the conditions under which so many African Americans live – in neighborhoods torn by violence and fearful of testifying against criminals out of fear of being their next victim. Gwen raised the issue of race, suggesting that “the white community isn’t crying out,” that they seem to think that the violence is the problem of other racial and ethnic groups who reside in the neighborhoods most affected (Field notes, 7-15-07).

Joyce responded in surprise, speaking directly to Gwen: “My friend and I talk about that all the time!” Even watching newscasters on television, Joyce said that she recognizes their disengagement and described the atmosphere of the newscasters when a story of violence is reported. The newscasters “are giggling and talking” through much of the broadcast, she said pointing out that “then they get serious” when reporting the crime, “then they go back to giggling and talking” (Field notes, 7-15-07).

Bible study, said Pastor Jason, is one of the most effective places for constructive dialogue about race because the shared focus on the “Christian story” helps people find similarities when their life experiences otherwise can appear so different (Interview, 8-22-07). Christians have long claimed that they guide their lives by the teachings of scripture. “Well, if you’re claiming that then I can make some claims of you,” Pastor Jason said. He is convinced that with a gentle challenge, the church can bring people around. “It’s going to come to a place where ... you’re not going to be able to hold on to your faith and hold onto this prejudice” (Interview, 8-22-07).

These Bible study conversations, said Gwen, have had a profound effect on her. She told me that she had to learn to listen to perspectives of African Americans without resorting to the white tendency to offer one's own racialized perspective – what I have referred to as the aversive racism strategy of rationalizing behaviors on factors other than race. She also described how she had to reflect on her own racialized thinking and racism. These two practices have enabled her to broaden her racial perspective in ways that most white individuals that I observed have not been able to do because they were more inclined to reflect on other white people's racism than on their own.

The Story of the Jena Six Creates a Focus for Dialogue

In September of 2007 – near the end of my field observations at Crossroads Church – the impending trial of the Jena Six gained the attention of the national news media and, in turn, the church staff who used it as a focus for several dialogues. The chronology of events cited in the news began with an incident a year earlier at the public high school in Jena, Louisiana, when a black youth sat under a tree which white students who congregated there had claimed as their own, by unspoken agreement. That night someone hung three nooses from the tree. The perpetrators were suspended, and there began a volleying of racial incidents between white and black students that culminated in the serious beating of one white youth by six black youths who were charged with felonies as a result. Activists decrying as racist the harsher penalties levied on the black youth, brought national attention to the Jena Six by mobilizing protestors to travel from all over the country and converge on Jena in time for the first defendant's trial.

The following encounter illustrates how white individuals – particularly some who describe themselves as “liberal” – presume themselves to be enlightened about racism and less in need of education than other members of the church. This reality is poignantly captured in the transcript below of the dialogue between Connie (white) and

Orinthia and Antoinette (both black) who were trying to help Connie recognize her own limited perspective. The dialogue took place in the midst of the meeting of the multicultural group, which had engaged in an exercise comparing two different perspectives on the events that lead up to the Jena Six trial.

Connie: ... It seemed to me that the very kind of thing that an integrated congregation *should* be talking about. You know, it's up to us. And because we have young people being killed all the time, and being jailed, we have violence in the city that is the subject of conversation all the time. And we need to [inaudible] with these issues that are impacting all of our lives.

Orinthia: I agree that this is something that should be discussed. But, on the other hand, you know, people think you shouldn't be discussing it at all. So what do you do?

Connie: Well maybe we need to have a forum outside the church service – the Sunday service. Maybe a post-service discussion, you know, in one of the break-out rooms and just have a chance to talk about it, you know, to get it off your chest.

Orinthia: Why can't *we* talk about it?

Antoinette: We're right here! We're the microcosm of the congregation. You would make a plan, have a program, bring a bunch of people instead of just dealing with it amongst ourselves.

Orinthia: I'll start it. (Field notes, 9-26-07)

Connie, like some of the other newer white members of Crossroads Church, presumes herself to have a more highly developed sense of racial identity attitude than others in the congregation, which is true. Her participation in the multicultural group would indicate an “intellectual recognition of personal responsibility in racism” characteristic in the pseudo-independence stage of the WRIAS (Helms, 1990) (see Figure 2). Even in this phase of racial identity attitude – a phase marked by the shaping of a non-racist identity – Connie still succumbs to the same undercurrent of fear about being labeled a racist, that plague most white people in the congregation. This is the minefield that the staff tries to negotiate.

Jena Six: “Given What This Is and Given Who We Are, What Is an Appropriate Way for Us to Address This, To Lift This?”

At one staff meeting Pastor Jason – who avidly follows the news and radio talk shows and keeps everyone else posted on current events – briefed the staff about the long-simmering racial tensions. The trial was scheduled for the day following the staff meeting that I describe below. After Pastor Jason’s summary and a series of questions and comments, the staff had a sense of urgency that the events in Jena, Louisiana needed to be brought to the attention of the members of Crossroads Church. “Given what this is and given who we are, what is an appropriate way for us to address this, to lift this?” asked Antoinette. “I think it is Sunday’s sermon,” answered Pastor Christine. The ministers take turns preaching and Pastor Jason had already begun work on his sermon so turning toward him, Pastor Christine asked: “Can you fit that in?” (Field notes, 9-19-07).

Sermons at Crossroads Church, like sermons at most churches affiliated with an old-line Protestant denomination, are preached on the Bible passages assigned for the day which are part of a three-year cycle of Bible readings read at Sunday worship.²¹ The first Scripture passage assigned for that Sunday was Jeremiah 8:18-19.1, a passage Pastor Jason later summarized: “God was ... bemoaning the fact that the children of Israel had turned away. And there was so much suffering amongst the people because of this.” The other reading is from Luke 16:1:13 which Pastor Jason summarized as the “parable where there is the rich man and a steward and the steward basically ... lets the debtors off with half of what they owe because he hadn’t been collecting things and he was going to get canned” (Field notes, 9-25-07). The staff pressured Pastor Jason to find a way to work the

²¹ This practice of the ordered reading of Scripture began in the 4th century (Cross, 1997). The *Revised Common Lectionary*, used by most churches in the old-line Protestant denominations, provides a continuous reading of the Bible that is uniform across denominational lines in worship on a given Sunday.

Jena Six controversy into the message of his sermon, but he did not see an obvious fit, and he was reluctant to raise Jena Six without connecting it to the readings.

Pastor Jason: I don't know. I am not going to force it. We've already picked the passages. But if I can find a way to do it, I will. ... During the prayers.

Pastor Christine: Yeah, I think that, that's just holding it up. I'd really like to deal with the issue. You can't change? What if you just preached on it? Screw the lectionary.

Pastor Jason: I don't know what I would say. ... [Then speaks in an exaggerated voice.] Racism is bad! [Resumes his normal voice.] What do you say? (Field notes, 9-19-07)

Pastor Jason was genuinely perplexed. The staff refused to back down and spent several minutes pressuring him about the importance of using the Jena Six controversy to illustrate how similar problems occur at home, in Crossroads. From the cacophony of everyone talking at once, Antoinette's voice emerged: "This is a situation where kids are being impacted by the racial implications in our country and we [Crossroads Church members] sit here thinking that we don't have any problems or whatever" (Field notes, 9-19-07).

The lively staff discussion that ensued helped Pastor Jason to reframe his sermon to include the Jena Six, tie it to the scripture assigned for that day, and make the message relevant to Crossroads Church. In talking this through as a staff, Pastor Jason realized the nature of his reservations. He said that he is uncomfortable that some people are more likely to traipse off to highly publicized events like the Jena Six protest, than they are to address systemic issues locally that if not addressed can lead to conflicts like those in Jena, Louisiana. He explained this to the staff, who responded:

Antoinette: I am not even there. I am saying that this is an example that there still [are] serious racial tensions in our country.

Pastor Christine: Of course!

Antoinette: [In a lowered, but firm voice she responded directly to Pastor Christine.] It's not, "of course." There are people ... *in this church* who *use* this church as an example to say there is no problem.

Here Antoinette has alluded to the 50-50 balance in the congregation between African American and European American members and the illusion that this creates for the latter that racial issues are *not* a problem at Crossroads. Antoinette explained:

So first for me is: This is happening in our country. This is a reality, number one. And then secondly, you know, ... then that connection that there are ways, local ways, even if we can't go there [Jena, Louisiana], there are things that we can do that continue to address whatever. ... But the biggest thing is for those people who don't think that there are racial issues in America, let alone we couldn't even do a race *anything* here because that title is going to turn people off. This is a reality. (Field notes, 9-19-07)

In the 34 worship services I observed, the Crossroads Church clergy rarely mentioned racism in their sermons – except in the most generalized terms – bowing, it appears to the concerns among some congregants that such talk will break the peace, that it is divisive. The sermon that Pastor Jason delivered four days after this staff meeting discussion was the one exception I observed to this unspoken rule against talking about race issues from the pulpit, but a somewhat tempered breach.

In the sermon Pastor Jason briefly and dispassionately mentioned the contrast in penalties and tried to objectively summarize the objections of the protesters, never directly telling where he stood on the Jena Six issue. He explained that the white youth who hung the nooses were suspended from school “instead of being accused of a terroristic threat” (as protesters suggested they should be charged) and prosecuted as criminals by the court. He explained that protesters contended that the minimal penalties imposed on the white youth assumed their act “was just a poor prank” while the criminal charges against the black youth assumed that their intent “was more than a schoolyard fight” (Field notes, 9-23-07). After this brief summary, Pastor Jason focused the heart of his sermon on “something uneasy in my spirit as I watched the events of the last week” by describing a television news story that featured the response of local people. In

particular, Pastor Jason recalled an interview with an African American man in the driveway of his home in a well-to-do suburb as he packed the trunk of his Lexus in preparation to drive to the protest several states away. Pastor Jason admitted that, “I got to wondering where he placed his values ... the other 364 days of the year. Did he engage young people who are victims of economic injustice, or was this a one day event?” (Field notes, 9-23-07).

In his sermon, Pastor Jason suggested that the congregation also needs to do the same. He encouraged them to engage with the poor and oppressed in the community of Crossroads and the larger city to concern themselves with the particular barriers that if not addressed can spiral into the sort of frustration and violence that occurred in Jena, Louisiana. To lend credibility to this suggestion, Pastor Jason told of research by a local organization that studies “the complexities of the system that leads people in the revolving door of the criminal justice system.” According to Pastor Jason, the young people interviewed by researchers said, “What we really want you to do is to talk to us, engage us, listen to us.” Referring back to a statement he made earlier in his sermon, Jason reminded the congregation that, “Within God’s system of values, taking this time is important” (Field notes, 9-23-07).

Two days after the sermon, while I was driving Pastor Jason and two parishioners to a multicultural event that we are attending an hour away, he told us about the feedback he received, “because it was so interesting – the reaction”²² (Field notes, 9-25-07). One white couple was “quite upset” by the sermon, Pastor Jason said describing his encounter after church with the woman who “actually had tears in her eyes” and explaining how she took issue with the suggestion that there was a disparity in penalties.

²² Because I was driving and unable to take notes, Pastor Jason suggested that we tape-record his narrative – and the conversation that ensued among the four of us – on the tape-recorder that he knew I always carried during field observations.

Her thing was, ‘Hey, this guy – the white guy – was hit from behind. He was not one of the ones who did the noose thing. He was assaulted by *six* individuals. That’s more than a schoolyard brawl.’ And to say that there was kind of an equal imbalance on both sides – to her – wasn’t accurate or fair. (Field notes, 9-25-07)

A second issue she had was the reference to the “Lexus,” said Pastor Jason explaining that the woman drives what some people would consider a luxury car and “she heard the privilege, ... and that part was a challenge to *her*.” Pastor Jason said that the woman told him, “‘I thought about me with my car and how I give time’ to worship and music and whatever else she is involved in and she said that she felt convicted that she should be doing more” (Field notes, 9-25-07).

Pastor Jason then explained to us what happened a few minutes later when he encountered her husband, a powerful man in the congregation, but with whom Jason has a very good relationship.

Pastor Jason: I stick out my hand like I normally do with him. He refused to shake my hand at first. ... I said, you know, “Ray. Ray. What’s up?” He said [mimicking the man’s stern voice], “I didn’t appreciate your sermon today.” I said, “Specifically, what is it that you didn’t appreciate?” ... His concern was that he thinks that as an integrated church, to bring up something controversial like that from the pulpit seeks to divide as opposed to unify.

Orinthia: That’s typically Ray.

Pastor Jason: Yeah, that’s Ray. And we’ve had that discussion before. ... [pauses to frame his thoughts]... Well, first of all just to let him know why I brought it up, I said, “Well, you need to know that someone else in the life of the church ... thought it was mandatory that we *do* talk about it. ... When you have an integrated congregation – right? – it is important to challenge, yes. It’s important to find ways of speaking Gospel to a very broad range of people.”(Field notes, 9-25-07)

The problem, Pastor Jason said, is that very little can be accomplished in a 20-minute sermon. Although more can be discussed in an adult seminar on justice, lots of members leave church after the worship service and do not avail themselves of such programs so clergy have little choice but to talk about issues like the Jena Six in worship. “Our hope [is] that as they get drawn into deeper relationship with other folks in the

church, that they will do more. ... Particularly with very controversial, hot topics that take more than 20 minutes to unpack,” he explained.

You take a person like a Ray Reynolds and you have them hear four or five sermons in a relatively short period of time – they’ll stop coming, you know. ... So, not to say that you coddle them just to keep them there. ... If it’s God’s will that it becomes a black church. But I do think that that diversity thing that we have is something very unique in the life of the mainstream urban church. (Field notes, 9-25-07)

The sermon affected others differently. An African American couple who had been regular visitors, but hesitant enough about the worship style that they were reluctant to commit to become members sent a “very affirming” email to Pastor Jason, he said (Field notes, 9-25-07). An elderly black man known by many African Americans in the congregation for having far more conservative perspectives on race than their own, came up after the service, said Pastor Jason, and gave him “a stiff pump of the hand and a hug.”

I don’t think his thing was, “Thank you for mentioning the Jena Six and the injustice.” I think his thing was, “Thank you for not totally deifying the folks that are going down for this protest. And I think he is probably one of the folks that doesn’t appreciate [Al] Sharpton and [Jesse] Jackson. So, it’s really interesting what folks see and hear. (Field notes, 9-25-07)

The sermon was ripe in Ed’s mind as well. On the day before the conversation described above, Ed brought up the sermon during an interview in his home and spoke of how disappointed he was that Pastor Jason preached about the Jena Six incident. Ed argued that the Jena Six should not have been raised in the sermon because with “such a controversial issue, you’re never going to get agreement” (Field notes, 9-24-07).

His message would have been better without sticking that [mention of the Jena Six controversy] into it. Okay? And, you know, so I am sure that if you talk to some other people, they’d say, “Oh no! It’s a big issue and you got to talk about it. Right? But I think the point of the first people were that you are diffusing what the real message was. (Field notes, 9-24-07)

When I asked Ed what he interpreted to be the message of the sermon, he explained:

“About serving people and helping, you know, money, etc. But, to use that as an example one way or the other, because it’s not a clear example. ... I mean, you’re never going to get agreement on that. So why throw that in?”

... And this Jena Six is going to be a divisive issue no matter how you talk about it. So does that really help the message that Pastor Jason is trying to send by putting that out there and getting polarization in the congregation? (Field notes, 9-24-07).

Ed's concern about divisive issues is shared by many members of Crossroads Church. One of the reasons they are reluctant to talk about issues of race, racialization and racism, is that they are afraid it will create conflict.

Professional Guidance Needed

A year earlier, the clergy called in consultants to help with long-simmering generalized tensions among the leadership and they helped create guidelines for meetings that have given more voice to people who have felt silenced in the past. Mounted on poster-board sized foam core, these ground rules are carted from room to room for meetings, especially when there is concern that something contentious is brewing. I have even seen Pastor Jason take them to Bible study and the multicultural group meetings – squeezing them into his economy size car to transport to the home of whoever is hosting the monthly gathering. Among other things, the ground rules remind people to not generalize their opinions to anyone else, to listen respectfully, only take their share of the “talking time” and encourage everyone else to use theirs. Thanks to the ground rules, the governing body of the church is less apt to be swayed by the strongest voices and more likely to hear the voices that have been silenced in the past, said Pastor Christine. The ground rules are an attempt to show, “We’re really trying here, you know. What was, was. And this is a whole new day. And we want to be a very different place.” And that has helped,” she added (Interview 2-22-7).

Hannah (black), an administrator at a private school which serves a large population of African American children, has participated in the type of cultural sensitivity training there that she would like to see offered at Crossroads Church. “Once you start going into race you just start opening a whole can of worms, so you want to do

it carefully,” said Hannah. “And you need to have professional help.” Because of this work at her school, “right now we are on a real good path. And people are excited. And we did something to include not just the teachers and the residential advisors, but the entire staff, the people who clean our toilets” (Interview, 8-28-07). Hannah explained that as a result of this training, among the faculty and staff there is “an air of excitement and hope that I haven’t seen since I’ve been there” (Interview, 8-28-07).

Her husband Billy T. spent his entire career as an executive in a large social service agency which was run by a white board that struggled with issues around cultural insensitivities. He knows that this type of training, “Is risky business. I mean I’ve been through it with work. ... I was part of a national committee that kind of took a look at diversity within the entire agency” (Interview, 8-28-07).

If Crossroads Church, offered some “well-facilitated” seminars “with ground rules,” said Hannah, the church could create the possibility for “an open and honest discussion” about race and racism in the lives of members who are African American (Interview, 8-28-07). Hannah – a woman in her early 60s – was born to a German mother and an African American father and although her complexion is light by African American standards, white people consider her black, she said. That is why Hannah would like to be able to explain to white conversation partners the circumstances that force her to “view my world – even though I am biracial – through the eyes of a black woman” (Interview, 8-28-07).

Such sessions need to be offered at a time that is convenient, so people will actually attend, Hannah said. They need to be part of a sustained effort that is not dependent on a particular person. “But I also believe firmly – you have to have somebody who doesn’t have a connection to the church who can get us to keep moving, you know, when it starts to break down, which it probably could – *will*” (Interview, 8-28-07).

Billy T. pointed out that the discussion of diversity must consider that diversity extends beyond issues of the black and white races. “And so we need to open up that

discussion about *all* of the issues of diversity because Crossroads Church *hasn't*" (Interview, 8-28-07). Hannah added that while it is important to talk about other dimensions of diversity, it is important to balance them with dialogue around racial issues that confront people of African ancestry, as she learned from cultural sensitivity training at her school.

We kept insisting ... that it's not just about race. But you have to be careful about how you say that because then people kept saying, "If you're not going to talk about the elephant in the room – which is race – I don't want to talk about diversity." So I think the conversation has to start – just because of our history – with race. ... You can't go, "Well let's talk about gender. Let's talk about sexual orientation. Let's talk about ageism, sexism, ableism.But we've got to talk about the issues facing blacks and whites and our mistrust of one another. ... You know, what is it and why is it that still in 2007 we're still *talking* about the stuff? ... We're moving forward. I just think it's slow." (Interview, 8-28-07)

The staff does not need to be persuaded of this need. During my pilot study in 2003, Antoinette was lobbying for cultural sensitivity training for all staff and lay leaders and by the time of my dissertation research four years later, the staff was in full support. Pastor Christine brought the request before the governing body at their May 2, 2007, meeting and was shot down.²³ I was not able to attend, but I heard the staff talk about it for months afterward because the opposition came not from white members of the congregation, but from two conflict-resistant African American members. "They were saying, 'Why are you going to bring this in?' ... 'Why are you going to upset the apple cart?' or something like that, you know. Pastor Christine wasn't expecting that kind of push back, so she wasn't prepared," recalled Pastor Jason (Interview, 8-29-07). The white

²³ Because this dissertation is not a study of a congregation per se but rather a study of race that happens to take place in a congregation, I made a decision against tracking changes between my pilot study and my dissertation research three years later. This debate over whether the congregation needs cultural sensitivity training is particularly illustrative and therefore I made this exception to my deliberate avoidance of comparisons between the two periods

members there sat silent. They did not have to speak. In deference to the two African Americans – presumed to be authorities on the matter – who spoke against the need for this kind of dialogue at Crossroads church, the white members contentedly cast their votes against this training while other black members fumed.

Months later, Orinthia (black) talked about the encounter. “I thought, here is a black man that doesn’t even want to talk about the problems that we have, who doesn’t even want to recognize that we have the problems,” said Orinthia, describing his perspective as “uninformed” (Interview 10-19-07). The larger issue that the man’s resistance created is that “it gives the whites an escape from it” she explained (Interview 10-19-07). Unaddressed, the struggle over how to talk about race continues.

**Conclusion: Misconceptions About What is “Politically Correct”
Stifle Healthy Dialogue About Race Issues**

In a nation where the majority of churches are homogenous, the most distinguishing characteristic of the congregation at Crossroads Church is the biracial balance between European Americans and African Americans. A second striking characteristic is not apparent at first but a major finding of my research – that in this tiny pocket of racial harmony that the church’s promotional literature depicts, there is very little healthy discussion of racial issues. Simply put: race is the metaphorical elephant in the room. On the one hand European Americans presume conversations about race are not “politically correct” in mixed race settings, and on the other hand they fear it might create conflict there that would upset the precarious balance of the congregation. Meanwhile, race talk is alive and well in semantic moves that attempt to veil race references, in nonverbal ways such as avoiding African Americans, as well as in back stage gatherings of white members. While European Americans presume that such race talk is circumspect, African American members point out that it actually is quite transparent and yet there are few opportunities to discuss these perspectives. As a result,

when race issues surface, the American lexicon fails them, said Pastor Jason explaining, “When I say ‘racism,’ I mean institutional racism. When whites hear ‘racist,’ they think I am referring to them” (Telephone conversation, 4-24-08). Then next chapter will address the root of these differing perspectives.

CHAPTER 7
DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES: THE INFLUENCE
OF RACIAL IDENTITY ATTITUDES

As we have seen in the previous chapter, dialogue on race issues is so difficult for most white members at Crossroads Church that they avoid it altogether or engage in a way that might implicate others but not themselves. In this chapter, we consider how this reluctance to dialogue has squandered what for most European Americans in the congregation is possibly their richest opportunity to learn about the problems of race and racism in our nation. In this chapter we consider the research question “How does racial identity attitude inform their perspectives?” by listening to voices within the congregation describe encounters that are illustrative of these perspectives.

I answer this question in two parts. The first illustrates how the staff deftly manipulated the discussion of a national incident to allow congregants to engage in conversation about race issues at a distance from which they are less apt to be implicated as racist themselves. The second part of this chapter centers on vignettes that through the voices of Crossroads Church members tell stories that turn the spotlight on racial microaggressions within the church itself, but which are largely unacknowledged. I conclude with an anecdote by one member (black) that illustrates the profoundly negative impact that microaggressions can cause the church without white members being at all aware of the cause.

As we know from Jackson’s (2008) social commentary on racial paranoia described in the literature review, European Americans and African Americans tend to focus differently when studying an encounter to determine whether or not it is racist. While white individuals tend to look at encounter in isolation and determine racism based on the *intent* of the perpetrator, African Americans usually look at the encounter against a backdrop of their experiences and determine racism based on the *effect* of the encounter.

The Jena Six controversy provided – from a safe distance – a point of focus for small group conversations in which European Americans glimpsed through the racialized lens which so many African Americans view daily racialized encounters.

Jena Six: An Opportunity to Dialogue About Race

Just days after the first trial of a Jena Six defendant and his sermon referencing the trial, Pastor Jason introduced a discussion about the incident during a meeting of the multicultural group. He downloaded from the internet two long and detailed chronologies that listed the events that lead up to the arrest of the Jena Six, and he distributed them to each member of the group to study. One was a chronology published by the local newspaper, the *Jena Times*, which reiterated accounts published in the Louisiana newspaper as the events occurred but which introduced no other perspective. The second handout was a chronology published in Wikipedia,²⁴ which was twice as lengthy and heavily footnoted using a range of media sources. Pastor Jason asked the group to compare these versions, pointing out that while chronologies are presumed to be “objective – just a listing,” a person can find “differences in nuance and the way things are framed” (Field notes, 9-26-07).

As the group compared the variations in the chronologies, Antoinette pointed out that the white and black youths were described differently in the *Jena Times* chronology, a point of contention for this African American mother of three sons in their 20s. “You know what jumped out at me?” said Antoinette to preface this phrase which she quoted from one of the chronologies: “When a group of other black *men* showed up.” She explained her objection to the group.

You know how *loaded* just that statement is. I don’t even know if they are kids. But what I know, when you say, “black men.” Okay? You call the

²⁴ An on-line, publicly-written, collaborative encyclopedia.

other people attendees, whatever. And, for me, my experience in this country and this culture – I read that differently. (Field notes, 9-26-07)

Connie questioned whether an occurrence of similar nature could happen in their own city, which over the last two decades saw African Americans elected mayor and council members, and appointed to key administrative roles. Orinthia was quick to respond with a narrative of discriminatory behaviors that she has witnessed before answering directly that, “of course it happens in this city! Maybe not as overt sometimes, but blacks are under attack many times” (Field notes, 9-26-07).

Offering an Example Much Closer to Home

After much discussion of everyone talking at once and little progress in a productive dialogue, Antoinette took the floor again, this time trying to explain how her comment stems from her observations about inequities in the justice system.

Antoinette: Black males are on the *low* end of the totem pole in that regard, and any person who calls on the name of the Lord should be offended by that type of injustice in my opinion.

Orinthia: Exactly. It’s over and over again that this stuff happens. I mean, I am scared to death for my own grandsons, that they can maneuver themselves through this, this *shadow* that is definitely stacked against them. It’s the lucky, fortunate, black man that reaches maturity without a [criminal] record. And it’s not because they’re bad. It’s [she laughs] because they are constantly harangued. (Field notes, 9-26-07)

To illustrate the plight of young African American men, Antoinette told the group a very personal story of a frightening encounter her sons had on a recent Sunday morning when police knocked on her door at 5 a.m. asking if she had “two males” there. She called to the three young men asleep upstairs – sons Anthony and Christopher and their friend Ryan, who had gone out with them the previous evening. They came downstairs, said Antoinette, and “the first thing the cop does is get right up in their face. I mean *right* in their face!” She imitated him saying, ““You know what you did and you know why I am

here! Just tell the truth!” Then she explained, “He didn’t ask them what happened. ... It wasn’t an equal, open discussion. He attacked them” (Field notes, 9-26-07).

As the events unfolded, Antoinette said that she learned that someone had broken into a parked car and that the owner of the car saw two young men peering into the broken window. Presuming their guilt, the woman followed them to Antoinette’s house then called the police. She was there with the police. Once the young men came downstairs, the owner of the car identified the overnight guest and son, Anthony, as Antoinette tried to decipher what was happening and realized both the gravity of the situation and that the police tracked innocent onlookers. “*I know* that my kids don’t steal. They’re not going to break into a car. And I am pretty certain about Ryan [the friend]. I mean, you know your kids,” Antoinette explained. Even more confusing was the fact that – although neither of her sons had ever been involved in any serious trouble – the victim identified the son far less likely to get in any trouble. “So now I am flabbergasted,” Antoinette said. Throughout it all, “The boys kept saying, ‘We didn’t do anything. We saw the car. We were looking in the window.’” Antoinette recounted. “That’s exactly what they were doing. They were looking in the window. And then they came on home” (Field notes, 9-26-07).

The police wanted to issue a summary offense, which she described as “a ticket – you admit that you did it, you pay the fine and it’s over.” Her voice climbed in volume as she recounted, “Now mind you, I am thinking, ... ‘how can I make my boys say something that they didn’t do?’” At that point, Antoinette called her neighbor who is a judge and who advised Antoinette.

She says, “Girl, this criminal justice system is no place for a black man. Tell them to take the summary, pay the fine and it’ll be over.” That’s what she told me. That’s what she told me. And at that point I had to say, “No. No. I am not going to let them take anything.” And on top of that, I am worried, “Oh my God, is this a record?” (Field notes, 9-26-07)

One of the young men was in a paddy wagon and the other in the back of a squad car when the captain arrived and Antoinette overheard the investigating officer tell his captain that the young men broke into the car. Antoinette corrected him.

I said, “Excuse me, sir. That is *not* what the lady said. The lady said she saw them looking in her car. She did not say she saw them *take* anything. She did not say she saw them *touch* anything. She did not recognize Ryan. She only recognized my son. She thought he was the other one, but she didn’t even recognize him.” (Field notes, 9-26-07)

Indeed, Antoinette’s description proved correct. The district officer took the arresting officer off for a private discussion, after which he ordered the young men released nearly three hours after their drama had begun. Although never arrested,

Their lives were *forever* impacted by that incident. And Anthony was *scared* to death! To death! I am lucky I didn’t have a stroke. As calm as I was on the outside, my brain is thinking, “What lawyers do I call? How much money is this going to be? What’s going to happen? They have to go to work tomorrow.” I mean, the stress that we were under because the police officer didn’t do his job! I mean, if this is what happens in America? I live on a *nice street*! These are *good kids*! And this is what is happening only ... because they were black kids. ... just the presumption of guilt. And that is not how our system is supposed to be! (Field notes, 9-26-07).

With that drama resolved, a new one unfolded between the young men and their mother when they disclosed that they had been walking home from a nearby “shaky bar” (Field notes, 9-26-07), Antoinette said. All the white listeners look puzzled, so Antoinette shook her generous bosom to convey that “shaky bar” referred to exotic dancers and added, “So when I found *that* out, then that was a whole ‘nother story!” Everyone laughed.

After this interlude of humor, Antoinette returned to the seriousness of the issue. “Kids do things. There are serious consequences,” Antoinette said as many people tried at once to interject their own experiences. She brushed off the comparisons. “But it shouldn’t be the *end* of their life! That’s what I was looking at with my boys. That their

professional ability, *their whole future*” (Field notes, 9-26-07). Orinthia agreed, “That’s right! Because once you get a record, it is with you forever.”

Antoinette’s story provided an opportunity for Allen (white) to tell the group about another frightening encounter with the city police by another African American young man in the congregation. The encounter involved one of his youth group members – Justin – who was a bystander at a fight and taken into custody with two other teenagers whom police charged with instigating the melee. Although the police eventually released Justin without ever levying any charges against him, Allen said that the young man was so traumatized by the parting comment of one police officer that he sought out Allen, his youth leader to help “process” it. Allen described how Justin said the officer begrudgingly let him go and wryly suggested, “I’ll see you again. I’m going to either see you in jail or I am going to see you dead by the time you’re 18” (Field notes, 9-26-07).

This story, in turn, created space for Orinthia to explain how police suspicions about these young black men – such as the ones that Antoinette and Allen illustrated – in turn drive influence parenting practices in African American homes.

Every black parent has to tell their child that you have to look out for certain things, that you don’t resist arrest, or you don’t talk to police in a certain way even though they are not any more worthy of respect that anybody else. But you fear them. (Field notes, 9-26-07)

Orinthia fears for her own 16-year-old grandson, Jeffrey. “He’s grown up in a very sheltered life with a multicultural group of people,” she said referencing her neighborhood, his high school and their church, all of which are exceptionally diverse. As a result of his exposure to white people and comfort with them, Jeffrey does not fear white people in the way earlier generations of his family have been taught, and he gives no credence to his grandmother’s warnings. “He doesn’t believe this!” Orinthia said explaining that Jeffrey will not understand their warnings until he has a close encounter with the type of racism that most African American men experience. In the meantime, “in order to save this child’s life, we have to tell him!”

The group returned to the discussion of the Jena Six. Referring to the nuanced differences in the words used to describe the black youth and the white youth in the two chronologies, Antoinette's perspectives are now better understood: "When I see 'black men,' I see something very different than other people do. When I see that word in writing, or whatever. When you can feel the force of the power behind that" (Field notes, 9-26-07).

Dialogue about encounters such as those described above helps to broaden the perspective of the white listeners, so they can begin to understand what is behind the racial paranoia that causes Antoinette to "see something very different." In this case their distance from the situation allows them to listen to the perspective of the victim of racism and empathize in ways they could not if they – or the church – were implicated as racist. Here, they are able to listen to the perspective of African Americans – Antoinette telling the story, and Orinthia echoing Antoinette's assessment and offering her own observations as supporting evidence. The group's experience of these women's highly developed racial identity – both characterize the internalization/commitment stage of the BRIAS (see Table 1) – gives their concerns more credibility. Story telling such as this – which provides evidence that justifies the racial paranoia that many African Americans feel – helps the European American listener to better understand African American perspectives on racism.

One of the obstacles to constructive interracial dialogue on race issues stems from the differences of opinion about what constitutes racism. Apart from overt acts of bigotry, contemporary U.S. society cannot seem to agree on a definition. That is because much of the European American perspective is so objective – considering each charge of racism in isolation and determining the intent of the actor – while African Americans rely on a subjective stance at times when other evidence is insufficient. The data in the next section describe African American experiences of racism in a range of encounters – fleeting, ambiguous, verbal or non-verbal – that have had such a powerful *effect* on the person that

he or she can vividly recall them years later. They provide further examples of the complexities of race that this congregation, in the words of Sen. Obama (2008), “has never really worked through” and needs to take seriously if it ever hopes to effectively address race relations.

Experiences of Racism at Crossroads Church

Hannah said that even though discussions about racism at Crossroads Church never occur – suggesting tongue in cheek the white perception, “because we’re so, you know ... diverse” – there is ample experience of racism in the congregation.

“I know that if you scratch the surface of what goes on at church, you will find there are some long-standing black members ... African-American, who have some really tender feelings about their perception – real or not – of racism in the church. (Interview, 8-27-07)

Observing Crossroads Church through the lens of racial paranoia, I attempt to identify racialized behaviors by white members and understand how black members of the congregation experience these behaviors. Engaging in a debate over whether the behaviors I highlight are aversive racism serves little purpose here because I am using the theory not to prove racist *intent*, but to demonstrate the *effects* of these behaviors on many African Americans. By identifying the effects of behaviors that African Americans experience as racist, European Americans can create space for empathy and dialogue, which in turn might motivate them to recognize their own racialized thoughts and racist behaviors. The goal is that white individuals would learn from this exercise and share what they learn in other institutions that they participate, as Putnam’s (2000) notion of bridging capital suggests. First we need to recognize what those slights look and feel like.

African Americans cited several encounters at Crossroads Church that had a racist effect for them because they noticed the change in performance between back stage and front stage – what Picca and Feagin (2007) refers to as *two-faced racism*. Sofia described several fleeting encounters as she flurried between the church offices, choir rooms and

other public spaces doing tasks with such focus that the white people she passed seemed unaware that she could hear or was paying attention to their conversations. One cluster of encounters Sofia had was particularly memorable because it involved back stage conversations about her friend – an unwed and pregnant teenager in the congregation. “I definitely heard a lot of things about her being young, black, and having a kid. *A lot of things,*” said Sofia (Interview, 5-31-07). Later, when she saw them with the pregnant teen, “These would be the same people that would smile at her and be, ‘Oh! How’s the pregnancy going?’ Or, ‘How’s the baby?’ You know, these two-faced things going on” (Interview, 5-31-07). Picca and Feagin (2007) suggest that in two-faced racism, white speakers “present an altered image of themselves or their views when they are around people of color” (p. 21), as they did here by asking about the pregnancy to mask their disapproval.

I have no doubt that these people could have the same misgivings about a white girl who was unmarried and pregnant, and because of that we could rationalize that there was no racist *intent*. Such an argument would miss the point of Sofia’s example, which is the racist *effect* that these comments had on her. Sofia’s experiences of racial prejudice made her assume that the players were engaged in racial stereotyping causing her to ask, “Is this, you know, like any other regular, you know, African American?” (Interview, 5-31-07).

To better understand this perspective, it is useful to draw a parallel to the difference between what two people see when one looks into the darkness while wearing night vision goggles, and the other person strains to see with the unaided eye. The night vision goggles give the first person the ability to see – in what had previously seemed like total darkness – many things (people, movement and the landscape) that are shrouded in darkness to the unaided eye of the second person. The repeated experience of racism by an African American can – like night vision goggles – heightens the ability to recognize the presence of racism even when it is shrouded from the unaided eye by cultural norms.

The points of contention in these perspectives are the ambiguous racialized encounters in which racist behaviors are so obscured that white people can rationalize the behaviors on other factors besides race, as the theory of aversive racism suggests. Sue et al. (2007) identified a range of these behaviors, labeled them *microaggressions* and characterized them as “subtle, indirect, and unintentional” (p.278) and therefore “difficult to identify, quantify, and rectify (p. 272). For these reasons, Sue et al. suggest that “the most accurate assessment about whether racist acts have occurred” (p.278) is best made from the perspective of the *effect* that the microaggressions have on people of color.

Racial Microaggressions Apparent in Encounters at Crossroads Church

African American members described numerous encounters at Crossroads Church that can be described as *microinsults* and *microinvalidations* – categories in the taxonomy of racial microaggressions. As such, they offer evidence of aversive racism.

Experiencing the Microinsult of a Stranger

Diane started attending Crossroads Church in 1989 with her husband and two teenagers after her daughter was hired as a junior counselor at the summer camp for neighborhood children run by Crossroads Church. My question (at the beginning of our interview) about how she came to attend a church like Crossroads, lead to a story of the daughter’s application and her encounter with Mrs. White, a European American secretary in the church office.

Mrs. White said to her, “What are you here for?” And she said, “I am looking for a summer position, camp counselor, junior counselor, whatever.” So she had to fill out an application and everything. And the words were, “What school do you go to? Booker T. Washington?”

Booker T. Washington is a public high school more than a mile from the church – a school where nearly all of students are African American, most are of low socioeconomic

status, and where academic performance is notoriously poor. The reputation of the school is so bad that many families in the catchment area never even consider sending their children there. That is why the secretary's mention of the school had the effect of a microinsult.

I took that as a dig. And my daughter was very upset by it. ... My daughter went to Pope John Paul II High School, which, back then, was a very prestigious Catholic school. They didn't take any and everybody in that school.

Diane explained that Mrs. White "associated" her daughter with Booker T. Washington High School "because she was Black." Then Diane justified her own response: "And that's kind of when the little red flags go up for me. ... that's, that's that narrow thinking." Diane described in a very animated voice how the encounter "bothered me for years" because it was "that kind of blatant racism" that she said she experiences often as an African American.

Encounters such as this one – Diane's vivid recall of this one statement almost 19 years later – demonstrates why (Jackson, 2008) suggests that "we should not underestimate the potential significance of seemingly inconsequential acts" (p.10). Yet microaggressions are "so pervasive and automatic in daily conversations and interactions that they are often dismissed and glossed over as being innocent and innocuous" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 273). On one hand, it is easy to dismiss the charge of racism and claim that Mrs. White never intended to offend, that she simply engaged in small talk, and that it was an honest mistake because Booker T. Washington is not too far away. On the other hand, with 10 high schools in easy commute – half of them prestigious private schools and magnet public schools – why would Mrs. White make a presumption about this particular school, if it was not influenced by race?

Regardless, to dismiss the charge of racism for lack of evidence misses an important dimension of this encounter – both the immediate and long-term effects it had on the family. Diane was adamant, unwavering and clear in her assessment of this

encounter – however brief and ambiguous – and its lasting *effect* of racism on her, even if no one proves racist *intent* by Mrs. White. Dismissing this microinsult as unintended and claiming that the charge of racism lacks evidence would have the effect of privileging the white perspective, which is limited by what can be seen by the naked eye. It has the effect of invalidating the night vision perspective of Diane and her daughter, a perspective shaped by a lifetime of experiences that sensitize them to recognize the nuances of racism even where it is cloaked. African Americans do not have to personally experience an affront to recognize when racism occurs – their own experiences of racism trigger the racial paranoia that helps them recognize when similar things happen to others people.

Witnessing the Microinsult Against Another Person

Pastor Jason described an encounter he observed between Jared, a teenage African American who is a frequent visitor to the congregation, and Lloyd, a successful white businessman and long-time member of the church.

Jared and Lloyd passed in the hallway after the service one time and Jared held out his hand and introduced himself, you know, and he said, “I am Jared Jones,” or something like that. And Lloyd basically didn’t return in kind and say, “I’m Lloyd Smith,” but said something like either, “I know who you are. That’s okay.” As if to say, “It’s all right. You have permission to be here.” ... I just chuckled. Here is Jared trying to do this thing of equals – “I’ll introduce myself to you and you introduce yourself to me.” And Lloyd thought he was being totally welcoming and appropriate by saying, “You’ve got my blessing to be here.”

Pastor Jason experienced Lloyd’s reaction to Jared as dismissive, a subconscious but nevertheless racist behavior which in Sue et al.’s (2007) taxonomy would be described as another manifestation of a microinsult. He made note, “God bless Lloyd, that’s where he is.” Once again, the motive in this encounter is ambiguous. Pastor Jason and others have noticed Lloyd’s racialized and sometimes racist perceptions. Indeed, Lloyd once admitted to me, “I always thought disparagingly about Blacks” as he described poor work habits of some of the African Americans he supervises at a company where they are employed as

hourly laborers (Interview, 4-1-07). On the other hand, I observed the deference he accorded one of the congregation's matriarchs (black) by escorting her to a front row concert seat, long after he had been squeezing other last minute arrivals (mostly white) into the back rows of the full house. Clearly, Lloyd's encounter with Jared carried no racist *intent*.

In rebuffing Jared's greeting, Lloyd gave the *effect* of perceiving himself as a superior, a behavior that offers evidence of Goffman's (1967) theory on the hierarchy of relationships. Age also may factor into this – Lloyd is past 60, and Jared is in his late teens. Socioeconomic status could factor into this as well. Regardless of the variables that would lead some people to dismiss charges of racism as groundless because there is no way to prove intent, we must not let this detail distract us from the *effect* that this encounter has had for Pastor Jason. He experienced it as racism.

Meanwhile Lloyd is oblivious to the racist nuances of interactions like his encounter with Jared that Trepagnier (2006) describes as “paternalistic assumptions” (p.24), a manifestation of *silent racism*. This patronizing type of behavior fuels white condescension towards African Americans – a form of everyday racism not perceptible to most European Americans – which, in turn, forms “the basis for indirect institutional racism” (Trepagnier, p. 26). Just as Lloyd is not aware of Pastor Jason's perception of this encounter, he also is oblivious to the way behaviors, such as this encounter with Jared, underlie the culture of institutional racism that is so difficult for white individuals to recognize.

Experiencing the Microinsult of a Friend

Microinsults even occur among people who are close friends. Such is the case of Sofia (black) who befriended Marguerite, an elderly white woman in her 80s, at the encouragement of their mutual friend, Ken (white), the former music director. I heard

Marguerite refer to Sofia as “my granddaughter” so I asked Pastor Christine if she knew how these two women bridged such generational and cultural differences to become friends. Pastor Christine noted that it was orchestrated. Marguerite “has a little racist streak in her” so Ken decided several years ago to introduce her to some of the members of the church youth group (black) whom he mentored in the choir (Field notes, 5-30-07). Marguerite and Sofia developed such a fondness for each other that Sofia told me she telephones Marguerite regularly and tries to visit once a week, driving several miles to her retirement home and often dining with her there.

During an interview with Sofia, when I asked about racism, she answered by describing a recurring encounter with Marguerite in the dining room of the retirement home where one of the waiters who serves them is a young black man. “It’s just weird that every time we get him, Marguerite thinks he is looking at me,” said Sofia explaining that the microinsult is embedded in the inference that among all of the other waiters (many of whom are white), “no one else will look at me.” This had a barbed effect for Sofia for several reasons. She lives most of her life in such multicultural environments (school, work and church) that she no longer self identifies as an African American (she indicates her race as “other”) and she dates men outside of her race.

Attempting to Challenge a Microinvalidation

Sometimes even microaggressions that are challenged go unrecognized by the perpetrator, such as the encounter between Giselle (black) and Sasha (white) at a multicultural group meeting. This group was handpicked by the staff to engage in discussions about diversity, conversations that occur monthly in member homes and begin with a potluck supper and casual conversation. Over dinner at one of these meetings, Giselle, who is in her 60s, was sitting next to me and telling me of her childhood and how her mother loved music so much that she and Giselle’s father

sacrificed to give each of their seven children lessons “even though we were poor” (Field notes, 3-28-07). Giselle said that she opted to study ballet, taking lessons until it dawned upon her that principal dancers were never black, a realization that dashed the dreams of a little girl – that with hard work she might dance professionally. So she quit, she said.

Suddenly, from the other side of the room, Sasha blurted out, “They told me I wasn’t built like a ballet dancer either!” Although Sasha had been listening to Giselle’s story, she clearly missed the point – the nuanced reference to the racial discrimination against black ballerinas that Giselle knew would limit her own professional prospects. Instead, Sasha tried to claim a similarity where there was none. Giselle tensed and turned away from me toward Sasha and through pursed lips she pointedly explained to Sasha that her own decision to quit ballet had nothing to do with her body type. Sue et al. (2007) define behaviors such as Sasha’s as an example of a microinvalidation – “communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color” (p. 274). Afterward, Giselle turned back to me, looked intently into my eyes and quietly finished her story in the same nuanced way she began it: “The first time I saw a black dancer, the tears just rolled” (Field notes, 3-28-07). There are many ways to rationalize that this encounter and the ones that follow are not examples of aversive racism, but do so is to lose sight of the effect – the racial paranoia it breeds in the people who experience microaggressions.

The key to understanding the effect of microinsults in this congregation is to focus on how an African American might experience something, not to try to determine what the white individual intended. Sue et al. (2007) suggest that the invisible character of microaggressions – allowing white people to avoid noticing them, and creating doubt among African Americans that what they experience is not real – is what gives microaggressions such power. With such ambiguous evidence, how can you even prove that a microaggression has occurred? What makes the victim’s belief that a microaggression has occurred any more plausible than the perpetrator’s conscious belief

that nothing happened or that nothing was intended? Such a dilemma can have a profound effect on the victim as the next vignette illustrates.

Dealing With the Dilemma That a Microaggression Creates

Pastor Jason (black) described an encounter several years earlier with the previous head minister (white) of Crossroads Church. Pastor Jason was driving and his boss was in the passenger seat when Pastor Jason saw his elderly aunt (black) waiting at a bus stop.

I said, “Oh, there’s my aunt! Would it be okay if I find out where she is going?” So we pulled over. This was a time when I didn’t have a four-door. I asked my aunt if she needed a lift, fully expecting Pastor Stephen to get out. Instead, he leaned up, you know, for her to be able to get in the back seat. And I was *so* embarrassed. (Interview, 8-29-07)

This situation created a dilemma for Pastor Jason. On the one hand Pastor Stephen was the same minister who was socially progressive enough to recognize the importance of nudging a reluctant congregation to hire the church’s first African American clergyman – Pastor Jason. On the other hand, Pastor Stephen was playing a hierarchical role, which Pastor Jason conceded may not have been a conscious slight, but nevertheless his behavior had such a profound racist effect that it still haunts him.

And I think probably the thing that I was ashamed about was that I wasn’t standing up for my aunt. ... I asked, “Would you mind getting in the back seat?” ... She said, “Oh, no. That’s fine.” (Interview, 8-29-07)

If Pastor Jason and/or his aunt were white, would Pastor Stephen have offered his seat to an elderly white woman, and crawled into the back seat himself? We will never know, but that matters little. What we do know is that more than a decade after this encounter, Pastor Jason still feels shame. He remembers it vividly – a negative psychological response (shame, self-doubt about his own priorities, and frustration that he did not stand up to his boss) – that Sue et al. (2007) suggest is a typical response to a microaggression. Not doing anything “may mean a denial of one’s experiential reality, dealing with a loss of integrity, or experiencing pent-up anger and frustration likely to take psychological

tolls” (Sue et al., p. 279) . Furthermore, Pastor Jason succumbed to the type of racial hierarchy I described in the furniture moving incident in Chapter 5, a mechanism by which white people maintain status in the post Civil Rights era.

Implications for Leadership

Like many churches, Crossroads Church has more tasks that need attending than people willing to assume responsibility for them. In an interview, Howard, a white man in his 60s, expressed frustration that in the key leadership roles,

There’s just a handful of us – I mean from the suburbs. My main concern really is what happens when we’re gone. ... While blacks have taken certain leadership roles – which is great – uh, they are not the leading leaders in the church. (Interview, 8-28-07)

Diane (black) would agree – that “we were not stepping up to the plate” – but her assessment of the situation relates not to unwillingness or indifference, but rather to the cumulative *effects* of microaggressions at Crossroads Church. “Many of us were intimidated ... by the white people,” Diane explained. “How do I know that? I’ve heard it. I asked them.” She has even experienced it herself, she said, describing how one white man in the congregation

has yet to open his mouth and speak. ... He has yet to speak to my husband and myself in 19 years. Okay? ... The man is a racist. ... That’s just my opinion. That’s – watching for 19 years – that’s how I see it. (Interview, 8-28-07)

The *effect* that this experience has had on Diane is profound. Her many encounters with the man all have been fleeting and ambiguous, but Diane is unwavering in her belief that many of those encounters have been racist.

In her case, these encounters have had a far-reaching effect. The man served on the committee that attends to the pastoral needs of the congregation. The pastor asked Diane to take a leadership role there as well, but Diane said she refused:

I told her absolutely not. Can't do it. I wasn't born with any silver spoon in my mouth. I don't have a whole lot of money. But I have my integrity. Okay? And there is no way in the world that I could sit on the committee with that man and do my job the way it should be done. I can't do it. I can't do it. I said, "All I have is my faith and I am not going to let him blemish that because I got all this rage in me because of the way he is. I know I can't change him." (Interview, 8-28-07)

The implications extend beyond her own discomfort and have a negative effect on the congregation, albeit an invisible one because few people know about the tension that Diane feels and the effect of it.

Conclusion: *Effect* Is the Most Important Measure for Determining Racism

Through observations and interviews at Crossroads Church, I used the lens of racial paranoia to study racialized encounters and describe how some black members of the congregation experience those encounters. Engaging in a debate over whether the encounters I highlighted are aversive racism, serves little purpose here because I am using the theory not to prove racist *intent* but to demonstrate the *effects* of these behaviors on many African Americans.

The fact that microaggressions are so easily overlooked, ignored or dismissed by the perpetrator and sometimes are invisible to the victim, is what makes microaggressions so powerful (Sue et al. 2007). As a result, the perpetrators escape having to confront their complicity in contemporary forms of racism and the opportunity to learn how to perceive a racial reality different from their own. These microaggressions are psychologically undermining through their cumulative effect on the recipient: increased anger and mistrust as well as lower self-esteem and standard of living. Together this undermines race-relations (Sue et al.).

The solution to this dilemma is for European Americans to look for racialization constantly – not to pretend they do not see race – and to study the effect of unintended racism has on many African Americans. By identifying the effects of behaviors that

African Americans experience as racist, European Americans can create space for empathy and dialogue, which in turn can motivate them to recognize their racialized thoughts and racist behaviors. As we can see in the next chapter, Crossroads Church still has a long way to go.

CHAPTER 8

SUMMING IT UP: MUSIC AND RACE

Over the last three data chapters, I attempted to chronicle encounters at Crossroads Church: the ways members interact across race and dialogue about race issues, and the way racial identity attitudes inform their perspectives. Throughout this narrative I wove analysis of these encounters by drawing on theories of aversive racism, racial paranoia, racial identity, race talk and two-faced racism to explain what was occurring at Crossroads Church. Here, in Chapter 8, I sum up the data with a narrative that illustrates the challenges of race relations through the proxy of music, a narrative so richly told by many voices at Crossroads Church that it requires very little analytical intrusion.

Music Has Always Been Central to the Church's Identity

“In many ways, the music program keeps the church together,” Antoinette (black) told me. Besides having the largest budget in the church, the music program “draws the most white people into the church” (Interview, 10-31-03). Tampering with the music program is akin to tampering with the identity of Crossroads Church and engenders powerful opposition from many white members, and some concern from a handful of black members as well. The music director (white) found this out the hard way. Ken’s attempts to make the music program more multicultural had pitted him against some choir members, triggering such animosity toward Ken that he sought new employment and left.

Besides varying the repertoire of hymns and anthems to accommodate the diverse membership, Ken stretched to incorporate personnel shifts, explaining that, “I’ve also tried to work hard with people that have kind of come my way” (Interview, 11-3-03). For

example, Ken encouraged the youth in the parish – all African American, and most with little or no music training – to join the church choir and a bell choir he started, and often drove around to pick up those who had no transportation.

Within another two years, Ken dismissed many of the professional singers and relied more on a volunteer choir in which the racial balance ranged widely, but with more white members singing most Sundays that I observed. This shift to a volunteer choir has had an effect on quality. Ken explained to me in a casual conversation about these changes one Sunday that Crossroads Church “is not big enough to fill a choir with people who can sing well” (Field notes, 2-18-07). A handful of church members observed this as well. During the period between my pilot study and dissertation research three years later, one choir member – a white man who wields considerable power – became so incensed with the changes that he tried to incite dissatisfaction with Ken throughout the membership. Pastor Christine told me that it reached a “point that all these other people start going, ‘Oh my gosh, yeah, the music is terrible! Listen to the choir, it’s terrible.’ I’m like, ‘Are you kidding me? What choir are you listening to?’” (Interview, 2-22-07).

Sofia (black), who started attending Crossroads as a teenager, sings in the choir and worked closely with Ken as his administrative assistant, described the changes in racial terms:

You have some people that are used to, you know, the soloists. Used to, you know, a flock of white people [she chuckles] up there singing. And then things change. Times change. The soloists are kaput. Out. ... So you don’t have your soloists up there anymore and people are having problems with that. And they’re seeing young people up there: “Oh my God!” (Interview, 5-31-07)

She recalled complaints: “The music is ‘poor to mediocre, at best,’ is what was said. Those are quote words,” she said adding, “and that like hurt me because I knew how hard Ken worked” (Interview, 5-31-07).

The complaints about Ken became so disruptive, that he asked the ringleader to resign from the choir. Another followed suit. This estrangement deepened the rift. A

“clique” of people made phone calls to provoke dissatisfaction with the music program in an effort to pressure Ken to leave, which he did in April 2007, two months into my field observations. One elderly white man, a long-time member, fought back tears in one meeting as he described how Ken’s efforts for the music program and the church as a whole far surpassed any other music director in the last half century. As the church changed, the man says that Ken “tried to change the music with the congregation” and he was “criticized for it” (Field notes, 3-23-07).

After Ken resigned to take a new position at a church several states away, Crossroads Church charged the worship and music committee with the task of conducting a national search for a new director of music. That committee had seven church members and the pastor. It was half European American half African American, seven women and one man, seven people middle aged and older and one young adult. Balance is a touchy issue for this congregation. During one meeting of the governing body of the church, one of the long-time white members noted that the music search committee was not balanced because there was only one man. The search committee chair – a white woman – snapped back that the committee on which he serves (administration and finance) is not balanced either. An African American in her 50s, recalling the debate later told me, “They didn’t like the search committee – too many women. I think they wanted to say ‘too many black people,’ but they knew better,” she added with a chuckle (Interview, 9-21-07).

During the interim, the church leadership hired Roger, a classically trained young organist (white) to play the organ and lead the choir in its weekly rehearsal on three Sundays a month. Because Roger sometimes substituted when Ken was away, Pastor Christine suggested at a meeting of the governing body of the church that Roger would provide “a smooth transition” (Field notes, 4-4-07). In an attempt to provide a balance against Roger’s repertoire of classic western European music, the church also engaged Arthur (black) who also received his training in a music conservatory, but whose primary

genre is sacred jazz music. He directed the music four times during the five-month interim.

Contrasting Styles of Music

The Sundays that each of these church musicians directed the music were markedly different from the Sundays that the other was in charge. On days that Roger (the interim organist) directed the choir, members typically dressed in black robes with crisp white cottas and all the music appeared to be traditional Western organ compositions, choral works and hymns. In my field notes I noted that the audience sat through each anthem as though they are watching a concert of classical music – no movement, no mouthing the words, no clapping when it is over. They truly fit the “chosen frozen” moniker that Pastor Christine often says old-line Protestants are called.

By contrast, Arthur (the sacred jazz musician) never touched the organ and never led the full choir. On three occasions (April 29, May 27 and July 8) he brought in a trio of vocalists and an instrumentalist, and on his final Sunday (August 26) he directed four members of the Crossroads Church choir who volunteered to sing with the vocalist that he brought. His pianissimo touch on the keyboard provided a musical backdrop to aspects of the liturgy where I never heard Ken or Roger play – the prayer of confession, the exchange of the peace and the prayers of the people²⁵. On most Sundays during the exchange of the peace, many people in the congregation step out of their pew for two to three minutes to greet others in pews nearest them. On, the four Sundays that Arthur provided a musical backdrop to the passing of the peace – the most social time in the worship – people lingered in the aisles longer (four to five minutes). When I pointed this

²⁵ These parts of the service are standard rituals within worship in many old-line Protestant congregations.

difference out to Pastor Christine she not surprised and explained, “It is a far more joyous time when he is doing it with his music there,” Field notes, 5-30-07).

Parishioners raved about Roger, the interim organist, said Pastor Christine:

I have heard from the whites – they love him. “Can he be our next musician? Stop looking now. ... Sign him up, you don’t have to look any further. Here he is. Wow! Can he play that organ! Oh, isn’t he terrific?” More of the black folks are saying that he’s too loud. ... Well, I meet with him tomorrow. He’s got to tone it down. And I, quite frankly, don’t find his preludes appropriate. They are dark and dirgey. I come here to worship. I want it to be joyful. ... He loves the bass. . (Field notes, 5-30-07)

By contrast, Arthur’s style of engaging the audience – on April 29, during the first of the four interim Sundays that he directed the music – caused much consternation among the long-time white members and a handful of black members. On one Sunday he wordlessly directed the congregants to clap along with the beat. While many people happily followed his bidding, others were appalled by the request to stretch so far outside of their comfort zone, and this sparked a debate at the meeting of the governing body of the church three days later on May 2.

Please “Refrain From Applause”

“You missed the meeting!” was the first thing Pastor Jason said when he saw me the following Sunday (Field notes, 5-6-07). I had been unable to attend so Pastor Jason briefed me about the 45 minute discussion about the music – concerns about “the direction of the music” during the interim and “norms” by which the sacred jazz musician should abide. Pastor Jason said that some members of the governing body complained loudly that they and other members of the congregation were uncomfortable about being told to clap, and that this discussion segued into a complaint about applause in general.

He described how one long-time white member suggested reprinting a rubric²⁶ written several years earlier by Ken, the director of music, when he wanted to deter people from applauding after the organ postlude.²⁷ On the following Sunday (May 6) the following rubric appeared in the service leaflet:

The postlude is an important part of our worship service. It is the final act of God's people going forth into the world. Most people will choose to begin this journey immediately while a few may want to linger and meditate upon the music offered. Greetings of gladness for the opportunities God has provided for us here in our common worship are most appropriate. It is obvious that applause would not be appropriate after the prayer of confession or the affirmation of faith. We therefore ask that you prayerfully consider the postlude to be just as integral a part of our worship as any other and to refrain from applauding. (Field notes, 5-6-07)

The man who asked that it be reprinted was not satisfied. Pastor Christine said that during the following week she received an email from the man that said, "Change the font so it stands out more" (Field notes, 5-30-07). To appease the man, the church's administrative assistant reset the type in boldface, italics and all capital letters, as it ran for three more Sundays until I asked about it at a staff meeting, an inquiry that turned a simmering distaste into an angry boil.

Allen was furious. A seminary graduate with a M.Div. degree who hopes to someday be an ordained a pastor in this denomination, described the argument against applause as "suspect, theologically" (Field notes, 5-30-07). "To say it is inappropriate?!" Allen questioned loudly. "Well my head went, 'Even the angels in Heaven rejoice over a sinner who repents!' I mean if you're going to clap somewhere, that's a good spot to!" Referring to the similarity in appearance to a "collect" – a short prayer that is often printed in a service book or missal for recitation in public worship (Cross & Livingstone,

²⁶ Directions regarding worship rituals in a service leaflet or worship book.

²⁷ The final piece of music in a worship service.

1997; Hatchett, 1995; McKim, 1996) – Allen added that the rubric against applause “is like a collect with a chain on it. Heel! Heel! You know?!” (Field notes, 5-30-07).

When the music and worship committee talked about the rubric, one member (black) noted the negative tone of the rubric suggesting that it “almost sounds like, ‘Now don’t you do that!’ It’s the way it was worded” (Field notes, 5-31-07). Another member (white) suggested that the rubric draws attention to the discomfort some people have with Arthur’s style. Besides, the use of the rubric for the current circumstances is inappropriate, the woman added, citing the rubric’s origins – to discourage applause that sometimes followed the postlude in the liturgy. Clapping to the beat is different everyone agreed.

Other members of the worship and music committee meeting recalled times when applause occurred spontaneously in worship and no one registered complaint: on days people were thanked for service and in response to a Baptism or children’s performance. Acknowledging that “it’s a sticky thing” determining when applause is appropriate and when it’s not, Pastor Christine said that she concurred with the congregation’s applause for the children who “need all the encouragement they can get.” In general, however, applause is not the norm in this old-line Protestant denomination’s worship, she said adding, “It’s just not our way of worshipping in our church.” Bowing to those old-line norms, Pastor Christine noted she does “not want to encourage it. If you watch me when it happens, I don’t applaud. I may smile, but I don’t applaud. It’s not my style. Another member (black) would not be dissuaded from extemporaneous response to being moved by the Spirit: “There are times that I have said ‘Amen’ after Pastor Christine preached a sermon.” Furthermore, “If someone wants to do that they should be able to do that. ... Being a diverse church, we have people coming from a diverse background and this is going to be displayed some times” (Field notes, 5-31-07)

The debate over the clapping at the April 29 sacred jazz liturgy is particularly striking when contrasted with a service just three weeks earlier on Easter Sunday, April 8,

in a more traditional liturgy. In my field notes that day, I noted that 70 people remained seated (most of them white) after the liturgy to listen to the postlude (*Toccata*, from Symphony v, op. 42, by Charles-Marie Widor) – Ken’s final performance at Crossroads Church as its director of music. After this postlude, nearly everyone rose to their feet in a standing ovation and I heard no complaints at the time about the “inappropriateness” of this applause, and certainly no recognition of the inconsistency in response.

Sacred Jazz Music “Is Interesting, but We Have Too Much”

Instead, each subsequent visit by Arthur, the sacred jazz musician incited more consternation among many of the parishioners, particularly the white parishioners although some African Americans expressed concerns as well. By Arthur’s third visit – which I could not attend – Pastor Jason told me that the sacred jazz musician asked him (as pastor-in-charge while Pastor Christine was on vacation) for permission to move the pulpit. Pastor Jason agreed without stopping to think of the ramifications and by the time he saw how bare the worship platform appeared with the massive pulpit focal point rolled out of sight, it was too late do anything. He knew these changes would rankle some members. “So during the sermon, I got up and said, the first thing I remember saying is, “Breathe. No, no, I am serious. Breathe. Take a deep breath. You know, we learn so much from our breath” (Interview, 8-22-07). Pastor Jason said that he talked about the opposites within breathing – full lungs and empty lungs – and how both are necessary to the process of breathing, then used that as metaphor for the polarities of the sacred jazz and of the more traditional old-line church music.

I was ... saying that here we have this music thing that is so different and such an opposite pole, but it helps us to recognize that there is a value in that opposite. There is a value in innovation and being opened to God’s new thing, even as we also lift up and affirm the best of tradition and the old thing. (Interview, 8-22-07)

Pastor Jason's attempts to defuse the tension failed to ward off every complaint. Pastor Jason said he received a telephone message the following week from someone who "felt they had gone to a concert as opposed to a worship service" and that "they just wanted to make it very clear and very known that they were displeased" (Interview, 8-22-07). Some members of the church went to great lengths to avoid attending the remaining services when Arthur was scheduled to play. One man told me that Arthur's repertoire "is interesting, but we have too much" of it (Interview 9-24-07), so on the last two Sundays it was scheduled this man perused other churches' websites to pick another church to attend on those days.

This mindset appears to be a factor in who attended worship on the last Sunday of the sacred jazz music, compared to the Sundays that preceded it and followed it when classically trained white musicians played. For instance, when Roger, the interim organist, played at Crossroads Church for the last time August 19, I counted 54 European Americans, 50 percent of the 108 people in attendance that day. The following week, on August 26 when Arthur played sacred jazz, attendance among European Americans dipped to 35 percent or 34 white individuals among the 96 people I counted in attendance. The next Sunday, (September 2) at the first performance by the classically trained and newly appointed director of music, attendance among European Americans rebounded to 52 people or 55 percent of the 94 people I counted in attendance on that Labor Day holiday weekend. Pastor Christine decried this behavior in staff meeting:

I think it's interesting that in this church we can have our white music. ... and expect that all the African Americans here are just going to be so happy for it: "Isn't this is just great?" And then when you have somebody like a jazz musician come in, the whites are absolutely livid. You know, "We're not going to worship with this! This is terrible! We're not even going to come when this happens!" (Field notes, 9-12-07)

This boycott illustrates a behavior that Christerson et al. (2005) observed: white individuals – by virtue of their membership in the dominant race – are more like to be leaders in their professions and therefore more accustomed to demanding their way. They

also note that interracial congregations have more conflict than homogenous ones because “cultural differences tend to be given absolute and transcendent meanings, making compromise more difficult” (p. 175) as the next section illustrates.

Kairos and Chronos as Metaphor for Music

Such “absolute and transcendent meanings” are most apparent in music at Crossroads Church, so Pastor Jason helped the multicultural group at one of its meetings to plumb those disagreements to gain perspective on them. He framed it in terms of “power up” and “power down” which are mechanisms of racial hierarchy and aversive racism that white individuals often resort to maintain status, or in this case in a bid to control the music. The group had used these concepts in the previous meeting’s discussion. Conversation focused on one disgruntled choir member who nobody named. The man (white) is a long-time member of the administration and finance committee and is considered by many members to be one of the most powerful people in the congregation even though he no longer serves on the governing body. Said Sasha (white):

I think that the concept is that if someone is very involved in the music program and didn’t like the direction it was taking and they decided to leave the music program and then also could withhold financial [support] and other things. They can then still hold the power because they are holding the money. I mean power goes with money. And so these people had a lot at stake within the power structure that may not be totally identifiable by everybody within the congregation. But if you’re in the small elite group, you know who the power structure is and know where the purse strings are held. (Field notes, 3-28-07)

In short, they could affect power in the congregation by using their status, said Pastor Jason, “to make things uncomfortable in the midst of the changes” that the music director was trying to introduce. “And not just financially, directly themselves,” Sasha clarified, “but by talking to other people about what’s going on. So there’s a lot of little side talks and side conversations ... and I knew they were going on and I stayed away from them.”

Antoinette (black) shifted the focus to consider issues over “quality” of music, a perfect example in this congregation of the “absolute and transcendent meanings, making compromise more difficult” (Christerson et al., 2005, p. 175).

Antoinette: There’s another piece of this, though, that the power up community sets the definition and defines quality. And so we operate with the standard that white classical church music is good. And anything else is not as good. And Crossroads Church wants quality. And we want the best. Therefore, this is the music. So it makes no room to define either what really is good, what really is quality. So there is no structural opportunity for anything other to even be presented – in a conversation, in the dialogue, even among the leaders – because we’re operating by this given standard.

Sasha: There’s another thing, too, involved with that. There’s a level of perfection that was expected among our music program. And that also makes it very difficult for people ... that are new to the congregation or who might be interested in the music program to enter into it because you feel like you have to be at this certain high level. ... I think very many people get intimidated because they feel, they feel they have to get to this certain level. There is a comfort level when you go to an African American church where the music is not perfect. But it’s praising God and worshipping God.

Antoinette: Well who says it’s not perfect!

Sasha: I’m saying it’s not perfect in that sense of the white classical music like everything is in tune ...

Lou (white): [chuckles] Where have you heard bad gospel music?

Sasha: [Defensive] Well no, ... I have been to ones where they are not in tune and yet ...

Antoinette: I have been to white churches where they are not in tune ...

Sasha: I know, but I am saying that at our church, that is what the expectation is. So I am saying there is a level here where people don’t think they can participate because they think that they have to be at that level of “perfection” that has been set within our congregation. I am not saying it’s perfect from my sense of being-ness, I’m talking about that quote perfect. (Field notes, 3-28-07)

The discussion moved into a discussion of “precision” in music. Pastor Jason pointed to the theory of “polarity management” (Johnson, 1992), a theory he often

references to help the congregation negotiate seemingly opposing perspectives, noting that even with opposites, it does not mean one is good and the other bad. “They are opposites like inhaling and exhaling,” Pastor Jason said (Field notes, 3-28-07). Later in the discussion he borrowed another metaphor:

In Greek there are two different words for time and they mean two different things. One is *chronos* which is 5 o’clock, 6 o’clock. Right? June, July, August. The other is *kairos*, which means the right time. Right? Music can be performed with the *chronos* exactly right every beat ... and the crescendos and everything done very precise, but it doesn’t have that spirit of the *kairos* that a good conductor can give and just out of the spirit and just pull out of an orchestra. That is not about whether they spelled the note with the right whatever. That is what I am trying to get ... they don’t have to be mutually exclusive. You can have both. Right? ... But as far as what is valued, there are certain congregations that value one above the other. (Field notes, 3-28-07)

As for the music program, “they were trying to do the music from the point of the precision of the *chronos* thing. So if whatever sheet music they had gotten, they were trying to do it well. But to them well was with that value of emphasis on paper,” he explained (Field notes, 3-28-07). Antoinette, suggested that the church needs “to be open to the *kairos* experience” the different sort of “precision” that authentic African American music provides. Then, “if you can’t do it, then let’s not try to do it” (Field notes, 3-28-07).

Conclusion: Music as Proxy for Race

Struggles over the music tell a nuanced story about race dynamics at Crossroads Church, illustrating every theoretical concept I have used in this paper: aversive racism, racial paranoia, racial identity, race talk and two-faced racism. As the narrative above illustrates, music style serves as a proxy for race allowing white people to talk about race without ever mentioning it, to talk about black music by simply referring to jazz. As the process of aversive racism suggests, white people express concerns about black musicians and music by rationalizing it on other factors – the inappropriateness of

outbursts of applause or of moving church furnishings, the quality of the musicians and the music, concerns for the musical reputation of the church, etc. Although they expect people with other musical tastes to accept the menu and taste of western church music, they seldom are willing to allow for variation in that fare out of fear that others will come to expect and demand that. When these white folks do not get what they want, they use subversive tactics to get their way – inciting discontent, threatening to withhold financial contributions, and simply not showing up for church.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

Thirty-five years after King's prophetic statement that 11 a.m. Sunday morning is the most segregated hour of the week, I went to Crossroads Church in search of whether this congregation had achieved the integration of which King had dreamed. Every Sunday, white people and black people arrive at worship in near equal numbers and through their shared work and ministry they continue to shape the new identity of Crossroads Church as a biracial congregation. While most white people inside and outside the congregation see it as a model of diversity, most African Americans there showed me that much work is to be done before Crossroads Church truly achieves integration. Indeed, I discovered the congregation to be a useful place to chronicle examples of the types of behaviors of which Sen. Barack Obama spoke: "the complexities of race in this country that we've never really worked through" (2008, ¶27).

Intent of This Study

While this ethnography focuses on one congregation, it is not a study of a church *per se* but, rather, a study of race, racialization and racism that happens to take place in a church. A biracial congregation such as this one – with its voluntary affiliation of people whose daily activities connect them to an array of institutions – provides valuable insights for the study of desegregation, integration and pluralism in America (Christerson et al., 2005). I went to Crossroads Church to determine whether interracial encounters there had the effect of moving white members along the continuum of racial identity attitudes toward an anti-racist world view. I observed the quality of members' interactions across race, their comfort in dialogue about race, and their awareness of

differing perspectives that stem from their racial reality, and noted slippages in their efforts to realize King's dream.

I am well suited for such a study because I am indigenous to the culture that breeds racism. I am a middle-aged white woman who spent most of my childhood in racial isolation in the mid-West where I was raised by conscientious parents to be a "well-meaning white," such as the subject of the theory of aversive racism. Indeed, I have an intimate relationship with every theoretical framework I use – *aversive racism*, *racial paranoia*, *race talk* and *two-faced racism* – because the broader culture socialized me to become fluent in all of them. Although I have progressed along the continuum of *racial identity attitudes* in my recovery, I still catch myself at times succumbing to these subconscious and covert practices of racism.

Findings

As I approached this study, I asked three questions: *How do members of a biracial congregation interact across race? How do they engage in discussions about race? How does racial identity attitude inform their perspectives?* I observed that white members have learned to comfortably co-exist with African Americans in worship – even giving a visitor the appearance of a peaceable kingdom – but have not developed deep enough relationships to broaden their world view. This hesitancy may be attributable to a larger social problem – that most white individuals in U.S. society are misinformed by white notions of what is and is not "politically correct" when interacting with African Americans. As a result, interracial encounters at Crossroads Church are adversely affected.

Beyond the modest degree of social interaction, most white members of Crossroads Church do not seem to want or be able to negotiate what they perceive as the complexities of interracial relationships. Examples abound: Of the nearly 30 members

who traveled to a women's retreat – a weekend directed by a European American hired to lead the program at a cozy camp and conference center – only three white women went along. On the Sundays when a church meal is planned, most African American members at worship those mornings stay, while many white members leave and the ones who do stay typically sit at segregated tables. Many of the white church leaders are less likely than their African American peers to participate in the social activities planned specifically to encourage congregants to get to know one another.

While reluctant to attend purely social events of Crossroads Church, white members appear quite comfortable working with African Americans on tasks at the church. Some of these encounters, however, illustrate how old authority models long used to maintain the status of white individuals continue to survive in multiracial settings, despite appearances of racial equality. For instance, the furniture moving incident illustrates how easily a white individual slipped into a hierarchical role assuming a position of power over an African American. Even members of the multicultural group – whose sole purpose is to wrestle with the issues of diversity – resort to these behaviors as illustrated by the encounter over who would host the next meeting.

The same hesitancy that causes the white members to avoid some social events at church also inclines them to avoid dialogue about race – even bringing in specialists trained to facilitate such dialogue – out of fear that it will incite conflict. These concerns are fueled by racial paranoia. Meanwhile the same white individuals engage in covertly racist performances that unbeknownst to them are transparent to most African Americans, such as coded language, other semantic moves intended to veil racialized and racist statements as well as two-faced racism. The one place in the congregation where healthy and non-confrontational talk of race and racism does take place is in the Bible study, where only one white person regularly attends and where nearly all of the participants are women.

With only modest social interaction across race and little dialogue about race, white members of the congregation hold markedly different perceptions about the interracial life of Crossroads Church than black members. Many black members say they would relish opportunities to talk with white members about race issues and share stories from their own lives that illustrate the racial realities that confront many of the nation's African Americans. Indeed a handful of black members of the congregation and staff have shared personal stories during meetings of the Bible study and the multicultural group in the hopes of opening the eyes of their white friends. What I found is that white individuals can dialogue about these issues only when they are scrutinizing the behavior of other white individuals and they do not feel that they themselves or people they care about are being implicated in racism.

Analysis

Throughout this research, I studied encounters at Crossroads Church in the same way that a therapist would observe a family in counseling, and like a therapist I hold great compassion for all the actors. Everyone I spoke to values the diversity there. The difference between them is the cost that different individuals are willing to bear to support this degree of diversity. It is quite apparent from the data that African Americans are forced to bear a heavier cost because they are expected by many members to conform without complaint to the European American norms of the church. This finding concurs with Edward's (2008) observations of the white hegemony that exists in racially diverse churches that purport to be multicultural, although my analysis of *why* this occurs differs from hers.

While Edwards (2008) and Cone (2002), among others, paint these oftentimes racist behaviors by whites as willful and deliberate, I suggest that there is another underlying factor. Yes, white people are influenced by their minimal awareness of their

racial identity attitude, prone to racial paranoia, and inclined to rationalize the behavior that results as though race did not play a role – all factors in unintentional racism. The data also suggest, however, what appears to be racial hesitancy exhibited by white individuals in interracial settings and that I argue stems from being totally confused about what is “politically correct.” Their socialization on these matters has failed them, as Ed so vividly recounted after his encounter with Ron when he tried to describe a woman without saying she was white, thinking it would be inappropriate to mention race to a black man. Maybe this hesitancy is not the overriding factor that drives the behavior of white individuals who exhibit it, but it is clearly a factor, and it is one that has not been explored in the literature on race and religion.

The data also speak to the biracial character of this church as being almost a delicate truce in an extremely dysfunctional family where many members are comfortable with the dysfunction, especially members in power who do not want conflict. There is collectiveness to this behavior, as though the congregation is well aware that if conflict erupts and gets out of control, it could drive away many of the more timid white members whose presence is necessary to maintain this island of diversity. Although imperfect, many members of the congregation – both black members and white – would rather cling to this dysfunction than take advantage of true growth in racial identity attitudes and of healing that would require interpersonal risks. Less developed racial identity attitudes play a role in this.

Implications

Crossroads Church, like most urban multicultural churches, is a primary location for educating people about how to negotiate the relationships in the changing ethnic landscape of urban American. Indeed, multiracial churches offer an extraordinary window into the ways people negotiate their racialized lives, particularly Protestant

churches where membership is voluntary and not assigned as in Roman Catholic parishes. We need to ask: What are they learning?

Previous research has laid an important foundation that describes the landscape of race, racialization and racism in churches and that provides a useful backdrop for the next phase of research required: analysis of the psychology of white behaviors there. The theory of aversive racism has been empirically tested by numerous researchers over the last three decades, but the nuances of other ideas such as Jackson's (2008) social commentary on racial paranoia, has been researched little. Bolstered by research that assures us of the validity of the theory of aversive racism, we can lean on it to do further qualitative work exploring the manifestations of racial paranoia (both black and white). We also need to develop a clearer picture of how racial identity attitudes influence racial paranoia and drive the other behaviors of aversive racism, race talk and two-faced racism among white individuals. Indeed, churches – by virtue of their teachings on social justice – are a unique location among all institutions for involving members in social action research that would engage members in the process of such study.

The people of Crossroads Church have taught us that while on the surface it is trying to bridge racial boundaries, the wedge of aversive racism has prevented a true integration and an advancement in their relations. For true education on race issues to occur, the members of this congregation must learn from each other to understand the role each plays in this dance of faux integration. The question remains whether this current situation has reached a point of homeostasis or whether it is just another waypoint on its transition from white to black. The clock is ticking and the time for learning may be slipping away. What have they learned? What are they taking away from this opportunity? For African American members already used to living in a white world, I would say they have learned from their encounters with white people at church – and in the absence of constructive dialogue – more reason to justify their racial paranoia. For European American members who presume they are exposed to the black world by virtue

of the few hours they spend weekly amidst such diversity, they are grossly mis-educated as the unabated aversive racism, race talk and two-faced racism attests. While the opportunity exists to reverse this learning and introduce education that leads to racial understanding, it will require the members of Crossroads Church to take a leap of faith to seize that opportunity. Once they do this, they will have much to teach other institutions.

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APPENDICES

**TABLES, FIGURES, OBSERVATION PROTOCOL,
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

Table 1: General Characteristics of Black Racial Identity Stages

Stages <i>Phases</i>	General Theme	Emotional Themes	Identity Components		
			Personal Identity	Reference Group Orientation	Ascribed Identity
Pre-encounter <i>Active (less healthy than passive)</i> <i>Passive or assimilating</i>	Idealization of Whiteness	Anxiety, poor self-concept, confused	Negative	White/Euro-American	White
	Denigration of blackness	Defensiveness	Idealized positive	White/Euro-American	None (non-Black)
Encounter <i>Events</i> <i>Experience</i>	Consciousness of race	Bitterness, hurt, anger	Positive	White/Euro-American	None
		Euphoria	Transitional	Black	Black
Immersion/Emersion	Idealization of Blackness	Rage, self-destructiveness	None	Black	Black
	Denigration of whiteness	Impulsivity; euphoric	Positive	Black	Black
Internalization/Commitment	Racial transcendence	Self-controlled calm, secure	Positive	Bicultural	Black
		Activist	Positive	Pluralistic	Black/pan-African

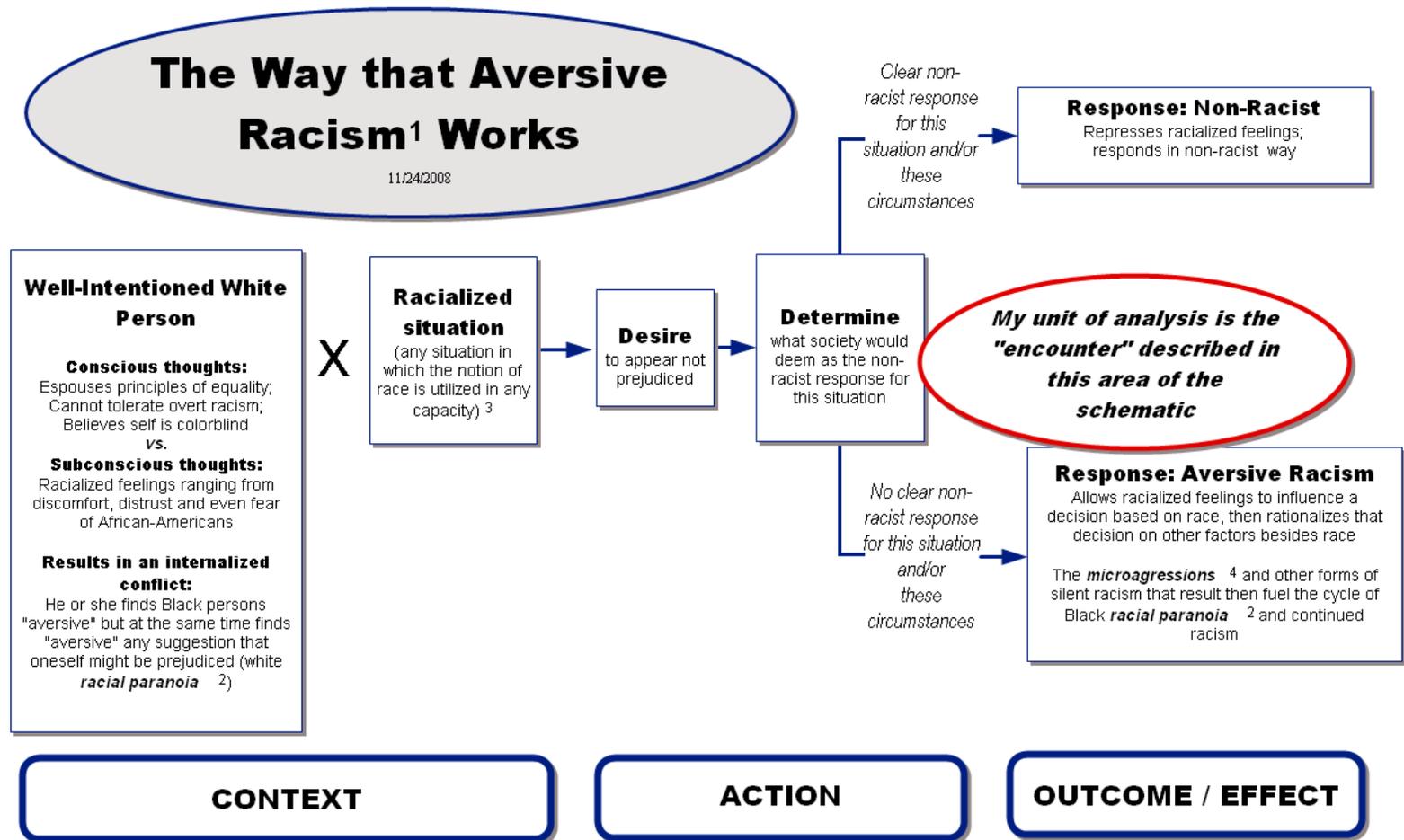
Slightly modified (Helms, 1990, p. 30).

Table 2. Continuum on Becoming an Anti-Racist Multi-Cultural Church

MONOCULTURAL → → →		MULTICULTURAL → → →		ANTI-RACIST → → →		ANTI-RACIST MULTICULTURAL	
<i>Racial And Cultural Differences Seen As Deficits</i>		<i>Tolerant Of Racial And Cultural Differences</i>		<i>Racial And Cultural Differences Seen As Assets</i>			
<p>1. EXCLUSIVE: A Segregated Church</p> <p>Intentionally and publicly excludes or segregates African Americans, Arab Americans, Native Americans, Latinos and Asian Americans</p> <p>Intentionally and publicly enforces the racist status quo throughout institution</p> <p>Institutionalization of racism includes formal policies and practices, teachings, and decision making on all levels</p> <p>Usually has similar intentional policies and practices toward other socially oppressed groups such as women, disabled, elderly and children, lesbian, and gays, Third World citizens, etc.</p>	<p>2. PASSIVE: A 'Club' Church</p> <p>Tolerant of a limited number of People of Color with "proper" perspective and credentials</p> <p>May still secretly limit or exclude People of Color in contradiction to public policies</p> <p>Continues to intentionally maintain white power and privilege through its formal policies and practices, teachings, and decision making on all levels of institutional life</p> <p>Often declares, "We don't have a problem."</p>	<p>3. SYMBOLIC CHANGE: A Multicultural Church</p> <p>Makes official policy pronouncements regarding multicultural diversity</p> <p>Sees itself as "non-racist" institution with open doors to People of Color</p> <p>Carries out intentional inclusiveness efforts, recruiting "someone of color" on committees or office staff</p> <p>Expanding view of diversity includes other socially oppressed groups such as women, disabled, elderly and children, lesbian, and gays, Third World citizens, etc.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">BUT...</p> <p>"Not those who make waves"</p> <p>Little or no contextual change in culture, policies, and decision-making</p> <p>Is still relatively unaware of continuing patterns privilege, paternalism and control</p>	<p>4. IDENTITY CHANGE: An Anti-Racist Church</p> <p>Growing understanding of racism as barrier to effective diversity</p> <p>Develops analysis of systemic racism</p> <p>Sponsors programs of anti-racism training</p> <p>New consciousness of institutionalized white power and privilege</p> <p>Develops intentional identity as an "anti-racist institution"</p> <p>Begins to develop accountability to racially oppressed communities</p> <p>Increasing commitment to dismantle racism and eliminate inherent white advantage</p> <p style="text-align: center;">BUT...</p> <p>Institutional structures and culture that maintain white power and privilege still intact and relatively untouched</p>	<p>5. STRUCTURAL CHANGE: A Transforming Church</p> <p>Commits to process of intentional institutional restructuring, based upon anti-racist analysis and identity</p> <p>Audits and restructures all aspects of institutional life to ensure full participation of People of Color, including their world-view, culture and lifestyles</p> <p>Implements structures, policies and practices with inclusive decision making and other forms of power sharing on all levels of the institution's life and work</p> <p>Commits to struggle to dismantle racism in the wider community, and builds clear lines of accountability to racially oppressed communities</p> <p>Anti-racist multicultural diversity becomes an institutionalized asset</p> <p>Redefines and rebuilds all relationships and activities in society, based on anti-racist commitments</p>	<p>6. FULLY INCLUSIVE: A Transformed Church In A Transformed Society</p> <p>Future vision of an institution and wider community that has overcome systemic racism</p> <p>Institution's life reflects full participation and shared power with diverse racial, cultural, and economic groups in determining its mission, structure, constituency, policies and practices</p> <p>Full participation in decisions that shape the institution, and inclusion of diverse cultures, lifestyles, and interests</p> <p>A sense of restored community and mutual caring</p> <p>Allies with others in combating all forms of social oppression</p>		

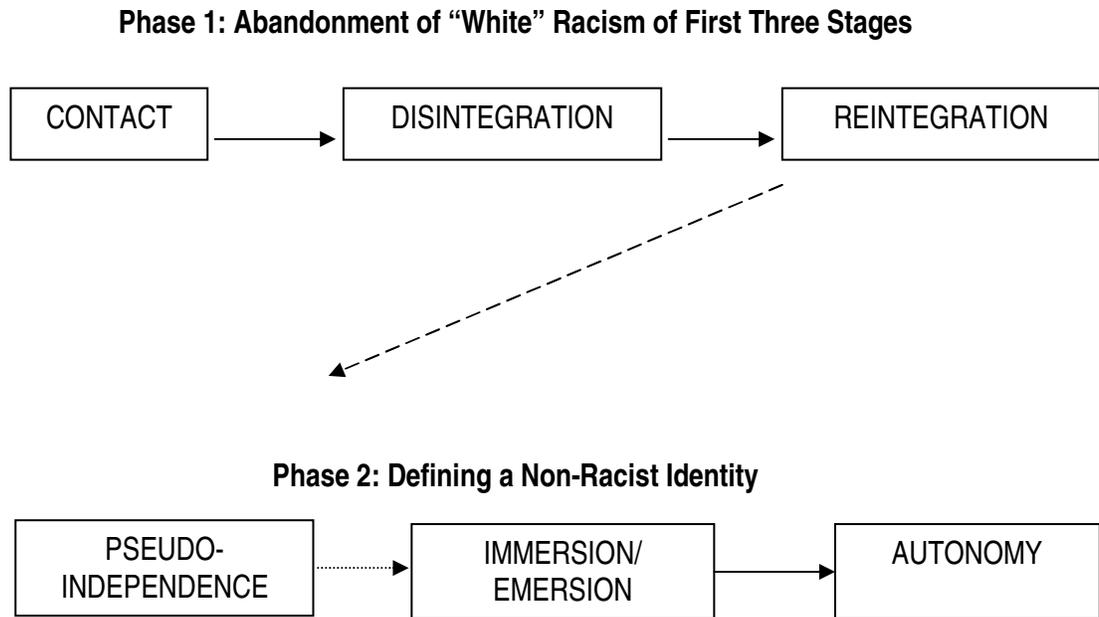
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Figure 1: Theoretical Framework



¹ Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986; Dovidio & Gaertner, 1996, 2000; Dovidio et al., 2002a; Dovidio et al., 2002b; Gaertner, 1973; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1977; Rollman, 1978
² Jackson, 2008
³ Dalal, 2002
⁴ Sue, D. W., Capodilupo, C. M., Torino, G. C., Bucceri, J. M., Holder, A. M. B., Nadal, K. L., et al. (2007)

Figure 2: Two-Phase Process of White Racial Identity Attitude



(Helms, 1990, p. 56)

APPENDIX A
OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Activity/Location: _____

Date/Time/Length of Observation: _____

Role of Observer (circle one): Non-participant Participant

Time (Jot down time every 5 to 10 minutes to loosely track what occurred when and the duration of what is being observed)	Descriptive Notes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity • Individuals • Interactions • Physical setting 	Reflective Notes (Insights, hunches, themes; questions to explore)

Things to think about as I observe:

- Record the frequency that a group meets over the months that I am collecting data and the number of people at each gathering. Record the topic or topics discussed. Record the number of times something occurs that relates to the research questions including the magnitude, structure (distinctive and relevant features), and processes (probably a sequence that requires tracing back), causes (in qualitative studies this requires incidences of its occurrence as well as nonoccurrence), and consequences.
- What are the physical arrangements of people? Think about this in terms of where people congregate before and after the gathering as well as during it. Specifically, how are white and black members spacially mixed or divided?
- Regarding human agency: “We view humans as creative and probing creatures who are coping, dealing, designating, dodging, maneuvering, scheming, striving,

struggling, and so forth—that is, as creatures who are actively influencing their social settings. ... What is the *situation* being dealt with? What *strategies* are being employed in dealing with the situation?” (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 145).

- When is race named? When is it avoided and code used? What code words or phrases are substituted?
- “What role does this practice, pattern, or variation play in the maintenance of this setting in its present form?” (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 144).
- Note to myself: In the field notes and transcripts, use brackets [] with *italics* in between to explain the rationale for what I am attempting with my line of questioning, either before or after the question.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Before the beginning of each interview, I will take time to chat with the interview participant to help him or her be comfortable with the idea of being interviewed. I already developed some degree of rapport through my fieldwork as a participant observer at many gatherings of members of the congregation. It is through these activities that I will determine who to interview, find an opportunity to talk to them about this research, and broach them about whether they would agree to be a research participant.

After some degree of comfort is achieved, I will remind the participant briefly about what was told him or her in previous conversations about the purpose of this research and its evolution from a pilot study done in 2003. The objectives during this introductory talk are twofold: to make sure (1) that the participant understands that his or her interview is part of a larger research effort to understand the benefits and challenges of diversity inherent in a multiracial congregation and (2) that he or she knows that the study of this congregation will contribute to the body of knowledge useful in understanding multiracial dynamics of many congregations. I will tell the participant what led to his or her selection for this study and the procedures that will be used to collect data (e.g., observations and interviews).

I will describe for the participant the steps taken to disguise his or her identity as well as the identity of the congregation. I will explain that the interview will be tape-recorded only to transcribe the interviews verbatim. I will not share the audiotapes with anyone. In the event that I need to share notes with another researcher to verify analysis, pseudonyms will be substituted for all proper names to disguise the identities of participants. The tapes, transcripts, field notes and racial identity instrument responses from the research project will be kept in a file cabinet (or password protected computer)

in my home. Although the participant's remarks may be published, I will attribute them to pseudonyms and attempt to disguise their identities.

I will take time to explain the remaining points to be covered on the consent form and ask the participant if he or she would be willing to sign it and continue with the interviews. I will repeat the procedure described above (but in an abbreviated form) for the second session of any interview that requires more than two meetings. At the conclusion of each interview, I will thank the participant.

Person Interviewed: _____

Date/Time/Duration/Location of Interview: _____

Make notes of things I observe (distractions, looking at me or looking away, body language, change in intonation, emotions, etc.) that are not captured in the dialogue and add details of those observations to the transcriptions.

SECTION ONE:

Life leading up to Crossroads Church

(This interview will gather demographic information about the individual to provide contextual information for situating his or her perspective. I also am probing for personal experiences that might shape the subject's outlook on diversity. At this point in the interview series I deliberately avoid asking leading questions about diversity because I want to see if the participant raises the issue of diversity without prompting.)

Questions:

- Tell me about your life experiences that influenced you to attend a congregation like Crossroads Church.
- Were you raised in this denomination? If not, what religious traditions have you been a part and when?
- How did you learn about this church?
- What characteristics about Crossroads Church led you to choose this congregation over all others that you could be attending at this time?
- Do you feel that these characteristics are unique to Crossroads Church?
- How many years have you been attending Crossroads Church?
- In what zip code do you live? For how long have you lived there?
- How many minutes does it take you to travel to the church?
- Do you drive, walk or take public transportation to church?

- In what other zip codes have you lived while you have been attending Crossroads Church?
- If you have a spouse or partner, does he or she attend with you?
- If you have children living at home, please tell me the name, age, sex, grade and school of each child as well as the activities at Crossroads Church in which your children attend now or have attended in the past (worship, nursery care, church school, youth group, choir, summer camp). If they no longer attend certain activities, tell me when they attended and why they stopped attending. If they don't attend, tell me why. (*I will record start and end dates.*)

	Child 1	Child 2	Child 3
Age			
Sex			
School name			
Worship			
Nursery			
Church school			
Youth group			
Choir			
Summer camp			

If any of your children are GROWN, but were living with you while you were attending Crossroads Church, please tell me their name, age, sex, schools attended and the Crossroads Church activities which they attended, and the reason they stopped attending church activities or never attended. (*I will record start and end dates.*)

	Child 1	Child 2	Child 3
Age			
Sex			
School name			
Worship			
Nursery			
Church school			
Youth group			
Choir			
Summer camp			

- Whose idea was it for you (and your family) to begin attending Crossroads Church? Yours? Your spouse or partner's? Your child's?

Experiences at the church

(Some church activities are more diverse than others, and I am curious to know to which ones the participant is drawn. I am trying in this interview to see whether the interviewee will talk candidly about his or her experiences of diversity. In particular, I am listening for whether whites will talk about interracial difficulties they have negotiated and whether they will admit to encounters that reflect on them in a less than positive way and the wisdom they gained from those experiences. Regarding members of African ancestry, I am listening for their experiences of integration and segregation in the congregation and their perceptions of those experiences.)

- In which activities do you participate at Crossroads Church?

Member of:

- Board of elders
- Choir
- Christian Ed. Cm
- Communication Cm.
- Evangelism Com.
- Mission/Outreach Cm.
- Multicultural Cm.
- Session
- Worship/Music Cm.

Attend:

- Adult seminar
- Bible study (Sun.)
- Bread & Cup
- Concert Series
- Parish excursions
- Parish retreat
- Progressive dinners

Assist with:

- Summer camp
- Sunday school

- Other activities?
- Of the parishioners that you have met at Crossroads Church, which individuals or families do you socialize most by visiting in each other's homes, and/or meeting at venues outside of the church? Name people from five different families.
- Tell me about your experiences at Crossroads Church:
 - What aspects of Crossroads Church do you most appreciate?
 - What aspects of Crossroads Church do you find challenging?
 - What aspects of Crossroads Church most frustrate you?
- If you have belonged to other congregations in the past, how do your experiences at Crossroads Church – the things you most appreciate, that challenge you, and frustrate you – compare with your experiences of those things in other congregations you have attended?

- Assuming that you talk to other people about your church, how do you describe your experiences at Crossroads Church to people who are not members?
- What types of questions do they in turn ask you about your experiences in the congregation?
- What types of assumptions do you think other people make about your attendance at Crossroads Church?

SECTION TWO:

Reflection on diversity

Crossroads Church's worship leaflet refers to the congregation as people "from diverse experiences, points of view, and racial, educational and economic backgrounds. Yet we are all one in Christ."

- How do you describe yourself in these terms ("diverse experiences, points of view, and racial, educational and economic backgrounds")?
- How have you experienced diversity in this congregation?
- What words, phrases or examples do you use to describe the diversity at Crossroads Church?
- What words, phrases or examples have you heard other people use to describe the diversity at Crossroads Church? Identify the relationship of those people to the congregation.
- Are there some aspects of Crossroads Church that are more diverse than others? If so, describe.
- How does your experience of diversity at Crossroads Church compare to your experiences of diversity in other aspects of your life? These include your workplace and closest colleagues there, neighborhood and the neighbors with whom you interact most, social life and the people outside of your family with whom you spend the most time.
- Are there aspects of diversity at Crossroads Church that you find difficult?
 - If so, how are they difficult?
 - How do you deal with this difficulty?

- Has your experience of diversity at Crossroads Church had an effect on your life outside of the church? If so, why and how? If not, why?
- How has your experience of diversity at Crossroads Church had an effect over time on your perceptions regarding diversity?
- What accommodations do you think the congregation makes to accommodate “diverse experiences, points of view, and racial, educational and economic backgrounds” described in the service leaflet?

SECTION THREE:

Reflection on race

Crossroads Church’s worship leaflet refers to the congregation as people “from diverse experiences, points of view, and racial, educational and economic backgrounds. Yet we are all one in Christ.” The multiracial character of Crossroads Church’s membership (particularly in terms of black and white members) sets the congregation apart from most old-line Protestant churches, of which fewer than 5 percent are multiracial.

- How would you describe the racial diversity at Crossroads Church in terms of the percentage of black members and the percentage of white members?
- How does a formerly all-white the congregation like Crossroads Church integrate African identity, values, and cultural styles into its worship style, practice of leadership, education program and social functions? How does it not integrate these things?
- Crossroads Church appears to have made efforts to racially diversify its staff, Session, and other committees within the church. Do you think that this diversification has effectively integrated the congregation? Explain.
- Are there groups or gatherings at Crossroads Church which are not racially diverse? Describe those groups and explain why you think they are not diverse? Would you like to see that changed? If so, why and how? If not, why not?
- Are there any things you would like to see changed at the church regarding diversity and race? If so, what changes would you like to see, how would you like to see them done, and what role, if any, would you like to take in this?
- How has the diversity at Crossroads Church had an effect on how people socialize across race?

- Based on your experience at Crossroads Church, what are the issues with which a racially diverse congregation must deal?
- Based on your experience at Crossroads Church, what are the underlying concerns of the different racial groups?
- What steps do you think must the congregation take to address these issues and concerns?
- What sorts of awkward situations have you found yourself in regarding race and racism at Crossroads Church?
- What sorts of awkward situations do you know others at Crossroads Church have found themselves in regarding race and racism?
- How has the diversity had an effect on how people talk about race, racialization and racism?
- How comfortable are you when someone in a group of mixed race at Crossroads Church brings up the terms race, racial and racism?
- How comfortable do you think other people are when someone in a group of mixed race at Crossroads Church brings up the terms race, racial and racism?
- When you talk to congregants of a racial group different from your own, do you talk about the same subjects in the same way as you would if you were talking to congregants of your own racial group? If not, give an example and explain what you think is occurring.
- When you talk to congregants of a racial group different from your own, do you think THEY talk about the same subjects in the same way as THEY would if THEY were talking to congregants of THEIR own racial group? If not, give an example and explain what you think is occurring.
- Are there times you recall at Crossroads Church when the words race, racial and racism were not used even though the conversation alludes to them?
 - If so, how did you “hear” race even though the word was not used in the conversation?
 - What words or phrases were substituted?
 - Why do you think this was occurring?
- I will be interviewing about people for this study. Not everyone shares the same perspective, even those who share the same race. Think of other parishioners of your

race and how they might answer some of these questions differently. What would they say?

Note to myself: Rather than interrupt the interview subject when he or she says something for which I need clarification, use this space to jot keywords to remind myself of clarifying questions that I need to ask: