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Observing the Experience of Racism Through Social Background

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OBSERVING THE EXPERIENCE OF RACISM THROUGH SOCIAL
BACKGROUND

A Thesis Presented

by

LEILA J. DIEYE

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies,
University of Massachusetts Boston,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

December 2017

Conflict Resolution Program

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ABSTRACT

OBSERVING THE EXPERIENCE OF RACISM THROUGH SOCIAL BACKGROUND

December 2017

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This study explores racism through the eyes of the one that experiences it. If different types of racism have already been established, the initial premise of the study is that some factors make its experience unique, such as one individual's markers of identity and his history.

Data have been collected from in-depth interviews with ten participants belonging to five ethnic groups (Latino, African American, Asian, African and Middle Eastern). Those participants were asked to reflect on a specific moment when they witnessed racism, and on why it made them think that event in particular was racist. Then, they were asked about what in their background helps shape their reaction to racism in general.

The results of the study seem to support the idea that experiences of racism are shaped by people's social background, but also by how this background is

viewed by outsiders. Moreover, immigrant status is an important characteristic in explaining differences in experiences of individuals sharing other elements of their social backgrounds.

To conclude, introducing the perspective of those who experience racism in studying this topic leads us to rethink what we define as racism, even if at the same time it adds one level of complexity. Should we now only consider racism in relation to the individual that was experiencing the act, and not in relation to the type of act that has been committed? Should we keep looking for other criteria to nuance the definition of racism, of at least its experience? If it is understandable that these questions may cause practical issues, they nonetheless invite us to always question, reconsider or broaden our understanding of racism.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Although the Charter of the United Nations reinforces the principles of dignity and equality inherent in all human beings, there is still no universally agreed definition of racism today. Nevertheless we can affirm that racism is directly against the principles of the charter and thus, even if there is no universal definition of it, there is a universal foundation to why racism is wrong.

The dictionary commonly defines racism as the belief that a race of people is better than others and therefore deserves a different treatment (Merriam-Webster.com).

However it is subtler and more complex than this. As an illustration, according to the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), the notion of racial discrimination includes “any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, color, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life” (ICERD, 1965, p. 2).

Since racism is so diverse (individual and systemic racism), there are several ways to experience it. Individual racism is made of personal beliefs or actions carried by an individual and is “a form of racial discrimination that stems from conscious and unconscious, personal prejudice.” (Henry and Tator, 2006, p. 329). Systemic racism, on the other hand and according to a U.S.-centric definition, is “the complex array of anti-black practices, the unjustly gained political-economic power of whites, the continuing economic and other resource inequalities along racial lines, and the white racist ideologies and attitudes created to maintain and rationalize white privilege and power” (Feagin, 2000 p. 6). Feagin then explains how racism is present in every part of the U.S. society, such as politics, economy, education or religion.

However, if these definitions help in identifying what is the purpose of racism (a difference in treatments), it seems to focus on the giving hand of racism (the intention behind committing a racist act). Therefore, the aim of this study consists in going beyond those definitions and exploring racism differently: through the eyes of the one who experiences it. The focus is given to individuals and their personal encounters with racism. This allows us to get a more unique perspective on racism, as the individual who experiences it is always more aware of his their own specificities.

Indeed, some factors can make the experience of racism unique: one’s personal markers of identity, or history. The term markers of identity is used here to designate several elements which form our identity. We often use them to define us, as they help determine our status and role in society (such as our marital status, our occupation, our gender, our age, our political affiliation). They are defined according to the elements of distinction used in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (race, color, descent, national or ethnic origin) as well as religion and sexual orientation. History is used as a means to designate the

personal past events we experienced. They are important factors to explore as they shape our understanding of what surrounds us. For the purpose of the study, the term “social background” will be used in order to capture these different elements.

Finally, I hope to bring awareness on how racism can have several layers. By awareness, I mean to push further the discussion, and leading people to think about how this study complicates ideas of racism by focusing on how it is experienced by individuals from different backgrounds.

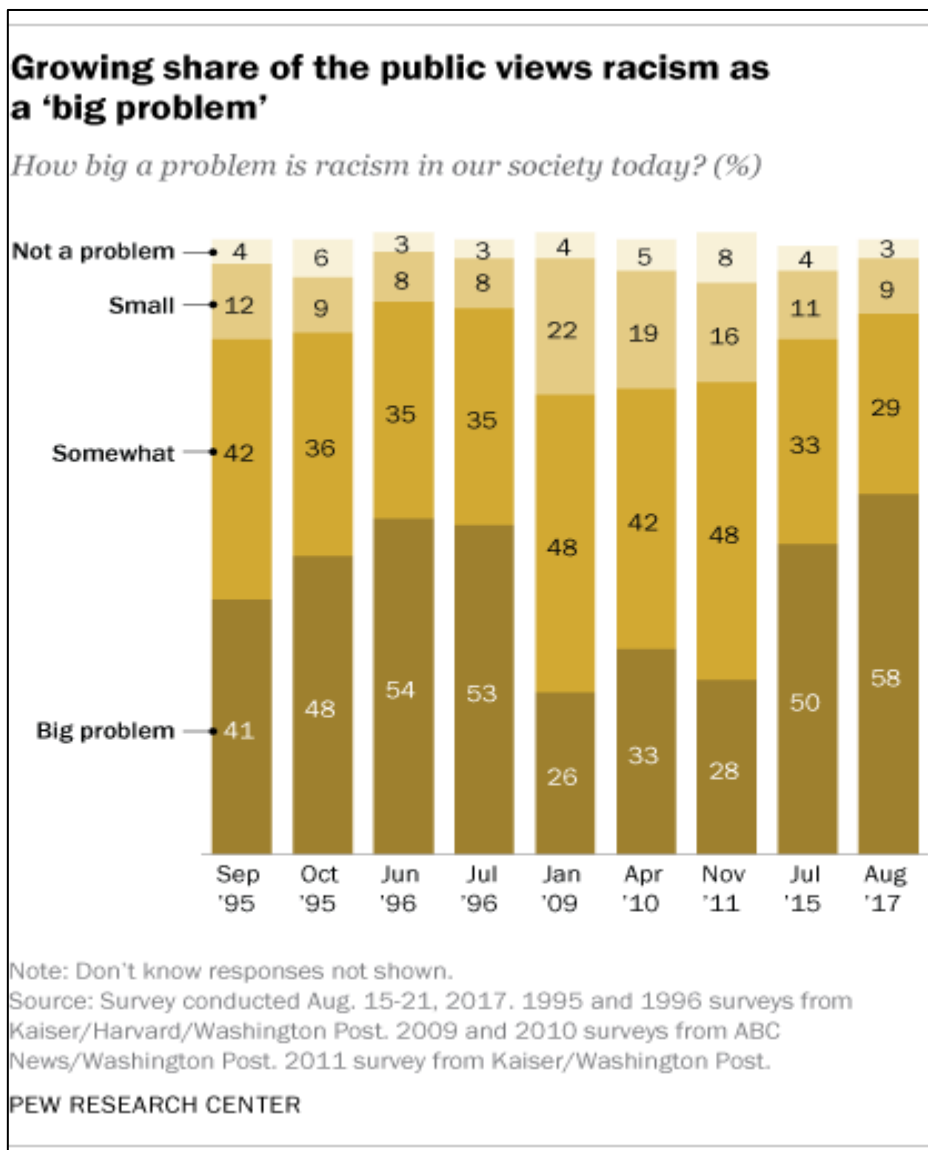
Implications of the Topic and Study

Nowadays, racism is still an existing issue worldwide, and especially in the United States where racial tensions have gotten worse over the past few years. In 2017, 36% of Americans believe racism and bigotry are an imminent threat to the country, while only 29% of them thought the same in 2015 (Reuters/Ipsos, 2017). Moreover, between 2014 and 2016, the number of hate groups in the U.S. went from 784 to 917 (SPLC, 2017). Ultimately in wake of the violence in Charlottesville, UN experts warned that racism and xenophobia are increasing in the country, and on August 18th, 2017 the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination issued an early warning over the situation (UN Office of the High Commissioner, 2017).

Several points make racism an important topic, and worth learning more about. The first one is simply that not everybody agrees on the state of racism in the United States today -whether it is by pure ignorance, denial, or lack of awareness. To begin, everyone seems to have a definition of what racism means to him or her. Concepts such as “Black privilege” or reverse racism, respectively the idea that there are some advantages that a part of the population enjoys due to being Black, and the idea that members of the racially dominant group can experience prejudice based on race too, have emerged. In parallel, and maybe because there is not an universal measure of

racism, the degree to which racism plays a role in our daily lives can be underestimated, or overplayed as well.

As an illustration, the following graph shows us how the perception of racism in society can vary. In 2017, 58% of the American population believes that racism is a “big problem”, and 3% of Americans believe racism is “not a problem” today. Meanwhile, in 2009 only 26% of Americans believed racism was a big problem, and in 2011 8% of Americans said that racism was not a problem (Pew Research Center, 2017).



However, because respondents of this study were from all races and ethnicities, this can give a misleading sense of unity on how the population views racism, regardless of race. Breaking down the figure a little reveals that 81% of Blacks believe in 2017 that racism is a big problem in society, while in comparison 52% of Whites think the same way (Pew Research Center). This suggests that even if there is generally a great awareness of racism across the country, that said awareness is not even amongst races, and is only higher amongst the races that actually do experience racism. Therefore efforts should be made, especially among individuals who are part of the racial majority, to understand racism as an issue.

A greater understanding of racism would also be beneficial to those who experience it, so they can feel understood, and stop being denied their truth. In short, the aim would be for people who experience racism to have their perspective acknowledged, without however giving the impression that everything someone experiences is necessarily racism.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND

Historical Background

The history of race and what it meant in the past has evolved and is different from its meaning nowadays. According to scholars, the idea of race as a way to distinguish individuals based on their skin color and facial traits was first introduced in the 17th century (Orbe and Harris, 2008). However, according to Orbe and Harris (2008), scholars often refer to the work of Blumenbach (1869) as the first classification of races: the distinctions he made were according to him based on geographical locations but were in reality based on what we could actually see: behaviors, physical appearance such as traits and skin color, level on intelligence measured by the volume of the skull.

Researchers used science as a way to distinguish between individuals, using biology as the basis for cultural differences in ethnic and racial groups (Cornell and Hartmann, 2007). By the beginning of the 20th century, discoveries from Frank Boaz shifted perception of race, as it became clear that “racial and ethnic groups were dynamic rather than static” (National Research Council, 6th paragraph). Culture replaced biology and became the basis for discussing racial differences.

Changing views on racial identities allowed for changes in racial categories. Even today, society uses race as an element of distinction between individuals. As an example, when filling a form in the United States, one is still asked to pick a racial category. Even those categories have evolved so much, with for example the introduction and then removal of categories such as quadroon and or octoroon. Before that and at its beginnings in 1790, the U.S. Bureau of Census only allowed three race options based on slaves status; which were slaves, free White persons (males and females) and all other free persons.

Trying to accurately grab the concept of race through categories can be understandable, as acting as if race was inexistent simply does not seem achievable or desirable: race, after all, remains important to one's identity. However, it is as important to acknowledge that here, as it is to know that it fluctuates and that it can be exploited to justify differences in treatment.

In short, "race is a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies" (Omi and Winant, 1994, p. 55). History provides several examples of social conflicts leading to hostile actions, such as the Genocide of Indigenous People and the Holocaust. Furthermore, the same authors argue that "the categories employed to differentiate among human groups along racial lines reveal themselves, upon serious examination, to be at best imprecise, and at worst completely arbitrary" (Omi and Winant, p. 55, 1994). This could explain how, in the United States, a different skin color or race was not the only factor that determined whether one would experience racism from the dominant group, or not. As an illustration, Irish and Jews were once subjected to racism, and were not considered Whites. Like African Americans, Irish were portrayed as apes, as de-humanizing them would help justify their oppression and exploitation (Wade, 2011).

Thus, it seems that there is a link between the way different races are perceived through history, and the social (and political) conflicts attached to them: moments in history where races were poorly viewed have led to hostile acts towards them.

To conclude, understanding the concept of race in historical perspective is important in order to understand racism, as racism is shaped by our definitions of races (Omi, 2001). Indeed, the fact that race and its characteristics have changed over time help us see that targets of racism have changed, as well as the fact that race is an evolving concept.

Theoretical Framework

Defining racism:

Racism can be defined as “an organized system, rooted in an ideology of inferiority that categorizes, ranks, and differentially allocates societal resources to human population groups” (Williams and Rucker, 2000, p.76) while Wellman defines it as “a system of advantage based on race” (1977, p. 4). Omi and Winant (1994) define a project (representation of race in social structure) as racism if it “creates or reproduces structures of domination based on essentialist categories of race” (p.71). This allows them to argue that all racial groups (Whites and non-Whites) can be racists, or victims or racism.

However, Orbe and Harris (2008) argue that minorities cannot be racist, but can only practice racial discrimination (which they define as “acting upon your racial prejudice when communicating with others (p.9)”, as they do not possess enough institutional power. Indeed, according to them racism happens only when in presence of racial prejudice, and societal power. They state: “racism is the systematic subordination of certain racial groups by those groups in power (p.9)”. If many

definitions of racism exist, Orbe and Harris' definition is one that seems relevant throughout the thesis, as the focus is racism experienced by minorities.

Racism as a whole can be classified as existing at two levels: the individual-level racism and the systemic-level racism. According to this specific dichotomy, individual-level racism consists of internalized racism, which is our private racial beliefs, "influenced by our culture"; and interpersonal racism, which is when racial beliefs show in interpersonal interactions (Oppression Monitor Daily, 2014, first paragraph).

On the other hand, systemic-level racism consists of institutional racism and structural racism. Institutional racism happens when institutions produce racial inequalities (as an example, institutional racism in the judiciary would be giving harsher sentences to people of color). Structural racism is, "the normalization and legitimization of an array of dynamics – historical, cultural, institutional and interpersonal – that routinely advantage whites while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for people of color" (Lawrence and Keleher, 2004). In other words, structural racism is the bigger frame that allows racial inequalities to continue, by subtly imbricating all forms of disadvantages to racial minorities and making them normal.

Galtung (1969) describes violence as the "cause of the difference between the potential and the actual" (p.168). He then defines three "overarching categories" of violence (1990, p. 294). Structural violence is when the structure prevents some individuals from reaching their own needs, while direct violence is the destruction of resources and insight that would have made the potential reachable. Finally, cultural violence is when elements of culture are used as a mean to legitimize structural violence, as it helps see it as normal or even not see it at all. A parallel can be drawn

between structural and direct violence, and structural and interpersonal racism; as structural racism and structural violence are the frames that both allow and reinforce racism and violence at a personal or direct scale.

This helps us understand how structural or institutional racism can lead to conflict between groups at an interpersonal level. Because of the dynamics established by systemic-level racism, people are more likely to develop racism at an interpersonal level. Indeed, “since we are disposed to a world structured by racial domination, we develop radicalized dispositions—some conscious, many more unconscious and somatic—that guide our thoughts and behaviors” (Desmond and Emirbayer, 2009, p. 345).

However, it is important to mention that this is not the only classification of racism that exists. As an example, racism can be covert (subtle) or overt, intentional or unintentional. More generally, it seems like racism has evolved through the years. That is why, based on the obvious manifestations of racism a few decades ago (such as segregation, or Jim Crow laws) one would feel like racism have diminished, when it has simply taken another shape. Indeed, Bonilla-Silva (2014) argues that there is a new racial structure which still allows for racial inequalities to remain, and to which we all contribute. According to him, Jim Crow racism has taken another form today. He argues that traditional markers of segregation are continuing in the social, political, social control and economic domains. As an illustration of how segregation continues in the social control domain, he argues that modern instruments, such as the criminal justice system, have replaced traditional forms of lynching or other forms of social control that insured white supremacy. He explains (p.46):

The United States has the highest per capita incarcerated population in the world. The incarceration rate has risen 600 percent in the past thirist years, and

race influences nearly every aspect of incarceration including arrest rates, conviction rates, the probability of post-incarceration employment, educational opportunities and marriage outcomes.

Moreover, Bonilla-Silva adds that claims of reverse racism, color blindness and “the avoidance of racial terminology” are all part of the new racial structure. Reverse racism has been defined earlier as the idea that members of the racially dominant group can experience prejudice based on race too. As an example, affirmative action is often thought to be reverse racism. According to Bonilla-Silva, racial color blindness occurs when the majority argues that race does not play a role anymore in the current status of minorities, and in current racial inequalities. As an example it enables justification of segregation, which consequently becomes “the result of natural tendencies among groups” (p.3). The avoidance of racial terminology refers to when the dominant group refuses to view racial conflicts through the lens of race, and acts like it was not a factor.

To conclude, grasping the idea of what exactly is racism and what is not can be hard, as it takes many forms, evolves, and seems subtler than before (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). And yet, new narratives in society seem to deny the existence of racism, or at least minimize its effects.

Inter-group interactions: a framework for exploring racism:

Looking at theories explaining inter-group interactions is important in relation to this study, to understand how minorities interact with the majority group (whether racism is involved, or not). They can help understand the formation of stereotypes and prejudice, which can turn into racism.

Social identity theory (and the use of stereotypes) focuses on the psychology of the individual, and reveals unconscious behaviors one is likely to adopt (Tajfel and

Turner, 1979). According to the theory, an individual is defined by the groups they belong to. These groups form our social identity; which is in other words the way we belong to this world. Given that those groups define us (because they represent the different aspects of our identity we are born with or that are central to us such as race, religion or sexual orientation), they act as instigators of pride and self-esteem for us, and create a strong connection between the members of the said groups.

Tajfel and Turner describe social categorization as a process through which an individual aware of their belonging to a group and identifying themselves as part of it will then proceed to categorize people around them as part of their group, or in other different groups (race, gender, class, nationality, ethnicity etc.). According to scholars, this part of the process is totally normal and not automatically harmful (Sageman, 2017, p. 362). The brain does it naturally so the individual is not overwhelmed with information, and categorization does not directly leads to a negative outcome. Thus, social categorization helps individuals know where they stand, and helps “interpret, explain, and even justify our behavior” (Trepte, 2006, p. 257). The final step of the process is however the most dangerous, as the individual not only categorizes themselves and the others, but begins to compare them (hence the terms in-group/out-group, because the individual sees their group as “us” and the outsiders of their group as “them”).

Coming back to social identity theory, the starting point must be individuals’ self-esteem. Indeed, in an attempt to improve the way they see themselves, individuals will valorize their in-group, by magnifying their positive aspects and minimizing their flaws. In parallel, they will tend to only point out negative aspects of an out-group. Those biased views/stereotypes of an out-group can easily be instrumentalized as the in-group will not only point out negative aspects but also

accentuate differences. Bearing in mind that in-groups are created based on elements of social identities individuals value and are proud of, interactions with the out-groups are not only shaped by the value in-groups attribute them, but also by the value individuals themselves attribute to their own in-groups. Differences in in-groups valorization and out-group bias among different social groups (or here, minorities) can help explain differences in interactions. Indeed, a social group will experience and interpret acts of its out-groups according to out-group bias (with said bias being influenced by past or current conflicts in other contexts, or history). Thus, social identity theory can help explain differences in experiences of racism.

Moreover, it seems that on this basis social identity theory can also explain how racism is directed differently at individuals from different social identity groups. For example, and with the help of the media that subtly keeps on reinforcing stereotypes there is this expectation that Blacks are lazy, violent, stupid and irresponsible (Horton, Price and Brown, 1999). Paradoxically, certain behaviors are expected from someone of Asian descent, due to “the myth of the model minority and the quiet submissive Asian” (Lee, 2011).

Another theory that might be helpful in order to explain race relations is relative deprivation (Gurr, 1970). We are in presence of it when “people feel deprived of something they had, but subsequently lost, or when others have gained relative to them” (Nafziger and Auvinen, 2003). More precisely, longitudinal deprivation occurs when individuals feel like something they used to have is taken away from them (Freeman, 2005). As an illustration Abigail Fisher, a White woman, sued the University of Texas after it rejected her, blaming its affirmative action program. In Fisher’s case, she blames the quotas instead of telling herself that other White students in her own quota’s group had better results or applications than her, hence

why she was rejected. She might have felt deprived, as the instauration of quotas took away from her the bigger guarantee she had of being accepted. In relation to that, a clinical study has shown that affirmative action plans that are based on race create resentment: when confronted to those programs, white peers are more likely to “express beliefs of modern racism and collective relative deprivation” (Carr, 2016). Thus, relative deprivation can help explain how members of the dominant group will view minority groups.

The theories mentioned above are relevant specifically because they help provide an understanding of group interactions. They were not designed to be primarily applicable to race, and they were not designed to only explain negative interactions. However, their relevance is due to the fact that they help understand all minorities’ interactions with the dominant group, as well as the possible differences in interactions between the dominant group and certain minorities. As demonstrated earlier, the dominant group does not view all minorities the same way (each minority has its own stereotypes attached to it, for example), hence why the interactions will not necessarily be the same between members of different minorities and members of the dominant group—they will vary depending on those same stereotypes. This could definitely shape one’s experience of racism, or make it different than another.

Intersectionality: a framework for understanding differences in experiences:

Focusing now on minorities only, intersectionality helps understand why individuals experience racism-related events in different ways. Intersectionality can be defined as the lens through which one observes how individuals are subjected to the overlapping of several levels of oppression at the same time.

Crenshaw (1989) pointed out that when it came to how they experienced oppression, women of color were either defined by their race, or their gender but were never seen

as simultaneously being oppressed by both categories. Later on, additional categories have been suggested as a frame to observe oppression experienced by minorities. Collins (1998) broadened intersectionality when she suggested that race, gender, class and nationality are not “separate systems of oppression”, but rather systems that “mutually construct one another” (p. 63).

Thus, intersectionality can help explain how individuals experience oppression (in our case racism) differently, because of their belonging in different categories. For example, a white woman who experiences oppression as a woman but is part of the dominant racial group in the United States will experience oppression differently than a dark-skinned Muslim woman who experiences oppression based on gender, skin color, and religious identity. Both will also experience oppression differently than a lower class Black man who experiences oppression based on race and class. The purpose of this study is to understand how different categories or aspects of identities (reunited under social background) will shape experiences of racism.

Empirical Studies on the Experience of Racism

Personal experiences of racism have been widely discussed in the past. However, this study aims to give a voice to a different perspective of racism. Indeed, in 2003 a study (Swim, Hyers, Cohen, Fitzgerald, and Bylsma) pointed out that at the time, only few studies observed racism from the perspectives of those who were targeted by it.

So far, when minorities are studied, their experiences or racism are more likely to be studied in a specific context. As an illustration, experiences of racism are often linked to health. In 2006 and 2009 alone, two reviews that studied the effects of racism on health were published, and they covered 253 empirical studies in total (Paradies, Ben, Denson, et al., 2015). Below, a few of the empirical studies that have been conducted in relation to specific contexts will be discussed in more details.

Understanding differences in experience: immigration, an important aspect of identity:

As mentioned in the very beginning, social background will inevitably shape the way one experiences racism. Research shows there are differences not only between minorities that were or were not born in the United States, but also between second-generation of immigrants and their parents (Deaux et al., 2007). Beginning with the differences between minorities that were born in the United States and those who were not, the latter often does not expect racism at first. This can be explained because in foreign societies, Black versus White is not always the principal element of distinction. Therefore, immigrant minorities often feel that this distinction does not apply to them (Deaux, 2006). Contrary to them, minorities who grew up on that distinction are more likely to expect being subjected to it, hence why immigrants might perceive incidents differently than non-immigrants. In some foreign societies skin color is not the only element of distinction. Indeed, in Latin America, the concept of race is different than in Europe or in the U.S., where racial identity is much clearer, which makes it easier for systematic discrimination (Wade, 2008). Using the example of Brazil, Wade argues that racial discrimination is not primarily based on skin color, but on class. He says: “rather than using a small number of terms such as black, white and indigenous, Brazilians use dozens of descriptive terms, which often try to describe actual shade of skin color (...). Racial categorization is shifting and contextual, influenced by appearance, dress, behavior, and, especially, class status: blackness is strongly associated with lower class position“ (p.182).

Finally, and “by virtue of their immigrant status” some minorities were not subjected to “the dehumanizing effects of mandated segregation”, so they are less skeptical when it comes to their relationships with Whites (Stephenson, 2004, p. 100).

Research made on West Indian immigrants in the United States shows that between first and second generation, the experience of racism varies: second-generation immigrants are more aware of racism and how it can affect them than their parents (Waters, 1994). This could be explained by the fact that first-generation immigrants are less integrated in the society than their children. Indeed, they have a different country as a reference point: their country of origin. Finally, because first-generation immigrants have “markers of foreignness” (such as an accent), others see them in a different and more favorable way than the way U.S.-born Black minority is viewed (Bobb and Clarke, 2001).

In-depth interviews showed that even amongst second-generation immigrants themselves, the way one self-identifies seems to play a role in how discrimination and on the flip side, opportunities, are experienced. According to one study, second-generation who racially identify as Black Americans will notice more racial discrimination and opportunities’ limitations; while those who ethnically identify as West Indians will see more opportunities and rewards for individual effort and initiative (Waters, 1994). The author explains that the different ways individuals identify are linked to “different perceptions and understandings of race relations and of opportunities in the United States”(p. 795). Thus, she suggests that people’s experiences are shaped not only by the way others identify them but also by the way they identify themselves.

Finally and although it does not solely focus on racism and immigration, an original study (Díaz, Ayala, Bein, Henne and Marin, 2001) showed the correlation between mental health and experience of poverty and racism on Latino gay men. For that matter, 912 self-identified Latino gay men were interviewed. The researchers found out that among those men, experiences of racism happened more frequently

during their adulthood. The justification that the researchers gave for it was that most of these men were immigrants, and so they did not grow up as part of a racial minority (not in the U.S. at least). Once more, the amount of time one individual spent in the U.S. versus elsewhere seems to influence their experience of racism.

The studies above are interesting as we are reminded that even among individuals from the same minority group, attitudes towards and experiences of discrimination can vary, especially based on the way those individuals decide to identify. Moreover, the time spent in the U.S. or at least the immigration status (first generation versus older generations) influence the way one individual will experience and think about racism.

Gender:

A small part of research is dedicated to racism experienced by women, and especially Black women. In her book, Collins (2000) explains how singular Black women's position is, at a crossroad between gender, class and race oppression. Thus, studying Black women's experience of racism can be interesting in the sense that it is tainted with various other factors, which is not necessarily the case for all type of minorities. In relation to this, a study (Domingueza, Strong, Krieger, Gillman, Rich-Edwards, 2009) sought to understand differences in the frequency with which pregnant Black U.S.-born and foreign-born women self report racist experiences. For that matter, women from their first trimester of pregnancy to the 7th year after birth were asked how they respond to unfair treatment, and if they address it or not. The findings revealed that U.S.-born women self reported racism way more frequently than foreign-born ones. However, experiences of foreign-born women that moved to the U.S. before being 18 resembled U.S.-born women more in their reports. Also, the experiences of foreign-born Black women from the Caribbean were more similar to

those born in the U.S., than to those born in Africa. Thus, it seems like the location of birth influences the frequency at which an individual will experience racism or not, or at least whether the said individual will report it or not. Moreover, time spent in the country also seems to affect how an individual will experience racism. This directly relates to my study as it is trying to establish whether elements of identity affect one's experience of racism.

Finally, studies (Kwate, Valdumarsdottir, Guevarra and Bovbjerg, 2003) have shown how racism would affect African American women's health negatively. To this end, 71 African American women were asked about their experience of racism and how it impacted their health. The researchers found out that demographics that were not considered for the purpose of our study (such as age, income or level of education) did not influence experiences of racism. However, in a more recent study (Greer & Spalding, 2017), age was found to be a relevant factor when it comes to experiencing racism as researchers found out that younger African women would experience more stress when exposed to institutional racism than older ones.

Institutional contexts:

Racism has been studied in different institutional contexts. In one study (Bullock and Houston, 1987), 31 Black students enrolled in 5 White medical schools were interviewed and asked about their perception of racism in high school, college and medical school; and about the ways they responded and coped with it. The authors found out that the students who said they were surprised and shocked to encounter racism in medical school were those who had not studied in a White institution before, while those who expected racism had. Thus, it seems like expectations of racism can be influenced by previous actual experiences of racism. Moreover, it also seems like

exposure to an environment where the dominant group is absent actually prevents from expecting racism.

Initial responses to and coping with racism is also a theme. For instance, Caughy, O'Campo and Muntaner (2004) conducted 200 interviews of African American families in their homes in Baltimore. The aim was to determine the correlation between the experience of racism of parents, and the mental health of their children. The primary caregiver of the target child (3-4years old child) was interviewed for about 2,5 hours, and was asked about his own experience of racism. This study's findings indicated that denying experiences of racism as a parent will result in high behavioral issues in children, while actively coping with those experiences will enable lower levels of anxiety in children. Thus, it seems like the way individuals experience and chose to cope with racism also affects the people around them (by affecting their mental health).

Religion:

Finally, it also seems relevant to analyze how religion but more importantly the political or social context can impact one's experience of racism. A report that was submitted to The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (now Australian Human Rights Commission) showed the increase in self reported racism after 9/11 on Arab and Muslim Australians (Poynting and Noble, 2004). Since 9/11, participants of the survey experienced increased incidences of racism, violence and abuse, whether they were actually Muslims or not. Indeed, Khan and Ecklund (2012) argue that since 9/11 there has been an increase in racial and religious animosity towards Muslims, Arabs, Middle Easterners and people who stereotypically physically resemble those groups. Thus, it seems like perceived belonging to a group, whether accurate or not, can influence experiences of racism. Moreover, Considine (2017) argues that

Muslims in the U.S. go through a specific process called racialization. Even if they are not a race per se, they are identified by racial and cultural characteristics. Thus, they are subjected to a racism that is justified by the different narratives defining them as a threat.

Those studies show how experiences of racism can be studied in many ways, depending on the settings or based on different aspects of the participants' backgrounds. Some of the demographics factors discussed above seem to be less relevant, while some such as the location of origin or time spent in the U.S. more strongly seem to shape the participants' experiences of racism. However, all of the studies listed above solely focus on one minority in particular, or one gender.

The originality of my study lies in the fact that in-depth interviews were conducted with participants from different genders, backgrounds, and immigrant status in order to better understand how experiences of racism can be shaped by multiple different factors.

In other words, the aim of this study is to understand how ethnic minorities experience racism, and more exactly to understand if their experience of racism may be shaped by elements of their social identity.

The research question is the following: how are minorities' experiences of racism shaped by their social background?

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Participants and Method

In order to better understand the process through which an individual decides whether an act is racism (and whether they react or respond to it), ten University of Massachusetts Boston students were interviewed and asked to reflect on their experience of racism.

In a quest for a better representation of the minorities living in the United States, the participants were of Latino, Asian, Middle Eastern, African American and African origin. Because my initial personal belief was that racism was not driven by skin color only, and that Black versus White racism was already talked about, I thought that including minorities from different backgrounds would help explore racism as a more complex phenomenon than only just skin color. Benefits of including minorities have been shown before, as “studies without adequate minority representation may miss relevant findings that are unique to that group due to cultural, environmental, or physiologic factors” (Diaz, 2012, p.372). This could be easily transposed to our study.

However, the participants still were not an accurate representation of the student body. Indeed, the initial goal was not to reflect the thoughts of the entire body, but more to understand in depth the experiences of some of the students.

Furthermore, I choose to interview both African American and African students because although they share the same race or complexion, literature shows that African Americans and other Black immigrants do not necessarily have the same experience of racism (Reddick, 1997).

Convenience sampling was used.

Information about the social background of each participant is included in the table below (their names have been changed):

| | Gender | Age | Ethnicity or race they consider themselves belonging to | Country they are from | Time spent in the US (at the time of the interview) |
|---------|--------|-----|---|---|---|
| Melanie | Female | 26 | Asian | Indonesia | 1 year and a half |
| Mary | Female | 23 | African | Cameroon | 5 years |
| David | Male | 22 | African | Germany | 6 months |
| Martine | Female | 59 | African American | United States | All their life |
| Monica | Female | 25 | African American | Parents from Jamaica and Sierra Leone, participant born in the U.S. | All their life |
| Raymond | Male | 32 | Asian | Republic of the Philippines | All their life |
| Brian | Male | 27 | Latino | Parents from Guatemala, his stepfather who raised him is from Peru | All their life |
| Ana | Female | 26 | Middle Eastern | United Arab Emirates (Dubai) | 7 years |
| Allison | Female | 23 | Middle Eastern | Lebanon | 2 years |
| Charles | Male | 19 | Latino | Dominican Republic | Since they were 3 |

In the first section of the interview, participants were asked to reflect on a specific moment when they witnessed racism (whether it was towards them or not). They were also asked their opinion on what exactly is racism, and the frequency in which they experience it. Then, in the second section, participants were asked to provide

demographic information about themselves, and what in their background helps shape their reaction to racism in general.

Finally in the third section, participants were asked to focus on race relations in the United States, and give their opinion on it. They were also asked to compare race relations (or any other kind of discrimination) in the United States to those in their country of origin. It is to be noted that some participants were not able to fully answer the third section, because they do not have another country of origin (see Appendix 1).

Participants were initially sent the interview protocol via email, and asked to respond in writing. Then, follow up interviews were done face to face (with eight participants only) in order to give those participants a chance to express themselves orally, and to deepen their responses. Those interviews were recorded, and transcribed by myself. Finally, additional follow up interviews were conducted via email, for clarification and to achieve further nuances in depth.

The interviews produced were analyzed and compared in order to see whether some elements of participants' social background would come into play, and how they shaped their responses. Firstly, the interviews were read several times in order to roughly identify common themes. I then proceeded to take each interview and compared it to all of the others (comparing first with the other interview of the member of the same ethnicity (or same skin color, if relevant), and then to the rest of the interviews), to see if I saw any connections/differences between them. For clarity purposes, I proceeded to analyze the responses by looking separately at responses related to each sections of the interview protocol. I first started with categories that I got to refine over time, such as presence or absence of parental and entourage

influence on views of racism, exposure to racism or not, reactions to racism (that went from strong reactions, to moderate reactions) etc. The aim behind that was to identify any kind of patterns across people from similar backgrounds (whether it is the same ethnicity, the same migration status, or other elements of their identity).

Limitations

In terms of other demographics, differences in age are to be considered in the sense as older participants might have probably been more exposed to less hidden or less subtle forms of racism. Only one of the participants was alive in the 60's, and having insight from other participants born in that era could have been interesting.

Moreover, paying attention to the country of origin when selecting the participants could have nuanced the finding: the country's own history might or might not have shaped the participants' views. For instance, we will assume that a participant who lived through apartheid will not have the same sensitivities on racism as a participant from a country that did not have any (recent) forms of segregation or colonization.

It is believed that interviewing more participants would have probably nuanced the findings. Furthermore, because the participants were recruited on campus, this may limit possibilities to generalize the findings to a broader population (even though qualitative studies such as this one are not meant to be generalized).

How class and education (even though the participants were all college students) might have influenced the participants' experiences was never taken into account. If my personal assumption was that class would indeed influence the participants' experience, interviews conducted among Black middle-class families showed that if greater resources enabled to better respond to discrimination (in

comparison to poorer families), they did not protect the participants from experiencing racism in the first place (Feagin and Sikes, 1994).

Finally, the opportunity to do extensive validity checks never happened. Indeed, the findings were not discussed with participants, whether throughout the study or at the end of the study. Tracy (2010) explains that in order to produce good qualitative research, going back to the participants with the findings in order to discuss them, and to collect the participant's input is necessary. The findings were also never discussed with peers who are knowledgeable about this topic. Indeed, peer debriefing with researchers that were not involved in the research process helps obtain a fresh perspective on how to interpret the data, but it also helps diminish any biases the researcher might have (Bellini & Rumrill, 2009).

Reflexivity

Because of my own personal experience in Boston that led me to conduct this study, I had clear expectations when it came to the findings. I do not think in all honesty that I have been confronted with racism here, or at least it was so subtle that I did not notice. However, I wondered if it was because I was Black but not African American that I was "spared", because most of my African friends also did not think they could complain of racism. Because of interactions with African Americans who felt like Boston was a very racist city and personal research on the specificities of racism, I expected to find a real gap in the experiences of African Americans, and Africans in this study, or at least African that had not been in the country for a long time, just like me. Consequently I had to be careful when analyzing data from those two ethnic groups, making sure that I would not be exaggerating the results of concrete experiences just to confirm preconceived ideas of a gap. Thus, I had to keep in mind those ideas all the time.

However, one helpful fact is that in some instances, the participants' experiences were completely different from what I had imagined. This was helpful in the fact that I would not be tempted to manipulate the data in a way that would have been a reflection of my preconceived ideas. In some other instances, and when I felt like I was trying too hard to tell a story that the data did not necessarily reflect, I had to take some breaks from analyzing.

When it comes to other ethnics group, not having any particular knowledge of them allowed me to start "fresh", as in without any expectations or preconceived ideas.

Finally, this project was a source of new experiences and enrichment. Growing up being considered as a majority in Cameroon, I never really had to think about race and power relations until I first moved to France, and then to the United States. It is only when I moved to the United States that race became meaningful, and that a need to shape my identity as a Black woman emerged. Therefore this research helped me understand myself, as well as the environment I have been living in for the past two years. However, this project was challenging, especially when it came to hearing and reflecting on so many testimonies.

The hardest part about the study was probably having to go past my own personal interests and beliefs, but also at times overcoming any feeling of hopelessness to complete it successfully. Indeed, reading and analyzing the responses of certain participants was difficult. Not always had I envisioned racism to be this close. Although I have always known the United States has a complex history regarding racism, I am lucky to have been here for about two years now without having witnessed any personal racism events (even if my experience may have been influenced by my background, according to this study). Indeed, it is important to

acknowledge that other people might have gone through a similar experience as me and felt as though they have experienced racism. However, my actual experience being in conflict with what I have always known, I think I implicitly expected it for everyone around me not to experience racism this often, or this blatantly. It was especially difficult given that my experience here is only temporary, and that is not the case for every one of my participants.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

On Experiencing Racism

Experiences of racial discrimination from the participants were very diverse: from non-existent (David, 22-year old and African; Mary, 23-year old and African; and Raymond, 32-year old and Asian) to witnessing it happening to someone else (Ana, 26-year old and Middle Eastern; and Charles, 19-year old and Latino). Finally, five participants were actually a target: Allison, 23-year old and Middle Eastern; Brian, 27-year old and Latino; Monica, 25-year old and African American; Martine, 59-year old and African American, Melanie, 26-year old and Asian). The kind of events that were witnessed and described as racism were quite similar: Ana mentioned “the use of racist/offensive comments” while Brian mentioned the use of “derogatory terms”. As an example, he says: “I have a diverse group of friends but sometimes I’ll be with a group of Caucasian people and they’ll throw subtle immigrant jokes around that catch my attention”.

Experiences of racism:

The participants experienced racism differently. Indeed, three of the participants (Monica, 25-year old and African American; Martine, 59-year old and African

American; and Allison, 23-year old and Middle Eastern who has lived in the U.S. for two years) indicated experiencing racism everyday, whether at work, on the Internet or in the streets. Monica who grew up in the U.S. but in an immigrant family, explained: “I confront racism all the time on the Internet (when she interacts in forums), but not often in real life. I would say a couple of times within a six months period,” while Martine, who did not grow up in an immigrant family and works in academy in addition to being a student said:

Racism is present all the time. It does not go away just because a few might treat you nice today, often times and it has been my experience those who are nice to you today, by and large are among the ones who will do you harm and call you foul names, all race based.

Martine also explains that, being the only African American in her department in a Professional Executive level position, all her colleagues are White. She recalls the “disrespect and racist attitude were quite apparent” (she explains that her colleagues would not follow her instructions or include her in emails, would dismiss her in conversations, speak to her as if she did not comprehend and invade her space). However, she says that they stopped once she confronted them.

Further, Allison, 23-year old and Middle Eastern who spent most of her life abroad said: “wearing the hijab will make you constantly feel unsafe, especially in those times. Even here in Boston I’m not safe, and there is not one day when I cannot feel the consequences of my choice to wear it”.

On the other hand, three participants (both African participants Mary, 23-year old and David, 22-year old; and Charles, 19-year old and Latino) expressed never experiencing racism on a monthly or weekly basis. However, not experiencing racism themselves does not mean that they necessarily reject the existence of racism. But, not

experiencing racism may also lead them to be more reluctant to label every unpleasant experience as racism. As an illustration, David provided an explanation to why he had a different experience:

I think racism of course is real in this country. But what I will say is that I think it's also embedded in people's minds rather than always being based on facts. I've been able to get into clubs where people said the bouncers didn't let them in because they were Black but I am Black. Meaning that somehow, the bouncer saw beyond skin color. People tend to easily say a situation occurred because the next person was racist rather than maybe look at other facts. In the club situation, maybe that that person was simply not dressed accordingly, and that's why he or she wasn't given access. I am not trying to say there's no racism in this country but highlight that maybe sometimes is not what people think it is.

The remaining participants were more nuanced in their answers, as they would experience or witness it sometimes, or not really often, in a variety of settings. Melanie, 26-year old Muslim and Asian female who has only been in the U.S. for less than two years expressed experiencing racism while traveling by bus in the Southern part of the country and added "However, this conversation happens in the South so it does not surprise me at all". Brian, 27-year old and Latino mentioned "two obvious moments" when he experienced "instances of blatant racism" in his life, which implies that he does not acknowledge the less important other times he might have been confronted to racism. As a reminder, Brian has lived in the U.S. all his life. His parents however, are immigrants.

Ana, 26-year old and Middle Eastern that has been in the U.S. for 7 years now said that although racism was never directed to her because she does not look “Arab enough”, she witnessed it directed to her kind, “several times”.

From this, we can draw several inferences as to how the background of participants or their immigration status might have played a role. Firstly, not having lived in the U.S for a long time can help explain why some participants did not experience racism on a regular basis. Or, it can help explain whether some participants would not perceive their experiences as racism, while other would.

Moreover, in the case of the two Middle Eastern participants, differences in how they are perceived can help explain differences in experiences of racism. Focusing on those two participants will allow us further our analysis more, by implying that sharing some elements of social background does not mean that the experience of racism will be even. As stated earlier (while discussing social identity theory), the extent to which individuals consider an act as racism can depend on the perception of the social groups they belong to (and more precisely the ones they think are relevant in the situation). Indeed if there is conflict on the basis of the social identity groups in question, individuals will more likely interpret acts that they believe were based of their belonging to those in-groups as racism, as a reflection of the broader conflict. In our case, Allison expressed experiencing racism because of her choice to wear the hijab, which makes her feel unsafe as well. The hijab disclosing her belonging to a specific social group (her religion), her likeliness to believe she is the target of racism might be related to the perception others have of her social group, but also to how she perceives and believes others perceive that group.

Differences in types of racism experienced:

When it comes to being a target, differences appear in terms of aggression. It varied from comments to actual physical exchange. Indeed, Melanie, a 26-year old and Asian female who spent most of her life abroad said that she was told (by a White male) “No, you are not from this country, you don’t look like us” and Monica 25-year old and African American, mentioned a “classic case of micro-aggression” at work such as being told that she is well spoken by coworkers, and being told that she would look so pretty if she straightened her hair instead of wearing dreadlocks. On the other hand, Brian whose parents and step father all immigrated from South America, mentioned being searched for drugs and patted down by the police after being asked a series of questions, and Martine, 59-year old and African American who said she was unjustly accused of theft explained:

He (a White police officer) threw the bag at me and said “Get Out!”, it was then that I felt hands on me, the cop grabbed my arms from behind, and shoved my arms in my back, I yelled out in pain, crying I asked others to help me, I had done nothing wrong, no one helped so I started fighting back, and in trying to get free, kicking every which way, I managed to kick him in the groin. He quickly released me due to his own pain, and in the instance when I grabbed my bag and turned around to leave, he had his gun drawn and aimed at me, he was about 5ft away from me (...)

It seems like while micro aggressions only took a verbal form, physical exchange was linked to the impression that the participant experiencing racism was acting in an illegal way (such as stealing, or carrying drugs). From it, it seems like explicit forms of racism will be experienced in an exceptional context while more subtle forms of racism are experienced in a calmer, or casual context. The more casual and subtle

forms of racism can be viewed as what Essed (1991) refers to as “everyday racism”, which can be described as “a process in which socialized racist notions are integrated into everyday practices and thereby actualized and reinforce underlying racial and ethnic relations. Furthermore racist practices in themselves become familiar, repetitive, and part of the “normal” routine in everyday life” (Essed, 1991, p. 145).

Moreover, both a male and a female participant that have spent most of their life in the U.S. experienced physical targeting. Verbal targeting happened to participants regardless of where they have lived the most time. It seems relevant to add that out of all the participants that feel they did not experience racism, only one said later on during the interview that they witnessed it happen to someone else.

Two of the participants that felt they did not experience racism share some elements of their social backgrounds, as they are both African and they have not lived in the U.S. most of their life. Moreover, Ana, a 26-year old and Middle Eastern female who did not experience racism directly but witnessed it toward someone else has also lived outside of the U.S. for the most part of her live. However immigration status alone does not always play a role in the experience of racism, as both participants Raymond, a 32-year old and Asian and Charles, 19-year old and Latino who did not experience racism (or witnessed it directed towards others) have lived in the U.S. all their life.

Justifications for interpreting an experience as racism, and assumptions on the basis for the racism experienced:

The context of the interaction helped the participants decide if their experience was actually racism, or targeting. As an example, Martine, 59-year old and African American mentioned the political climate at the time (in the late 60’s-early 70’s): she explained that “it was a very racist era and Whites felt comfortable committing racist acts of violence” when she was unjustly accused of theft and physically assaulted by a

police officer. Melanie, 26-year old and Asian mentioned being in “the conservative part of the country”: she had traveled to Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi; and admits some of her American friends warned her that it might not be safe for her to do so as a Muslim Asian woman. Brian, who was searched and patted down although being very young at the time (sixteen) tried to give an explanation:

I believe the way I was dressed may have caught his eye. But a sweater with a zipper and hoodie anybody can wear. I believe that certain clothes on Latinos/African Americans alarm White America. Media/movies are responsible for certain assumptions in the U.S.

From this quote, he believes his experience of racism happened partly because of the way he was dressed, and partly because of his belonging to a specific minority. Thus, it seems like he believes that certain clothes on specific minorities result in the perception that these minorities are about to commit crimes. An example that supports this belief would be Trayvon Martin’s murder: George Zimmerman, who shot him, told 911 he had seen a “suspicious” individual who was wearing a “dark hoodie” (Trayvon was Black). Based on the participant’s quote, a White individual would have not received the same treatment (as he specifically only mentions African Americans and Latinos). Besides, he only mentioned how clothes alarm White America, which could mean that White America does not have to worry about the signals its choices of clothes is sending in return. Thus, a possible suggestion would be that his belief that clothes influence how one is perceived is tied to him being Latino. Moreover, by stating that media are responsible for certain assumptions in the U.S., the participant implies that the media created expectations of certain behaviors when individuals of particular ethnicities or races dress a certain way. Thus, this

suggests that individual experiences of racism can be shaped by broader racist beliefs in society.

More broadly, it seems like participants were able to decide if a conversation or interaction was racist based on contextual factors such as their geographical location or the political climate at the time, but also based on factors such as someone else's perception of them, like the way they dress for example, or even their gender. Moreover, the way their interlocutor reacted might have helped them decide if it was racism or not. Melanie, 26-year old and Asian mentioned that her interlocutor (a White male who had approached her in a bus in Savannah, Georgia; and asked her where she was from) looked at her with "odd gesture", and it helped her assume that he was unconvinced when she first joked that she was American. She then explained that disguised under his discomfort was an assumption that Americans should look a certain way. When asked what made her think that the exchange was racism, she replied:

The fact that he didn't believe that I was from Boston just because I looked Asian. The idea that I got is this man still has this conception that Americans should look like a certain type of race or anything that he meant by us (her interlocutor had previously told the participant "you don't look like us").

The basis for the racism experienced also varied: some participants felt like it was based on their skin color or ethnicity only (it seems like it is the one that lived in the U.S. all their life), and others (foreigners), based on other kind of differences. When asked why they thought their experience was racism, Martine, 59-year old and African American who did not grow up in an immigrant family, explains: "Had I been a little white girl, I would've not been treated in such a manner" while Monica, 25-

year old and African American who grew up in an immigrant family but spent all her life in the U.S. says:

I thought this was racism because when a white person “compliments” a person of color on their ability to speak well, there’s an implicit assumption or expectation that the person of color would not speak eloquently.

Finally Brian, 27-year old and Latino, who said he was a target of racism also explains: “But there are times where certain people mainly White people, will remind you that you’re Latino (...). America has moments where it will remind you who the “majority” is in the U.S.”

Thus, it seems like participants that have lived in the U.S. all their lives are now aware of some stereotypes attached to their minorities, or are have expectations in experiencing racism based on their race or ethnicity -because they have seen it or heard it before so they are able to make generalizations. Then, they use them in order to determine whether or not their own experience was racist.

By contrast, participants who said they were targets of racism and that lived most of their life outside of the U.S. based the racism experienced on other additional factors. Melanie, 26-year old, mentioned her accent and looking Asian while Allison, 23-year old and Middle Eastern mentioned her religion (the fact that she wears the Hijab). She added: “most racists say that religious discrimination isn’t racism because religion isn’t a race, but that’s wrong because they think all Christians are white, all Muslims are Arab, all Hindus are Indians. They use religion to discriminate against a race”. This suggests that racism contains other layers than simply differences in skin color, as it is in reality more complex than the simplistic idea that racism is a White vs. people of color issue.

To conclude, immigration status is a dominant factor in individuals' different experiences of racism. Indeed, the participants who have lived in the U.S. most of their life attribute their experiences of racism to their identity (especially racial and ethnic identity) while participants that have not lived in the U.S. most of their life not only attribute their experiences to the same factors; but to other factors external to them as well, such as their geographical location, or the political climate.

Reactions to racism:

When being confronted with racism, there were three kinds of reactions: some participants would avoid the topic because they feel it was not worth it discussing it, or because they were simply afraid. Mary, a 23-year old participant who feels she has never been confronted to racism stated: "If I was a victim of racism, I would most likely ignore the person because I would not be affected. I do not have time to waste by responding to threats or insults". The fact that this participant is an African who has been in the U.S. for five years, and who additionally has never experienced racism before, probably influenced her decision not to respond to threats and insults. Indeed, it might be that previous exposure to racism could influence the level of tolerance one has for new racist acts, but also the level to which this new act will affect us or not (for example, being exposed to a racist act once and brushing it off, as opposed to being constantly exposed to it and finally feeling frustrated).

Finally, a few other participants revealed they would try to have a conversation with the person, to see where they are coming from or to educate them. However, as a side note, it seems necessary to highlight that the decision to react to racism can depend on the context on the interaction, and not everyone has the luxury of responding the way they really want to. As an illustration, Brian who was searched by the police as they believed he was carrying drugs, explains:

The way I reacted was simply following police orders. I was nervous. Especially today the safest and smartest thing to do is to simply follow orders and make them as comfortable as possible. The most important part is to make hands clear and visible at all times.

Differences in responses might indicate that there are different expectations or fears when it comes to the potential consequences of responding to those racist acts. For example, Brian's reaction is based on what is safe and smart for him.

On Identity

Self-definition and its influence on experiences of racism:

The way participants self-defined themselves is important, as it can help shape their experience of racism. For example Charles, 19-year old, mentioned being Latino but "passing as White", and suggested it affected his experience of racism (he said it prevented him from going through what someone of his ethnicity would go through, when it comes to racism). Indeed, passing as White would mean that the participant is not viewed in terms of all the stereotypes attached to his actual ethnicity. Moreover, being viewed as a member of the dominant group would mean being able to enjoy the privileges attached to it (McIntosh, 1989). Ana, 26-year old and Middle Eastern; suggested that she was treated less unfairly than the males from her home country, because she doesn't look "Arab enough" and she's a "girl". For her, not looking Arab enough would mean that she does not have to suffer because of the stereotypes generally attached to her social group (indeed, the participant's racial or ethnic background is not easily identifiable when looking at her).

Among the Black participants, when asked how they define themselves, only the African American participants emphasized their ethnicity or race first. On the contrary David, 22-year old and African, defined himself as "an ambivert

(=characteristic of someone sharing both extrovert and introvert traits), believer and hard-working person” while Mary, said she could not define herself because she was “a lot of things at the same time”. One inference for these differences could be because the African American (who are also Black) grew up where they were not the majority, so race was always an important part of their identity. On the other hand, both the African participants grew up in Africa, where they were the majority so their race did not stand out in their lives. Indeed, Mary explains:

Cameroon is a peaceful African, bilingual and diverse country. The majority, about 70% of the population is Cameroonian and Black and the remaining 30% are international. Racism is not prevalent in my country because we welcome and treat everybody the same.

Peggy McIntosh (1989), explains how members of the dominant group (Whites in America) do not need to see themselves in terms of skin color, and fail to realize all the advantages that actually come with the fact that they are White, even when they realize that minorities are disadvantaged. Thus, it could be that only the individuals that are disadvantaged by their racial identity need to assert that said racial identity. She also mentions how coming to this realization would be the end of meritocracy. Going back to our participants, I make the inference that the African American participants might have mentioned their race because they are aware of how it can affect them daily. On the other hand, Mary (the 23-year old African participant) might have mentioned that she is hardworking because being used to being the majority in her own country, she is not necessarily aware of the effects of her race in a different society where she is not the majority (the United States), which is why she might believe in meritocracy just like the dominant group. Indeed, when asked about existing discriminations that are hard to fight in her country of origin, she responded:

The only type of discrimination that has become hard to fight is in the work environment. Most Cameroonian workers are underestimated for their competence and ability to get the work done well and on time.

Also, Melanie, 26-year old and Asian mentioned how because of her appearance and the traits that are specific to her race (her skin color and eye shape), she is constantly reminded how she does not fit in the society. For participants, already holding the assumption that people will believe that they do not fit (because they cannot conceal their differences) could explain why there are more inclined to believe their experience is racism based on their racial belonging.

Conversations on racism:

All the participants discussed racism, whether it was with family, friends, acquaintances, and strangers online, and whether it was in relation to the United States or their countries of origin. However, the intensity and frequency of the conversation varied: Martine, 59-year old and African American said racism was discussed “a lot” in her household, because “during the 60’s and 70’s it was about protecting/defending yourself”. She grew up in South Boston, and Whites in the area “were always ganging up on Blacks”. She adds: “We were instructed to walk in groups and if confronted, grab one, don’t worry about the rest and beat the hell out of that one”. Monica, 25-year old and African American discussed racism with her mom, who was “very vocal about her experiences with racism”. As a reminder, Monica and Martine have both experienced racism. Mary, 23-year old and African with parents that lived in Cameroon most of their lives said: “My mother always told me to be careful” whereas David, 22-year old and African whose father lived in Germany most of his life “never discussed racism at home” (he suspects his father did not have a great experience, and avoids the topic for that reason) but did have some

conversations outside with friends. Meanwhile, Raymond, 32-year old and Asian said racism was an “everyday topic », and Ana, 26-year old and Middle Eastern; said that « racism was never a big discussion”. But, also, some mentioned their own entourage’s prejudice and distrust toward Whites or other minorities. Charles, 19-year old and Latino who was born in Dominican Republic but migrated in the U.S. at 3 said: “both my parents are lovable people and get along with everyone. But at times they too have prejudiced moments in the household. Towards Blacks and White”; while Monica said about her mom:

Often, I was told not to trust or get too close to white people, because they will try to sabotage me if I’m doing well and will throw me under the bus to protect their own interests, if given the chance. I had white friends so this rhetoric made me uncomfortable. I would push back and defend friends I had known for years. She only really trusted my oldest white friend, but it was a source of conflict between us for a while.

From this, it seems that parents or entourage’s influence can shape perception of racism. According to Thornton, Chatters, Taylor and Allen (1990), racial socialization can be defined as:

Specific messages and practices that are relevant to and provide information concerning the nature of race status as it relates to: (1) personal and group identity, (2) intergroup and interindividual relationships, and (3) position in the social hierarchy. The forms of racial socialization include specific verbal behaviors (i.e., direct statements regarding race), modeling of behaviors, and exposure to specific objects, contexts, and environments (i.e., artifacts and settings).

In other words, racial socialization refers to the process through which parents (and to some extent society) transmit knowledge but also values about race (or in some cases ethnicity) to their children. In the participants' case, it seems that there is a small link between how they were taught about racism and how they actually experienced it. Indeed, it seems like accentuated discussions on racism lead to more awareness on racism and its forms, which is why certain participants might have experienced it more. Indeed, Martine who expressed experiencing racism everyday and Monica who mentioned micro-aggression at work both had accentuated discussions on racism at home, with Monica's mother being very vocal about her own experiences. On the contrary absence of discussion on racism might have led participants to miss issues around racism, or at least given them the impression that they did not experience it, as the two participants that did not heavily discuss racism (David and Ana) were also among the ones that did not experience it.

A few participants mentioned bits of information on what they were taught about racism, or how they were told to react. Confrontation was a recurrent topic. As mentioned earlier Martine, 59-year old and African American said it was about « protecting/defending yourself ». Moreover, Brian, 27-year old and Latino said: "I was taught to not let anyone especially White people disrespect me in public due to race" and Mary, the 23-year old African participant, said that she was told to stand up for herself. However, we can see there can be a difference in how the participants were taught to react, and in how they actually responded. Martine ended up kicking the police officer who confronted her in the groin, and ran away. Brian simply followed police orders. One possibility, even if hard to verify with such a small group of participants, would be that actual reactions to racism are not influenced by what the individual experiencing racism has been taught, but rather by his own personality.

Raymond, 32-year old and Asian whose parents immigrated from the Philippines, mentioned that he always knew he had to stand up when encountering racism, as opposed to members of his community who were used to staying silent and passive when confronted with racism. Coming back to racial socialization, or the sets of information and attitudes parents transmit to their children about race; Raymond example's could mean that an individual personality or even broader society can interfere with what they were initially taught or told about racism.

Role of religion:

Religion played a role on the participant's experience of racism, only when it was made obvious to the outside world. As an example only Allison, Middle Eastern, felt like religion was relevant, and explained her experience by her choice to wear the hijab.

Melanie, 26-year old and Asian mentioned that she had a happier experience than some of her friends especially because they did not wear the hijab.

Sexual orientation did not play a role at all in the participants' experience of racism.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The results of the study seem to support the idea that experiences of racism are definitely shaped by people's social background, as well as that they are shaped by how the social identity is perceived by outsiders (and especially members of the dominant group). In short, two people may or may not experience a specific situation as racism based on their different backgrounds (when one comes from and is aware of coming from a background that is frequently confronted with racism, while the other is not). But, they will also experience a situation differently because their understanding of the situation is different, when one of the said people is less frequently a target of racism. Moreover, immigrant status is believed to have played the greater role in shaping individual's general views.

We will first focus on the research about the immigrants from minorities' experiences of racism mentioned earlier. Our initial understanding was that there are differences between minorities that were or were not born in the U.S., and between first-generation and second-generation immigrants. Indeed, Portes and Zhou (1993) suggest that assimilation amongst migrants in the U.S. has become segmented, and the outcomes of said assimilation now depend on which sector of the society the immigrant will assimilate.

As immigrant status was a demographic that varied, we will now try to see if it can help explain why participants responded differently.

Focusing on the four Black participants seems logical as they hold both similarities and differences, in the sense that they have the same skin color but every different demographics. As a reminder, both African American Martine and Monica (who have lived in the U.S. all their life) have experienced racism whereas both Africans, David and Mary (who had lived here for 6 months and 5 years at the time of the study), have not.

As mentioned earlier, research indicates that minorities who were not born in the U.S. do not expect racism at first. This could explain the differences in experiences between both African participants who did not experience racism, and both African American participants, who did.

Additional interesting research that can be linked to the differences in experiences among the Black participants of our study is that of Waters (1994), who suggested experiences of racism among second-generation immigrants are shaped by the way one individual is identified by others, but also by the way this individual self identifies. Indeed, it was stated earlier that only the African American participants (that happen to have experienced racism) defined themselves with their race, while the African participants did not. This let us wonder if Waters' research that was only dedicated to second-generation immigrants can be expanded to foreign-born immigrants as well. Moreover, Greer (2013) talks about the elevated minority status. Similar to the model minority, she explains how Black immigrants see themselves and are perceived by society as being above or better than Black Americans. This hierarchy could help explain not only differences in treatment but also differences in the acts of racism directed towards those different categories of Blacks. Thus, this

hierarchy could help explain why African Americans experience more racism than other participants who share the same skin color.

A small section will now be dedicated to the three participants that did not experience or witness racism (both African David and Mary who have respectively lived in the U.S. for 6 months and 5 years; and Raymond, Asian who has lived here all his life). Why are their experiences different? If Waters' research can possibly answer that question for David and Mary, Raymond does not fall in the foreign-born category. Moreover, Deaux's research (2006) seems to indicate that second-generation immigrants are more aware of racism than their parents. Although he was studying patterns of Western immigrants only, one of the initial premises was to expect the same patterns among other ethnic groups. However, Raymond seems to counter it.

Asian Americans are often referred to as the model minority, which means that they are perceived to be a high-achieving and quiet minority. This stereotype aims to create a gap between them and other minorities (Lee, 2009) as they benefit from more positive stereotypes in the U.S. society. This could help explain why Raymond did not experience racism. A parallel can be drawn with the concept of "invisibility bargain" (Pugh, 2017) where members of a host community will accept migrants as long as they bring economic benefits while remaining politically and socially invisible. Indeed, it seems like in both cases, the host community is only accepting of immigrants that bring benefits while avoiding interfering in other domains, or while avoiding making their presence felt.

Going back to the theories and studies mentioned in the beginning, we will now try to tie them to the participant's experiences, and see if they are of any relevance and help explain those experiences.

First, social identity theory may be helpful in trying to justify why one individual would treat different minorities differently, based on his inner thinking and the prejudices and stereotypes that are held against them. Moreover, social identity theory suggested that individuals' experiences of racism are influenced by the extent to which aspects of their identity are the basis of inter-group conflicts in other contexts. We can say that social identity theory holds some relevance here as some participants mentioned stereotypes and prejudices for the basis of racism that they experienced. However, we can also say that social identity does not fully illustrate the participants' experiences. Indeed, while focusing only on one aspect of identity –static at that, social identity theory fails to explain differences in experiences of racism in individuals that share some social identity groups. In several instances participants shared aspects of identity (such as race, gender etc.), but those were not sufficient enough in order to guarantee or predict a specific experience of racism. Intersectionality comes into play, as observing how different social identity characteristics simultaneously shape one experience is more efficient in order to understand differences in experiences of racism. Indeed, rather than only focusing on one or a few social characteristics in order to understand, it is important to take into account all relevant social identity characteristics (to the extent possible) and how they work together; even if it inevitably makes research more difficult to conduct.

Moreover, it seems at first like none of the participant experienced racism based on relative deprivation. However, interactions at broader levels that can be explained by relative deprivation might have been reflected in some of the participants' experiences, as feeling of deprivation of resources in the political, economic level etc. constantly happen in society.

In order to provide more insight into whether and how relative deprivation might be helpful explanation for how individuals experience racism, potential research could focus on differences in experiences of racism in groups that live among or interact with members of dominant groups that traditionally feel deprived (such as inhabitants of poor economic performances zones), and groups who do not.

To conclude, our study suggests that in order to fully understand differences in experience of racism, there is the need to take into account how several aspects of individuals' identity overlap.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Studying the experiences of racism will always be useful, especially in a society that was and still is deeply marked by racism and racial disparities. Studying the experiences of racism in depth rather than focusing on racist acts is useful, as it is qualitatively adding to numerous studies touching on a topic that has been largely explored in the past.

At a practical level, studying the experiences of racism leads us to rethink what we define as racism, even if at the same time it adds one level of complexity. Going back to our participants, if several of them were confronted to the same kinds of acts or thoughts, but only one ended up thinking it was racism, our study would not give us the basis to invalidate anyone's experience. However, what if we wanted to focus on the acts or thoughts, and whether or not they were actually racist? Should we now only consider racism in relation to the individual that was experiencing the act, and not it in relation to the type of act that has been committed?

Indeed, it is important to take into account what is felt and experienced as racist. This complicates the identification of a specific situation as racism, as one can wonder which side takes over when in a specific scenario, both accounts of the situation (what was experienced as racism and what was done) seem to contradict one another.

Thus, should we keep looking for other criteria to nuance the definition of racism, of at least its experience? However, this is not the only question that has been raised while conducting the study. Indeed, because in this study the instances of racism reported were only those of personal racism, we could not assess if the experiences of other types of racism (structural or institutional) were directly shaped by the same criteria.

Moreover, these different experiences reminded us of some of the different forms that racism can take. Some of the most brutal experiences the participants of the study recalled still resonate with those that many still experience today, although the participants' experiences happened years ago. To say that progress in terms of racism has not been made at all would be an inaccurate statement, as well as saying that the United States is completely a post-racial society.

APPENDIX

Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to be one of my interviewee. As I've probably explained earlier, I'm interested in knowing a bit more about your understanding of racism, and how your upbringing plays a part in that.

I would like to say that I'm currently recording you so I can get back to what we've talked about later on, but if you're not comfortable with me doing so just let me know. Also, except from that, do you have any question for me before we begin?

Relations to racism

Lead off question: As a starting point, I would like you to think of an experience where you personally experienced or witness racism. Can you tell me what happened?

Possible follow up questions:

1. What part exactly made you think it was racism?
2. How did you react that day?
3. Can you tell me a bit more about what you would consider as racism, and what you wouldn't?
4. On a monthly basis (or whatever time period would be the most relevant here), how often would you say you feel confronted to racist events? Could you specify in what kind of situation are you when it happens to you?

Covert categories:

Definition of racism (and can you actually prevent/fight what people think versus preventing how they behave?)

Experiencing racism versus witnessing it

Forms of racism: interpersonal racism versus structural racism

Identity

The second set of questions focuses a bit more on yourself, and how you identify.

Lead off question: Can you tell me about where you're from?

Possible follow up questions:

1. (For foreign born interviewees) When did you move to the U.S.?
2. When it comes to your identity, how do you define yourself?
3. Now I would like to know about your household, please. Did you sometimes discuss racism with whoever brought you up? Do you recall what you were told? Also, were you told to respond to racism in a certain way?
4. Going back to your reaction to that first event you described earlier, do you feel like you responded in a way that was appropriate? (And do you feel like you responded in the way you were taught to?)
5. Have the recent political climate changed/shaped the way you respond or feel like responding to racism/racist events? Could you talk me through a specific example, please?

Covert categories:

Race

Ethnicity, religion

National identity

Sexual preference

A broader reflection on racism

Once again, thank you for agreeing to do this interview. Your input is really valuable to me.

Lead off question: I'm interested in knowing your opinion on racism, but at a broader level. Can you tell me what is your sense of racial relations in the U.S.? How do you view/define them?

Possible follow up questions:

1. How would you compare your relations to racism in the U.S., and in another country you have lived a significant amount of time in?
2. If racism isn't prevalent there, are there other kinds of discrimination that have become really hard to fight?
3. Finally, do you have any suggestions on what you think would be helpful in order to better racial relations in the U.S.?

Thank you so much for your time, and for your contribution.

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