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Geneseo's Diversity Efforts and Its Missing Link

Stella Oduro

Sponsored by Melanie Medeiros

ABSTRACT

As a result of segregated school environments, largely due to differences in socioeconomics, college may be the first place where some students learn to work with people from different races and ethnicities (Park, 2014). Interracial friendships not only help to develop the racial climate of a campus, but also help students develop positive learning, increase critical thinking, and enhance college experiences (Tanaka, 2003). Students do not benefit if homophily forms; homophily is the “tendency of like to attract like” (McPherson et al., 2001; Park, 2014). Homophily can occur if students lack precollege experience of interacting with students of other ethnicities and races or if the college's racial climate does not encourage students to interact with others from different racial groups. In this presentation, I will present data on whether homogeneity on the Geneseo campus is influenced by racial climate and/or homophily in students' precollege experiences.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I will argue that Geneseo's location and lack of representation forces students, especially minorities, into same-race homophily groups, regardless of their pre-college experiences and geographic location. Homophily is defined as the love of the same or the tendency to associate and bond with similar others. The purpose of this paper is to (1) explore how pre-college experiences and geographic locations impact a student's ability to form interracial friendships, (2) to understand if a student's pre-college experiences and geographic locations have increased or decreased their racial sensitivity, and whether Geneseo's campus encourages voluntary segregation among students, and lastly, (3) to suggest ways in which Geneseo can shape its programs, policies, and environment that would encourage an open dialogue about race, ethnicity, and diversity.

At an early age, children are taught to be colorblind. The inability to see disparities caused by the social construction of race causes consequences many are unaware of. Wingfield (2015) found that colorblindness benefits White people, allowing them to live in a society where “Whiteness is normalized.” Minorities,

however, become aware that people will often judge them “as members of their group” (Wingfield, 2015, p. 5), treating them with the stereotypes commonly attached to their group. This means that unless White people are exposed to racial issues, many children and adults alike will go on through life without seeing or experiencing “racial stratifications in schools, neighborhoods, health care and other social institutions” (Wingfield, 2015, p. 6). Colorblindness is so prevalent it can also be seen on college campuses. Racism influences the ways in which students are treated on campus as well as how minorities interact with both their fellow classmates and professors. The Black Lives Matters movement, which emerged after the unjust and untimely deaths of Michael Brown and other minorities, ultimately encouraged students to question the racial climate of their colleges. These protests raise questions about the colleges' ability to protect minorities, as well as educate community members about the importance of not being colorblind. Students across the United States often protest the systematic oppression minority students endure all too often in higher education. Some students protest these oppressions on their own campuses, while others stand in solidarity to address both the systematic oppression and microaggressions experienced on



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campuses. These acts promote awareness of the racial issues at hand and advocate for social change on college campuses by administrators. This systematic discrimination makes it essential that we teach our community members and students alike that just because there is an absence of outwardly racist findings, it does not mean that racial discrimination is not still at large.

Color consciousness would not only draw attention to the systematic oppressions that minorities face every day, but it would also increase racial understanding within our society. Additionally, it would encourage us, as a society, to work toward change for everyone. If we are not consciously aware of the limitations minority groups face, we cannot resolve them. *The New York Times* OP-ED columnist David Brooks (2016) reported that “a free society requires individuals who are capable of handling that freedom — people who can be counted on to play their social roles as caring parents, responsible workers and dependable neighbors.” Brooks’ words echo the Black Lives Matter movements’ cries that society cannot erase violence against minorities without seeing the problems that minorities encounter in their everyday lives. This means professors need to be learning how to facilitate conversations about racial conflicts, while schools work to create a safe space for minority students to share their experiences.

The SUNY Geneseo Campus, just like other campuses, has been experiencing protests urging administration to address the microaggressions minorities face. By opening a dialogue in regards to race and the microaggressions Geneseo minorities face on campus, President Battles has created initiatives like the Commission on Diversity & Community to both address and find solutions to students’ problems. It is impossible to find solutions without considering students’ pre-college exposure to this sort of dialogue, especially with apps such as Yik Yak that aid students in making ignorant posts and voicing their dissatisfaction anonymously.

The election of Donald Trump and his current administration has encouraged students who dislike the continuous protests of the Black Lives Matter movement on campus to not only graffiti a KKK sign on our beloved Gazebo but to also vandalize dormitories with hateful signs. It is imperative that the Commis-

sion on Diversity & Community works toward understanding how students’ geographic locations and pre-college experiences influence their racial perceptions.

FIELD SITE

The Village of Geneseo is composed of 8,158 people, while the State University of New York at Geneseo alone has about 5,521 attendees. Geneseo is a predominately White campus with 75% of the student population identifying as Caucasian, 3% African American, 7.5% Latino, 7.6% Asian, 2.8% Multi-racial and 0.1% Native Americans. Using the Geneseo campus as my field site, I researched to find if Geneseo’s racial disproportion makes it susceptible to homophily.

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS AND METHODOLOGY

In order to understand how the Geneseo campus and community influences interracial friendship and homophily among students, I interviewed 14 Geneseo students from different graduating classes. This was a random sample as I emailed the different graduating classes from freshmen to current seniors seeking willing participants. With the political turmoil of the United States, many students responded to this research despite contributors not receiving any sort of payment for their participation. To protect the identities of my participants, I will only use their first names in this paper. I interviewed two freshmen, Samantha and Amy; seven sophomores, Michelle, William, Lauren, Linsey, Ciara, Richard, and Nina; one junior, Linda; and four seniors, Tobey, Anne, M, and Michael. The interviews were conducted in person and at the end we had a focus group to discuss strategies to use in working toward improving Geneseo’s racial climate. Each individual interview was pleasant and conversational and lasted anywhere from 36 to 60 minutes. The questions were designed to see whether each interviewee’s pre-college experiences and geographic locations influenced the type of friendships they made in Geneseo. The questions also examined how Geneseo’s location influences their decision to either interact and befriend only people in the same racial group or different racial groups on campus. The answers to these questions



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allowed me to see how different geographic locations and pre-college experiences influence the way Geneseo students choose their friend groups. One challenge that I faced while conducting this research was finding a key informant, such as an administrative worker or faculty member, to offer additional context to the paper.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pre-College Experience

College students' pre-college experiences with interracial friendships plays a significant role in how they make friends during college. Saenz (2010) found that "Students' pre-college racial environment and experience indeed have notable perpetuation effects in college diversity outcomes, such as cross-racial interactions and students' attitudes about racial discrimination" (p. 30). Many researchers support Saenz's statement by citing that because of segregated schools and environments, students of racial and ethnic backgrounds differing from the majority group have a harder time interacting with one another (Bowman & Stewart, 2014). By citing that segregated environments and schools influence student interaction, Bowman and Stewart (2014) emphasize the importance of spatial proximity and how diversity within students' community is important to the formations of interracial relationships (Mouw & Entisle, 2006). Because college students carry their precollege interactions with them into their first year of college, it is imperative that colleges find a way to help students expand upon their experiences without imposing or impeding on their beliefs and rights (Saenz, Ngai, & Hurtado, 2007, Whitt et al., 2001). In addition, Bowman and Stewart (2014) assert that pre-college experiences, such as "living in a racially diverse neighborhood, attending racially diverse schools, and having interracial friendship networks, may have a greater impact on the racial attitude of White students than on the attitude of student of color at college matriculation" (p. 116). Bowman and Stewart's assertions stem from the fact that Asians and Hispanics/Latinos are more likely to have friends from other races and ethnicities when compared to White and Black students in their first year of college due to their pre-college experiences (Park, 2014, p. 655).

HOMOPHILY AND PROPINQUITY

Segregated neighborhoods and schools foster and enhance homophily, which is the tendency of "likes attract likes" (Park, 2014, p. 655). Homophily allows students to interact "with others who are like [themselves]" (McPherson et al., 2001, p. 415), which later becomes an exclusive membership for the people in the group excluding dissimilar characteristics. Although homophily can be built upon status, homophily can also have a values basis, as "similarity is based on informal, formal, or ascribed status," it can be a combination of both status homophily and value homophily (McPherson et al., 2001, p. 419). Thus, a decrease in racial homophily depends upon students' interactions, availability of different racial groups within their own community, and spatial proximity with their peers (Bowman & Stewart, 2014, p. 116). Only a decrease in homophily will illustrate Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis, which states that prejudice is lessened and decreases when people with equal opportunities interact with diverse groups and effectively learn from each other. Therefore, a more open dialogue will be established between individuals of different races and ethnicities with a positive and progressive attitude. With the concept that college students' tendency to become friends and associate with people of their own race and culture, Buchmann et al. (2009) insinuates that college students might be driven toward their friends because of shared social situation, which is called propinquity. In addition, Buchmann et al. (2009) found that propensity combined with homophily increases racial homogeneity on college campus.

RACIAL CLIMATE

With homophily derived from pre-college experiences, it is imperative that the racial climate on campus be adjusted in order to help students interact more with both faculty and other students. While college campuses give the majority group the opportunity to interact with minorities, all reviewed literature states that students of color, such as Asians and Hispanics/Latinos, are neutral in the interracial friendships from their pre-college racial environment, while Black students decrease the formation of their interracial friendships during college.



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Hence, colleges need to implement programs aiding the school's commitment to creating a diverse community (Whitt et al., 2001). Implementing programs like this should provide college administrators with alternative lenses in which they can understand "how same-race friendships persist due to how majors are filled that resists simply targeting the concentration of students of color in certain academic programs as the 'problem' to be solved" (Bowman & Stewart, 2014, p. 116). College racial climates should be inclusive, while providing students the same opportunity to learn effectively about other cultures without administrators simply targeting different races and ethnicities to fulfill their diversity quota. It is the duty of the college to help entering students without any prior interracial friendship experience not only question their pre-college experiences, but expand and improve upon their understanding of these kinds of relationships.

RESULTS

Geneseo's Location

Geneseo prides itself on its inclusion and diversity initiatives. Each and every semester, Geneseo finds ways to make diversity a priority; however, as I found out through this interview, students are unfamiliar with Geneseo's definition of diversity. All of the interviewees, when asked to define Geneseo's diversity, failed to articulate a definition of what it means to be a diverse campus. While Geneseo's definition of diversity is holistic and composed of all of the different categories, such as race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, etc., and reflected in interviewees' own definitions of diversity, with the exception of Michael and Richard, most of the interviewees did not see the diversity Geneseo claims to be promoting.

According to Ciara, "diversity needs to be seen." Regardless of how Geneseo defines diversity, all of the interviewees agreed that Geneseo does have a holistic definition, but it is not fully manifested in the campus population.

Linda, a biracial student and Buffalo native, stated that while she knew diversity was a Geneseo core value, she said it is "passive" rather than active, referring to the lack of racial diversity within both the student body and faculty. Anne, a Black Geneseo graduate

student, argued that "Geneseo has a large LGBTQ+ community and that plays a lot into its diversity, I get that, when it comes to sexuality, you have a diverse campus, but a majority of those people are White... When it comes to race, you still have 95% of the population as White, and that's not diverse." She continued to say that she does not see the college "upholding the pillar of diversity."

Lauren, a Guyanese and Portuguese student from Queens, New York, wanted to know how Geneseo defines diversity because she was "told that it was fairly diverse" and when she came to orientation "they said it is 76% Caucasian people" and [to her] that doesn't sound very diverse. M, an Asian student who identifies as Chinese, believes that Geneseo defines diversity "based on an equal ratio of students from different geographic areas. There is a decent number of international students but also Geneseo mostly attracts students from Europe. [It's] still Eurocentric not a lot of diversity."

Combined with its location, some interviewees found Geneseo, as a whole, to be very limiting. Geneseo's small population forces people to "interact through cliques, groups of people, and organizations." Tobey, a White student, from Middleburgh, New York, stated that "small town, [students] never get to meet people in town before meeting people on campus." Amy, a Hispanic student from the Bronx, believed that Geneseo's location makes it difficult to make friends on campus because campus is "extremely big. So normally for you to make friends and for you to get to know them by going an event, you can't really do that here because there is only one bus that takes you to Walmart and back." Michael, a Pakistani student from Albany, New York, and Linsey, a White student from Buffalo, further reinforced all the interviewees' points by stating that Geneseo's location puts students in a bubble: "You are either in a group or you are not in a group. Once you have like a set groups, you stay there and you don't really like mix." Essentially, the context of Geneseo's propinquity, or spatial proximity, makes it easy for homophily to form among students. As Michelle, a White student, put it, Geneseo's location forces students to go with people who look like them. However, to some interviewees, Geneseo's spatial proximity means "more people are ignorant about things such as race and diversity." According to M, this ignorance stems "out



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of lack of knowledge and experience." This lack of exposure to different races and diversity can increase hypersensitivity towards different racial groups.

PRE-COLLEGE EXPOSURE

Interviewees' Awareness of Racial Identities

Bowman and Stewart (2014) make the argument that students do not come to college with a clean slate; rather they come already "filled with experiences, beliefs, and interpretation of social dynamics on both macro and micro levels." Because of this, they assert that students' pre-college exposure to diversity shapes their racial attitudes. Before the analysis, it is important to state that all interviewees understood and were aware of race starting at a very early age. While the method by which each became aware of different racial groups and their own race was different, they knew it existed. Anne reinforced this: "I always knew. It was there but I did not understand until I came to college. In the city, it was there but it was not defined." M, who was adopted, said that by the time she was in kindergarten, she understood that there was something different about her because her friends would ask her, "Why don't you look like your mom?" Linsey said she "remembers going through all of the pictures and seeing that I am the only White person in the picture." For Michael, who felt similarly, it was being raised in a predominantly White neighborhood that made him aware of his own racial identity. He reaffirmed this when he said, "I have always known that they are White and I am not." Despite knowing about race, as both Anne and William, a Hispanic student, expressed, "It was not necessarily an understanding of race, but we knew that certain people were different."

As previously stated, students' propinquity, which "describes the proximity between people," influences "the likelihood of their forming a relationship" (Park, 2014, p. 643). Aspects of propinquity include perceived similarity and homophily, which is often tied to racial demography. When asked to describe their friend group before college, the interviewees' responses reflected that of the neighborhood in which they grew up. In doing so, each interview reinforced that propinquity does play a significant role in friend-

ships formed before college. Lauren reaffirmed Parks' theory in saying, "It is not the best neighborhood, so my parents don't like me making friends there but I love the people there. Because we all grew up in the same neighborhood and face the same thing growing up." Despite her Queens village neighborhood being "ghetto," she "vibes together [with her Guyanese friends] because [they] know the struggle." The individuals Lauren interacted with shaped her pre-college experience, because she lived in a community of mostly minorities, and mainly intermingled with Guyanese people because of the spatial proximity and racial makeup of her community.

Just like Lauren, Amy went to a predominately minority school in a predominately minority community, the Bronx. According to Saenz (2010), both Latinos and Black students are more likely to attend mostly minority-attended schools (p. 5). He further asserts that these schools, unlike predominately White schools, are the "most under resourced, most understaffed, most poverty-stricken, and most neglected schools in the country" (Saenz, 2010, p. 4). They attend these schools as a "coping strategy to account for perceived hostile or unwelcoming environment" (Saenz, 2010, p. 28).

MEDIA AND ITS EFFECTS ON WHITE RACIAL IDENTITY

These differences are often reinforced by the media, and depending on the neighborhood they grew up in, each of the interviewees understood the different stigmas and privileges that are associated with their race. When asked to state some of the privileges associated with each of their race, White students interviewed were more likely to state positive privileges than their counterparts. Samantha, a White student from Long Island, stated that "having money and a say in a lot of things" mattered. Linsey reaffirmed this when she said, "There is a stigma about being a White person. Like you don't hear about White stereotypes. I am better off than most people because of my race." Nina, a White Jewish student from New York, further explained that her Whiteness not being considered a race in itself is a privilege because "no one [is] tiptoeing around microaggressions and in a sense, makes life easier." Both Tobey and Michelle stated being White gives them freedom of movement



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in which they can walk around “police officers and guys leave you alone.”

MEDIA AND ITS EFFECTS ON MINORITY RACIAL IDENTITY

Unlike their White counterparts, students of color had a harder time thinking of something positive to say about their race. When asked to describe some privileges associated with her race, Anne took a moment and asked “Like what? I don’t know,” claiming “that’s not a question [she] can answer.” M also illustrated the same thought when she said, “I don’t consider my race to have any privileges. I don’t think there are things Asians have that other race don’t have.” Linda took the conversation further to illustrate the colorism that comes with having certain features. Linda states that she has the “privilege in the realm of race because [she is] lighter and [has] other features.” She continues by stating that “being proud to be Black and other things that Black people do is much more tolerable when you are light skin, the closer you are to Whiteness.” Even if they are able to describe the types of privilege associated with their race, it is something tangible to their ethnic group such as speaking “two languages” and having the ability to “travel outside of the United States” as Amy stated. These students did not come to Geneseo without knowing about different racial groups or their own privileges, if they believe they have any (Bowman & Stewart, 2014, p. 10). They have their own shared experiences which shape and define how they interact with both the people on campus and within the community.

MICROAGGRESSIONS AND ITS REINFORCEMENT OF SOCIAL DOMINANCE

During the interview, I asked students if they have ever lost something or felt mistreated because of their race. Anne responded with a story about a time she and her friends went to a Rite Aid store in New York City. She stated:

We went around into Rite Aid to look around and look at stuff and one of the associates kept following us around the

store. It got so uncomfortable to the point that we had to leave. I felt like we had to buy stuff to prove that we weren’t stealing. It changed how I go to the store. When I go to the store, I would stay outside if I am not buying anything while my friends go inside. When I go to a store, it means I need something because I won’t go to the store to look, it does not feel right.

During the conversation, Anne further stated that she does the same thing here in Geneseo out of the fear of encountering the same issue. Despite her decision to restrict herself from going into stores unless she needs something, the issue of being viewed or stereotyped as someone who would steal still prevailed.

Ciara, a Hispanic student from the Bronx, also shared Anne’s sentiment when she stated that her interaction with the community has been less than positive. She too shared an anecdote of going to the Geneseo Walmart. She stated, “There have been multiple times where we went to Walmart and we were in the self-checkout aisle and the workers would literally come and stand in front us.” She later observed that as soon as they paid for their materials, the workers would leave. To Ciara, “stereotypes of people of color stealing things” play a role in the Walmart workers standing in front of her when she paid for her mattress pad. These shared experiences are not something that Geneseo has to consider when dealing with students of different racial groups. In fact, when asked if they were mistreated because of their race, with the exceptions of Michelle, William, and Richard, all of the interviewees can recall a time they were mistreated or lost something because of their race.

When minorities attend predominantly White colleges like that of Geneseo, students’ microaggressions reduce their sense of belonging and hinder their participation in campus life activities (Yosso et. al., 2001). Amy shared, “People get upset at the stupidest things and take it out on the wrong people and it is the last thing I want to happen. I honestly do not mind walking around here with people ignoring that I exist, or I don’t mind as long as when they *do* find that I exist, they don’t hate me for something I did not do.” Amy’s decision to remain invisible on campus despite being a freshman illustrates Yosso et. al’s



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(2001) theory that racial microaggressions can negatively impact college racial climate.

Amy's remark came shortly after she said she heard "one girl saying 'Oh how am I supposed to feel comfortable with White cops walking around saying they are going to protect us?'" While the students, whom Amy describes as White, may have the intention of making a joke, Amy did not find it particularly funny. In fact, Amy stated that this "kind of bothered [her]," because the student could not put herself in the shoes of minorities being mistreated by cops. She stated that the student "was being insensitive to people who were experiencing the situation." Amy described another incident that occurred in her dormitory where a friend of a suitemate calls her the "brown one," rather than her name, simply because she is the supposedly darkest one in her suite.

These microaggressions influence not only minority participation on campus but also their academics.

Last year, the BSU staged a protest in solidarity with the students of Missouri and people on Yik Yak were so hateful. They were basically saying that 'we don't need to protect racism on campus' but the way they said it proved the opposite. It was very terrifying because I honestly think every White person has some form of hidden racism inside of them. I don't go to White people saying let me be your friend, I don't do that. No one is correcting anybody because they are either too afraid or they don't know any better, I just sit there hearing the ignorance of the people. If I was not the only Black person in class, I would have said something but because I am, I just sit there and let them talk.

Ciara describes how some students' reactions to the solidarity protest caused her to stop participating in class, especially if she was the only Black student in the classroom.

Anne agreed with Ciara by asserting that "on this campus, most of the classes you take, there will be only one or two Black people in the class." The fact that she is the only Black person in the class forces her to "put on [a] persona of a tough person going to

classes like 'I don't care.'" She explained that she always felt unwelcome in all-White groups. She felt like her perception of White students changed in that she is less likely to befriend White students because they are unfriendly toward her race or seem unwilling to get to know her. The lack of diversity and the inability of many White students to understand how the different forms of microaggressions toward students of color makes it difficult for them to share their experiences and knowledge. Linda also reinforced both Anne and Ciara's points that without the presence of another minority in their class other than themselves, they are less likely to voice their opinions. Despite being considered most prepared to engage diversity, Amy, Lauren, Anne, and Ciara's decision not to voice their opinions and dissatisfaction with the treatment of minorities can prevent cultural engagement on the Geneseo campus. It also proves Solórzano et. al's (2000) finding that racial microaggression does not only occur inside classrooms but also outside of them.

Similarly, Milem and Umbach (2003) found that the students least likely to be prepared to participate in diversity in college are White students. Their assertion stems from White students coming from almost all-White neighborhoods. With the exception of Linsey and Nina, a large number of the White students interviewed came from mostly White neighborhoods. In fact, Richard, who comes from a town an hour away from Geneseo, sees Geneseo as a diverse place in comparison to his hometown. Similarly to Richard, Tobey comes from a predominantly White neighborhood and knew mostly White people before coming to Geneseo. Tobey's exposure to different groups of people, specifically Black people, came through media. Tobey affirmed this when he said he "really had no exposure until I was ten. [I knew] there were people who are different and that they were bad." For him and his family, the lack of interaction with other racial groups made college the first place he was fully exposed to different groups and cultures. In college, he was "surprised by the diversity" but even then, he maintained that Geneseo is "still pretty White." Tobey's exposure to diversity also means exposure for his family. Tobey, who began dating a Black girl here in Geneseo, explained the awkward way his grandparents would show their affection toward his girlfriend. When asked to explain whether he has stereotyped someone, Tobey said



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“telling my grandma what to buy for [my girlfriend] to eat. It’s so bad, every time, my grandma buys tons of bananas, and I am like ‘Grandma, [she] eats different things beside bananas.’” He attributes this awkward affection to lack of exposure to Black people as well as people of other racial groups and the media’s reinforcement of stereotypes.

Stearns et. al (2009) argues that because of different pre-college experiences, “college may provide the first opportunity for many young adults to interact closely in academic, residential, or social settings with members of different racial and ethnic groups” (p. 173). Michelle, who went to a school that was 95% White with a handful of Hispanic and Black students, grew up in an all-White neighborhood and stated that she was oblivious to racial struggles. She was never aware of race until 7th or 8th grade when her friends were “complaining of how they were represented. It was something that was brought to my attention by a minority.” Initially Michelle saw Geneseo as a more diverse community than the one she grew up in. Similarly to Tobey, as she began to explore more on campus, she began to realize “we are [not] as diverse as other schools.” Nevertheless, Michelle expressed her discomfort when speaking about racial issues. She stated she becomes “really conscious and think about what [she is] going to say” because race is a sensitive topic. Despite most of their friends being White, Tobey’s, Michelle’s, and Richard’s exposure to different racial groups has helped expand their knowledge about racial disparities.

These students’ experiences here in Geneseo allow them to seek comfort within their own racial group. Minorities who come here with diverse views are often deterred by the environment in the classroom and community. While all of these interviewees had a diverse group of friends, they also had certain biases toward their own group. M affirmed this when she said that she was much more willing to trust a Chinese person for the first time than someone of another race. Even students who came from diverse schools often have homogenous friend groups. Samantha came from a diverse school and had a varied group of friends back home, but in Geneseo, all of her friends are White. Linda and William, who continuously maintained their interracial friendships, are exceptions to this. Rather than only focusing on academics, Geneseo administrators should find ways

to make Geneseo a student center where dialogues about social issues are encouraged. While each interviewee had different characteristics they look for in friendships, it is important that Geneseo understands that all of these students come from different walks of life. Because all students on this campus come from extremely different lifestyles, there needs to be more ways to promote diversity within the Geneseo community.

DISCUSSION

Despite stating broad characteristics that students seek in friendships, which can be found among people from different racial groups, these interviewees found that their close friends are from the same racial group as them. While social students do come to Geneseo with their own knowledge and understanding of race and privilege, these ideas are normalized by both the media and environment. Precollege experiences influence students’ initial friendship formation; however, the overall college experience has a much greater impact on how students choose their friends. The interviewees acknowledge that Geneseo’s location places them into cliques and makes it difficult to either escape or add to their group of friends. Nevertheless, the idea that Geneseo’s lack of diversity forces students into a bubble depends on the type of environment the students are coming from. Students who live in diverse and highly populated areas, such as New York City, found Geneseo to be limiting and not very diverse, while students from upstate and towns smaller than Geneseo found Geneseo to be more diverse. I did find that students from minority backgrounds tended to make friends with minorities from other cultural backgrounds because of their shared experiences, geographic locations prior to Geneseo, and microaggressions they have encountered. Microaggressions not only hinder minority students from voicing their opinion in classroom, but also make their race and cultural difference in this homogeneous campus more visible. With few exceptions, White students interviewed said they tend to have friends from the same racial group, but whether their decision is influenced by their pre-college experience is not certain. While I did learn that students’ decisions to form these kinds of friendships are influenced by their college experiences and Geneseo’s location, the extent to which



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Geneseo's location influences students' behavior and decision is still unclear.

Regardless of race and class year, a majority of the interviewees believed that racial and social issues should be taught in class or be incorporated further into professors' lesson plans. As one interviewee stated, "race, gender, and sexuality affect students and how they are treated during their time at school and later in the workforce." In fact, these things also influence how they interact with other people, especially those who want to work in fields that require them to work with individuals coming from different backgrounds.

CONCLUSION

In order to fully implement rules and goals about diversity and inclusion, racial and ethnic differences have to be talked about. A person's race should be one of the few things that administrators consider when making a decision how to make Geneseo more inclusive. Out of the 14 students interviewed, only two students did not mention ethnicity, race, or skin color in their definition. Bowman and Stewart (2014) argues that propinquity might contribute to White students interacting with fewer racial friends and reinforce racial homophily. However, in Geneseo's case, it seems as though propinquity might contribute to minority students interacting with less White students. If this occurs, Geneseo loses its opportunity to educate and teach students to be equipped with the skills and motivation to create a diverse society (Stearns et. al, 2009). According to Milem and Umbach (2003), exposure to diverse peers can disrupt the cycle of endurance of segregation in our society.

Consider Linsey's experience in Geneseo so far: Linsey, a White female, knew from an early age that she was White and from the minority group at her Buffalo school. Nevertheless, Linsey considered that it was a "pretty cool thing to have many different types of people around [her]." Her story is striking because she went from being friends with a diverse group of people in her hometown to not wanting to attend multicultural organizations in Geneseo because she "believes it's not her place." If the goal of this campus is to create holistic students who understand and appreciate cultural differences, then Geneseo needs to find better ways of encouraging students to speak about social issues. As depicted by interviewees in

various responses, requiring a mandatory course on race, gender, and sexuality might not work because, as one of the interviewee said, "a class like this might ignite hatred towards minorities and would become another general education requirement where students just take the class to fulfill their requirement, not to learn." On the other hand, M optimistically stated that a class like this would make multiculturalism more than a hobby. Michael also suggested that Geneseo should create a mandatory pass or fail seminar each semester for students in different majors to attend. However, this class should be taught by a professor who is racially and culturally aware, as well as able to generate conversation through storytelling. Just like Anne, Linsey, who is from the city, knew that race existed, but it never let it define her, until she came to Geneseo.

Most of the interviewees also found that most professors are ill-equipped or uncomfortable with leading a conversation on diversity, race, and different forms of microaggressions. Anne recalled one of her last classes before graduating where the professor talked about race and religion, but never about race relations. She claimed that her professors felt uncomfortable and never once went into Islam and the Black community. She also mentioned that sometimes it depended on the audience of the class. For example, with a mostly White audience, the professor might not feel obligated to explain racial issues. Nina also reiterated Anne's point when she said that, "Oftentimes if someone brings up [a topic that professors never heard before] they don't know how to approach it." Approaching different curricula through a Eurocentric view does not provide students with the holistic view necessary for change to occur.

Finally, it is important to mention the limitations of this research. First, the interviews were a random sample; therefore, it was not race- or gender-based. They were selected because they wanted to share their experiences.

We also have to encourage our professors to acknowledge their own biases, fears, and anxieties when talking about race and diversity (Sue et. al, 2009, p. 183). An option to better professors is to offer training in this area. Geneseo can have a mock teaching session, where a professor approaches the different facets of race and microaggressions. After this, students can



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offer the professor some constructive criticism. Maybe professors should find ways to incorporate Critical Race Theory, not only to improve race and diversity conversations, but also to encourage students of color to speak more in class. If Geneseo is going to claim diversity as a part of its core tenets, we must equip professors with the training and skills needed to ensure effective and productive conversation.

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