"I'm Just American": Facilitating Seminary Students' Reflections Regarding the Impact of Whiteness on Vocational Formation

Susan L. Maros

Abstract

Substantial literature discussing racial identity development and vocational formation has been published in the United States, but little scholarly work explores the intersection between racial/ethnic identity and vocational formation. This paper explores the intersection between White identity development and vocation formation for European Americans with particular attention paid to the implications for practice in a seminary classroom. It closes with recommendations for educators on developing capacities for integrating discussions of race into their courses.

Introduction

Several years ago, I took my first steps in the practice of facilitating conversations around race and ethnicity. I had students complete an ethnic autobiography.[1] As we talked about the experience of the exercise, one student identified as Mexican American and reflected on the stories he heard about his great-grandparents. Another student talked about his German heritage, also noting it was his great-grandparents who immigrated to the United States. "But," he said, "I don't see myself as German-American. I'm 'just American.'"

Susan L. Maros is Affiliate Assistant Professor of Christian Leadership at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California.

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[1] The exercise "Writing an Ethnic Autobiography" comes from Mark Lau Branson and Juan F. Martinez, *Churches, Cultures and Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 24–25. The list of questions in this exercise can be found in an appendix at the end of this paper.

The phrase "just American" was troubling. However, at that time, I lacked the skill to expose the assumptions that came with it. Despite having a Ph.D. in intercultural studies and having the enriching experience of learning alongside people from many different nations, I had not yet grappled meaningfully with my identity as a White person. I was not conversant with the idea of "White privilege," and I was not familiar with the concept of "White normativity." I had some measure of cultural awareness from my life experiences as a missionary kid and cross-cultural mission worker, but I was just beginning the journey of exploring racial identity.

Since then, I have learned more about racial identity and have pondered its impact on vocation. I have had more experiences facilitating conversations around race and ethnicity with seminary students, developing from completely ignorant to novice in this area of endeavor. This paper represents my current thoughts on the relationship between racial identity—specifically, White identity—and vocational formation, and it articulates some of the knowledge I have gained through facilitating conversations on this subject and what that means for leader educators.[2]

I work with emerging and developing leaders in the context of a seminary classroom. Although the focus of this paper is the process that takes place in a formal education setting, similar learning experiences occur on a Sunday morning and in the board room and in team meetings. My hope is that in focusing on a particular

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[2] This paper consciously centers on the experience of Whiteness in the United States. The risk of doing so is to contribute to, rather than ameliorate, the cost of the centrality of Whiteness for the broader community. The intention of this paper is to grapple with one element of the conversation that White people in the United States are responsible to address: face, scrutinize, and attend to the fact of our USAmerican Whiteness and its implications. This paper represents one effort to engage in this work for the sake of taking one step closer to a Revelation 7 Church in which peoples of all ethnicities, races, and cultures stand before God in their rich diversity.

context, the principles become clear and can then be adapted and addressed in other contexts of practice.

My experience with USAmerican seminary students of European descent suggests they have rarely considered how Whiteness has shaped their understanding of the nature of vocational formation.[3] This is often true even for White USAmericans who desire to be allies with people of color around issues of ethnicity, race, and justice. Literature on social justice activism rarely addresses the vocational formation of the individuals and communities involved in this work. Likewise, literature on vocational formation seldom acknowledges the impact of a person's context and racial identity on that formation. This paper suggests that racial identity, context, and vocational formation are inextricably linked, and it explores means by which educators might assist developing leaders to become aware of this connection and its impact on their vocational identity.

Throughout the paper, I use two student composites, "Joe" and "Lily," to represent some of the dynamics I commonly encounter with White students in a class I teach on Vocational Formation.[4] Biographical details for Joe and Lily are drawn from actual students with enough detail changed to shield the identity of any particular individual. Quotations are the words of actual students drawn from their written work, again with identifying details removed or altered.

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[3] I use the term "USAmerican" to refer to citizens of the United States rather than the popular term "American" as "America" is the name of two continents. I capitalize the racial term "White" to parallel other terms of racial and ethnic designation that are capitalized such as Black or African American or Asian American. I do not use the term "European American" in this context because it implies an emphasis on ethnicity that obscures the challenges that come with forming a healthy racial identity. I capitalize "Whiteness" both for its parallel to the racial term White and to emphasize the nature of Whiteness as more than an individual's self-identity.

[4] IS500 "Practices of Vocational Formation" is one of four integrative courses required for most Masters students at Fuller Theological Seminary. This course has been in existence since Fall 2014 and the author has been teaching IS500 since Fall 2015.

I begin with the starting point I still use in this course—an ethnic autobiography—and identify two problems that unexamined White identity poses for vocational formation. I then discuss how Whiteness impacts several elements of a common cultural model of vocation formation. Finally, I conclude with recommendations that focus especially on the development of the educator engaged in this work.

Ethnic Autobiography and Vocation—A Starting Point

Joe is from a mainline denominational church in a mostly White suburb of a major city in the northwestern part of the United States. Joe is in seminary working on a Master of Divinity degree, exploring the possibility of ordination in this denomination. Aware of urban church planting initiatives in his tradition, Joe envisions himself leading a multi-ethnic ministry. Joe identifies himself as a racial ally.

Lily grew up in a staunchly Evangelical church located in a small town just outside of a major Midwestern city. Lily's involvement in a Christian student group on her college campus impacted her deeply. In this context, she interacted regularly for the first time in her life with people who were not White. After working for a couple years on staff in that ministry, Lily started a seminary degree to receive further training.

In a course on vocational formation, Joe and Lily complete an ethnic autobiography.[5] In addition to the questions asked about their ethnic identity, Joe and Lily are asked to reflect on the following questions: 1) How has your ethnic identity and racial identity impacted your understanding of the nature of vocation? 2) How have the assumptions and values within your ethnic/racial context shaped what you believe is possible for you vocationally?

In response to this exercise, Joe writes about his Scotts-Irish background and his experience growing up in

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[5] Branson and Martinez, 24-25.

a majority White area with progressive-leaning politics. Joe asserts that a person's ethnic or racial identity shouldn't limit what that person pursues vocationally. "Everyone should have a chance to live out the American Dream," Joe writes, "no matter where they come from or what their ethnicity." Nevertheless, Joe acknowledges, some people experience limitations as a result of their racial identity.

Lily writes "I definitely feel that I've had a white suburban understanding of vocation, where taking care of your family and living out your 'individual relationship with God' is everything." When pressed to think about how being White has impacted her formation, Lily responded that she believes her family originally was English but that she doesn't think of herself as being a member of a racial group. "I'm just normal," she says.

Neither Joe nor Lily has a conscious, fully-formed, healthy sense of White racial identity. [6] For them and other seminary students seeking to develop in their capacity to engage with God's work in the world, an unexamined experience of Whiteness detrimentally affects their development in two primary ways. First, being unaware of White racial identity means that the person does not recognize how Whiteness forms and deforms their experience of vocational formation. Second, insofar as the White person is unaware of racial identity, she or he will act out of their White privilege, assuming White normativity, and tacitly support structural racism. This is true even when they desire to be engaged in a life-giving way in issues of justice and racial reconciliation. "Until we know who we are ethnically, we are unable to really reconcile genuinely with others," Brenda Salter McNeil writes. "And until we know and recognize people for who

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[6] Use of the term "ethnicity" in Branson and Martinez's exercise allows students to reflect meaningfully on family stories. On the other hand, use of this term allows a White student to affirm their ethnic background—German, Italian, Irish, etc.—and ignore the fact they live as a White person in a racialized world.

they really are—including some of their history as a people—and then interact with them in ways that actually influence how we see ourselves, we cannot genuinely reconcile with them."[7]

Racial Identity Formation and Mental Models of Race

The term "White" refers to people identified by USAmerican society as having the physical phenotype characteristics of a person of Northern European descent.[8] "Whiteness" then is the corresponding social construct related to the identity, values, and behaviors associated with people who are categorized as "White." Robin DiAngelo defines Whiteness as "dynamic, relational, and operating at all times and on myriad levels" and including "processes and practices include basic rights, values, beliefs, perspectives and experiences purported to be commonly shared by all but which are actually only consistently afforded to white (sic) people."[9]

The concept of "race"[10] in general and the specific racial designation "White" are socially constructed.[11] The

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[7] Brenda Salter McNeil and Rick Richardson, *The Heart of Racial Justice: How Soul Change Leads to Social Change*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 88.

[8] Whether or not people from the Iberian Peninsula in Europe—people of Spanish and Portuguese descent—are considered "White" and its rationale is an important topic for understanding the experience of race in the United States. It is, however, beyond the scope of the present paper.

[9] Robin DiAngelo, "White fragility." *The International Journal of Critical Pedagogy* 3(3) (2011); 56.

[10] Omi and Winant observe that the concept of "race" is often viewed as a social category that is either an objective reality or an ideological construct. "When viewed as an objective matter, race is usually understood as rooted in biological differences, ranging from such familiar phonemic markers as skin color, hair texture, or eye shape, to more obscure human variations occurring at the genetic or genomic levels." When viewed as an ideological construct, on the other hand, race is seen as a concept that "masks a more fundamental material distinction" such as ethnicity, class or nation. Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 109.

[11] The concept of "socially constructed knowledge" is a theory of knowledge developed in sociology and communications theory that looks at how

modern concept of race has its origins in the
Enlightenment with the development of a "scientific"
race theory utilized to justify enslaving whole people
groups.[12] Although twenty-first century genetics and
biological science have demonstrated that this
conceptualization of "race" has no biological basis, in the
context of contemporary racialized society in the United
States,[13] the concept persists and continues to be a basis
for social organization and interaction throughout the
nation. The social significance of these concepts is guided
by the social meanings ascribed to them. "As social facts,
both 'race' and whiteness define real situations in
American society; and, as real situations, both 'race' and
whiteness issue into real social consequences."[14]

Psychologist Beverly Daniel Tatum writes about
"racial-ethnic-cultural identity development"[15] from
adolescence to adulthood. She defines this development
as "the process of defining for oneself the personal

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humans rationalize their experience and codify that rationalization in
language. This is similar to the concept of "mental models" in leadership
theory, popularized by the work of Peter Senge who defines mental models
as those "deeply held internal images of how the world works, images the
limit us to familiar ways of thinking and acting." Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth
Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization.* (Broadway Business,
2006) , 163. Cognitive anthropologists work with "cognitive schemas," a
"learned, internalized pattern of thought-feeling." Claudia Strauss, "Models
and Motives" in *Human Motives and Cultural Models*, ed. Roy G. D'Andrade
and Claudia Strauss. (Cambridge England: Cambridge University Press,
1992), 3. All three disciplines are dealing with ways in which experience
shapes conceptual frameworks which, in turn, govern the interpretation of
further experience.

[12] Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical
Religion and the Problem of Race in America.* (Oxford University Press, USA,
2001), 8.

[13] Emerson and Smith define a "racialized society" as "a society wherein race
matters profoundly for differences in life experiences, life opportunities, and
social relationships." Emerson and Smith, 7.

[14] Guess, Teresa J. "The social construction of whiteness: Racism by intent,
racism by consequence." *Critical Sociology* 32, no. 4 (2006): 656.

[15] Beverly Daniel Tatum, *Why are all the Black Kids Sitting Together in the
Cafeteria?: And Other Conversations About Race,* (New York: Basic Books, 2017),
134.

significance and social meaning of belonging to a particular racial group."[16] Tatum observes, "There is a lot of silence about race in White communities, and as a consequence Whites tend to think of racial identity as something that other people have, not something that is salient for them."[17] She further notes, "For White people living in largely White environments, it is possible to live one's entire life without giving focused attention to what it means to be White. Ethnic identity (being of Irish, Italian, Polish ancestry, for example) may be celebrated as part of a family's culture traditions, but being White may go unexplored because it just seems 'normal.'"[18]

Both Joe and Lily are able to identify their ethnic origins but neither is able to articulate what being White means for them personally. Further, both resist being identified as "White." They prefer to be viewed as an individual rather than a member of a racial group. When asked to reflect on how race impacts vocational formation, instead of talking about the meaning of being White, they "otherize" the subject by focusing on people of color. Neither has fully grasped that, regardless of their self-identity, they move through the world identified as "White" and are treated accordingly.[19]

Richard Dyer observes, "As long as race is something only applied to non-white peoples, as long as white people are not racially seen and named, they/we function as a human norm. Other people are raced, we are just people."[20] Dyer further notes, "There is no more

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[16] Tatum, 96.

[17] Tatum, 186. In this paper, the focus is the impact of that silence on White people. Meanwhile, White silence has profound impact on the experience of people of color. This is part of the unrealized and unintended impact for the broader community of ignoring White identity development. The impact of Whiteness on people of color and the impact of faculty Whiteness of their students of color is a subject needing attention; it is, nevertheless, beyond the scope of the present paper.

[18] Tatum, 189.

[19] Tatum, 198.

[20] Richard Dyer "The Need to Understand Whiteness" in *Race, Ethnicity, and Gender: Selected Readings,* eds. Joseph F. Healey and Eileen O'Brien (Newbury

powerful position than that of being 'just' human. The claim to power is the claim to speak for the commonality of humanity. Raced people can't do that—they only speak for their own race."[21]

Neither Joe nor Lily feels powerful when it comes to issues of race. And neither feels comfortable with the idea that they daily experience the benefits of being White. However, by naming their own experience "normal" human experiences, they end up unable to see the experience of people of other races as being fully human as well.[22] This hinders their capacity to truly hear the other and to accurately see the impact they have on their social environment even when—and this is a crucial point—Lily has experienced ministry partnerships with students of Asian descent and Joe wants, specifically, to be a racial ally. Their lack of attention to Whiteness hinders their intention in ministry.

Whiteness and a Theology of Vocational Formation

How then does this unexamined White identity and the values and assumptions inherent in Whiteness impact understanding of vocational formation? In the class, I define "vocation" as participation in God's work in the world and "vocational formation" as the process of developing and sustaining that participation. Based on my

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Park, Calif.: Pine Forge Press, 2007), 407. Michael Morris explains the concept of "white normativity" in this way, "white people are people, and the members of other racial groups are people to the extent they resemble white people….White normativity functions to make whites 'standard' or 'typical' but not always explicitly superior." Michael Morris, "Standard White: Dismantling White Normativity." *California Law Review* 104(4)(2016): 952.

[21] Dyer, 407.

[22] Dyer continues in his discussion, writing, "As long as whiteness is felt to be the human condition, then it alone defines normality….[The] equation of being white with being human secures a position of power. White people have power and believe that they think, feel, and act like and for all people; white people, unable to see their particularity, cannot take account of other people's [particularity]. White power…reproduces itself…overwhelmingly because it is not seen as whiteness but as normal." Dyer, 407-408.

research into vocation, my observations from working with seminary students, as well as my reflections on literature around White identity formation, several elements regarding the impact of Whiteness on vocational formation stand out: the impact of USAmerican individualism, an emphasis on vocation as task or role, a focus on the individual's gifts and passions, (cis)gendered expectations, and the emphasis on success as evaluative criteria.

Individualism

One well-researched trait of USAmerican society is the emphasis on the individual.[23] In the research begun by Dutch social psychologist Geert Hofstede, the United States ranks the highest in the world on the individualism side of the individualism/collectivism scale.[24] According to Geert Hofstede and Gert Jan Hofstede's work, healthy members of an individualistic society are expected to stand on their own feet, and take care of themselves and their immediate family. Children in individualistic families grow up to think about themselves as "I" rather than as a member of a "we." The assumption is that individuals chart the course of their own life and are responsible for the success or failure in their lives. When people in an individualistic context think about a job, they place high priority on personal freedom and challenging, personally fulfilling work. In an individualistic context, the cultural value is to view people primarily on the basis of who they are as individuals and not based on any group affiliation.[25]

USAmerican students generally engage the question of vocational formation from this individualistic perspective. Students ask questions with first person

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[23] See, for example Robert Bellah's seminal work. Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American life.* (University of California Press, 2007).

[24] Geert Hofstede and Gert Jan Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*, 2nd Edition (New York: McGraw Hill, 2005), 78.

[25] Hofstede and Hofstede, 98.

pronouns: What am *I* to do with *my* life? What is *my* ministry? What role has God called *me* to engage? Even in theological environments that include group discernment as an important part of the process—call discernment committees and the like—the vocation being discerned is still that of the individual.[26] The group can contribute to the process by means of counsel and prayer, but, ultimately, it is up to individuals to know and live out their vocation.

Lily and Joe demonstrate individualistic assumptions. Joe is exploring the possibility of ordination and expects the course will help him discern the direction of his life. Lily wants training that will help her develop personal skills for ministry. Both are attending seminary, pursuing their individual development.

But individualism goes deeper than the assumption that vocation is about an individual's personal development. Individualism impacts how racial identity is seen to affect vocational formation or, to be more accurate, how difficult it is for White students to see how race affects vocational formation. White students often resist being viewed as a member of a group, wanting instead to be seen as individuals. Individualism "allows whites to distance themselves from their racial group and demand to be granted the benefit of the doubt, as individuals, in all cases."[27]

Yet "thinking of oneself only as an individual" is itself "a legacy of White privilege."[28] The concept of "White

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[26] For example, see Tod Bolsinger, "Formed, Not Found" *Fuller Magazine* 1, 46-49. Bolsinger states, "The formation of vocation is from start to finish a *communal* event that is both contextual and incarnational." The biblical examples that follow emphasize community as the context. Bolsinger further writes, "The vocation of God is a gift of grace mediated through the relationship and formation of the people of God. The call comes within and through the community." Thus, the community is the *context* of formation but the vocation is not the community's; the vocation is the *individual's* vocation.

[27] DiAngelo, 59.

[28] Tatum, 196.

privilege"—an invisible package of unearned assets granted based on the perception of a person's racial identity[29]—is particularly troubling to White students. Students might respond with angry defensiveness when they are "accused" of receiving unearned benefits based on race.[30]

Joe and Lily resist the idea of White privilege, although for different reasons. Joe expects his self-identification as a racial ally to be accepted on the basis of his individual good intentions.[31] Meanwhile, Joe is unaware of the ways he tacitly enacts racism in the classroom, including his tendency to interrupt students of color when they are speaking or to "correct" their experiences of race. Lily, on the other hand, says nothing in class discussions but struggles profoundly with the idea of being identified as a member of a group. She believes, as many White Evangelicals do, in "accountable freewill individualism"[32]—the belief that every person is individually responsible for his or her choices and that the life experiences of an individual are the result of those choices. Neither Joe nor Lily see how they move through the world identified as "White."

Emphasis on Task or Role

A common Christian understanding of vocation in the United States is that vocation is about an individual's

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[29] Peggy McIntosh likens the benefits of Whiteness to "an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks" and observes that White people are not taught to recognize the presence of privilege at work in their lives. Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" in *Revisioning Family Therapy: Race, Culture and Gender in Clinical Practice*, (New York, The Guildford Press, 1988), 148.

[30] DiAngelo, 60.

[31] DiAngelo would suggest Joe is here demonstrating "white fragility" in that he resists the feedback that his behavior has racist impact, a challenge that is particularly troubling for political and theological progressives. DiAngelo, 57.

[32] Emerson and Smith, 76-77.

knowledge of his or her God-given role or occupation.[33] The term "vocation" tends to trigger the broader social construct of job or career. Even viewed in theological terms, recognizing that the Latin word *vocare* means "to call," vocation is still thought of in terms of an occupation. Most students react negatively at the idea that a vocation is *only* a job; nevertheless, they expect that a person is called to a particular career.

Furthermore, the greater the social status of a role, the more likely that role is to be viewed as a "calling."[34] In some theological environments, calling is limited to the role of pastor or missionary.[35] In other environments, a broader range of occupations could be considered possible vocations.[36] Helping professions such as doctor, fire fighter or police officer are more likely to be viewed as callings along with "white collar" roles such as accountant or chief executive and roles that require education such as astronomer or psychologist. Roles such as janitor or assembly line worker are less likely to be viewed as valid vocations.

Note the normative White, middle class social values present in the assessment of various roles. Authority, financial status, and education are highly prized. The fact that some people have greater access to finances, education, or social status as a result of their racial or ethnic identity is ignored.[37] The unconscious bias of associating particular roles with vocation and associating

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[33] Susan L. Maros, "Knowing my call: A cultural model of the experience of call in a Pentecostal/charismatic context." (Fuller Theological Seminary, School of Intercultural Studies, 2014), 122.

[34] Maros, 106.

[35] See, for example, Terry L. Cross, *Answering the Call in the Spirit: Pentecostal Reflections on a Theology of Vocation, Work and Life*, (Lee University Press, 2007), 33.

[36] See, for example, Steven Garber, *Visions of Vocation: Common Grace for the Common Good.* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 12 or Mark Labberton, *Called: The Crisis and Promise of Following Jesus Today* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 9-10.

[37] For one discussion of socio-economic disparities, see Emerson and Smith, 11-18.

particular races with those roles impacts the vocational formation of many.

Emphasis on Gifts and Passions

Students tend to see vocational formation as being related to an individual's passions, gifts, and personality. This is a way of looking at vocation through a "self-actualization" frame: focusing on an individual's sense of satisfaction in making a contribution to the community.[38] The fact of the inherent socioeconomic privilege this view necessitates is absent from consideration. The message "you can be anything you set your mind to" is a message given to Whites, a message of privilege and position, a message that all possibilities open. This message shapes the way a White person thinks about vocation. Vocation is expected to be challenging, personally fulfilling, and meaningful for the individual.

Instead of challenging the self-fulfillment-orientated cultural understanding of vocation, White Christians can end up bearing a heavy burden. If they are responsible for identifying their calling individually, and that calling is supposed to be full of joy, failing to identify their calling is assumed to mean life will have little meaning or value. Lily reflects this experience, writing, "The mindset of the rugged individual characteristic of white American values manifested in my understanding of vocation as something I realize and execute entirely on my own. This placed an intense amount of pressure on me in college in that I expected my individual work to give me full meaning and satisfaction in life and be the primary place where I lived out my faith." This vocational burden is created by Whiteness, not required by Scripture.

(Cis)Gendered Expectations

Vocations are gendered. Some roles are consciously and unconsciously associated with men while others are associated with women. For example, in certain

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[38] Maros, 49-50.

conservative Christian circles, a woman articulating her
sense of "calling" to be an at-home wife and mother will
be affirmed but a man articulating sense of "calling" to be
an at-home husband and father would not be affirmed as
valid. Even in more progressive theological contexts
where gender roles are not as clearly defined in traditional
terms, men and women are often still expected to adhere
to cisgendered norms, meaning the norms that are
associated with the gender a person is identified with at
birth.[39]

Lily writes, "Growing up in church, I never thought
that I could be in ministry because I was a woman." It
was the woman who was the staff worker for the
Christian ministry on Lily's college campus who began to
suggest different expectations. "Assumptions that gender
limits leadership capabilities kept my view of vocation
small, but it has expanded and is continuing to expand."

Note, however, that Lily writes as a White woman.
Her conservative, White, middle class social norms
require that she choose between the role of wife and
mother and the role of working in a context outside of
the home. Women of color, particularly Black women in
the United States, have always worked outside the
home.[40] What is framed as a gender norm issue is really a
racially located gender norm.

Joe, too, labors under White gender norms. He knows
his parents expect him to marry, have children, and have
a career that will financially support his family. He was

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[39] Cisgender refers to people who embrace "a gender identity or perform a
gender role society considers appropriate for one's sex." Huge C. Crethar
and Laurie Vargas, "Multicultural intricacies in professional counseling." In
Jocelyn Gregoire and Cristin Jungers (Eds.), *The Counselor's Companion*.
(Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2007), 59.

[40] This is the heart of the difference between feminism and womanism in the
United States. The former has been criticized as being dominantly led by
middle class White women and ignoring the concerns of women of color.
Note also that womanist writers and thinkers generally address community
concerns while feminists focus on the concerns and rights of individual
women.

taught that being a "good Christian man" means providing financially for your family.

Success as Evaluative Criteria

In both conservative and progressive theological circles, a person's "success" in his or her calling is very often assessed based on metrics—the so-called "A, B, Cs" of ministry: attendance, buildings and cash. In this way, vocational formation is evaluated by means of capitalistic and materialistic criteria. Joe reflects this perspective when he writes, "I have often felt a lot of pressure in relation to my vocation. Whatever I end up doing, I feel a pressure that I must be super successful; I can't settle for something small." This approach to vocation that is focused on production flies in the face of biblical statements such as the value of laying one's life down (John 15:13), or being the servant of all (Matthew 33:11), or being known by the love demonstrated in the community (John 13:35), to name a few.

In addition, this evaluation by metrics reflects a key cultural assumption in the United States: the belief that anyone can be and do anything they set their mind to as long as they work hard enough. One study found that a "dearly held assumption for a large majority of white evangelicals is that all Americans have equal opportunity."[41] Thus, if a person fails to achieve "success" in his or her vocation, as measured by material metrics, the fault lies with the individual.[42] This ignores the ways in which structural racism plays a role in a person achieving financial and social status. Personal achievement and self-sufficiency are central to a White sensibility. To acknowledge that access to resources is

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[41] Emerson and Smith, 98.

[42] See Emerson and Smith, 98-106, for an articulation of White evangelical perspectives contrasted with Black evangelical perspectives on the source of socio-economic inequalities in the United States.

unequal between racial groups is to challenge the central cultural myth of meritocracy.[43]

Concrete Steps

Given these dynamics are present in a seminary classroom, what then are some resources or strategies for assisting White students in thinking about the impact of Whiteness on their expectations of and experience with vocational formation? I offer the following to my colleagues as some suggestions for engagement. These recommendations presume an educator working in a classroom although I hope they might be helpful for colleagues who are engaged in non-formal and informal learning experiences as well.

Begin with Listening

Leadership begins with listening. Particularly for those of us who are White and thus embedded in a context where our racial affiliation is the norm, listening to the voices of others who have a different experience is profoundly important. Before we even think about taking action, we need to do a great deal of listening.

Listen to colleagues and students of color whenever and however they tell their stories. Listen to podcasts of people of color and read blogs of people of color. Read novels by people of color. Watch movies by and about people of color. Become educated on the history of slavery and segregation in the United States.[44] Notice your feelings and reactions. Explore the roots of those feelings. Be alert to externalizing the discomfort by blaming the "other." Facing our own mental models regarding our racial identity and telling our own stories is part of the

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[43] DiAngelo, 57.

[44] For example, Milton C. Sernett, ed., *African American Religious History: A Documentary Witness.* (Duke University Press, 1999.), Lerone Bennett, *Before the Mayflower: A History of Black America.* (Johnson Publishing Company Incorporated, 2003), and Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness.* (The New Press, 2012.)

process of decentralizing Whiteness and making space for others to tell their stories.

Explore White Identity

Based on the principle that we cannot give what we do not have, an essential point of development for the educator is to explore his or her own racial identity. Complete Branson and Martinez's Ethnic Autobiography. Take several of the "Implicit Associations Tests".[45] Discuss the results with a trusted colleague or friend. Read books such as *Divided by Faith* and *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* Read these books together with a friend, family member, or colleague who is willing to explore White identity with you. Seek out workshops and seminars on White identity. Consider how your own sense of vocation was shaped by the values and assumptions of Whiteness.

Develop Resilience

Psychological discomfort with conversations about race is part of the hidden cost of racism for Whites.[46] Many Whites have so little resilience that any conversation about race provokes anger, withdrawal, and emotional incapacitation.[47] Come to grips with the fact that having conversations about the experience of race and ethnicity is going to bring passionate emotions to the surface. Get comfortable with being uncomfortable. Keep a journal. Practice good emotional hygiene. Read the stories of Whites who have engaged in issues of race.[48] Sit

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[45] The Implicit Associations Test (IAT) is a social psychology tool designed to measure the strength of a person's automatic association between objects in memory. The tests explore a number of constructs including race, age, and gender. To explore the IAT, visit https://implicit.harvard.edu/.

[46] Tatum, 187.

[47] DiAngelo refers to this emotional incapacity for dealing with race-based stress as "white fragility." See DiAngelo, 54-56.

[48] For the story of an Evangelical White pastor developing awareness as a result of his interest in multi-ethnic ministry see Daniel Hill, *White Awake: An Honest Look at What It Means to Be White.* (Downers Grove, Ill.:

in the classrooms of colleagues who address issues of race. Take advantage of anti-racism training opportunities in your institution or your local area. Attend meetings lead by people of color talking about issues of race and justice.

Facilitate Conversations in Your Classroom

If conversations about race cannot be fostered in a seminary, how do we expect our students to engage in these conversations in their churches and ministry and work contexts? Few of us have much experience in facilitating these conversations. The standard cultural model of educators is that we are dispassionate experts. If we hold onto the expert identity and avoid conversations where we are not expert, we will end up tacitly supporting systemic racism in our classrooms. We cannot get the experience of facilitating conversations any other way than facilitating conversations.

Commit to facilitating conversations, and be willing to do a poor job initially as a part of learning. Model humility and transparency by naming your own discomfort. Consider integrating exercises like Branson and Martinez's ethnic autobiography as a starting point for discussion. Explore case studies related to your topic that include race as a dynamic. Consider biographies as a rich resource for stories that express a wide variety of life contexts.

Examine Institutional Whiteness

Leaders in educational institutions need to explore the Whiteness of academia. Seeing academic disciplines as "neutral" is a way of undergirding Whiteness by failing to address how White normativity dominates those disciplines. Seeking to always have "dispassionate" academic discussion is a functional way of supporting

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InterVarsity Press, 2017). For a sometimes painfully honest story of developing self-awareness, see Debby Irving, *Waking Up White and Finding Myself in the Story of Race* (Cambridge, Mass.: Elephant Room Press, 2014).

Whiteness by shutting down voices that speak with passion and pain. Listen to colleagues of color without critique when they express their experiences in the institution. Read books like *Teaching for a Culturally Diverse and Racially Just World*.[49] Find like-minded colleagues to process with. Avoid the White privilege behavior of asking a colleague of color to be your "educator." Colleagues of color carry enough weight simply surviving in a White institution; they are not responsible for carrying you, too. Find White people to process Whiteness with you in your institution.

Commit to Engaging Scholars of Color

White normativity in academia is a self-replicating system. We read White authors, use those same White authors in our classrooms, and then our students use those White authors in their own work. Make a commitment to read authors of color in your field. If it is hard to identify authors of color in your field, commit to keep in mind that this difficulty is an expression of systemic racism, not the absence of good scholars of color. Ask colleagues for suggestions. Scan syllabi in your institution and at other institutions for ideas. Prioritize listening to presentations by people of color at conferences you attend and pay attention to the scholars they cite. Read journals that specifically address your discipline from a non-White perspective.

Commit to include authors of color on your reading lists for every class. Start with one text and grow from there every time you teach the class. Brainstorm on ways to include race and ethnicity as a thread in your subject. Avoid treating the issue as a "topic;" this tends to reinforce race as an optional subject and reinforces the centrality of Whiteness. Commit to reading one book or article on issues of race and ethnicity before each class you teach that incorporates this subject.

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[49] Eleazar S. Fernandez, ed., *Teaching for a Culturally Diverse and Racially Just World.* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014).

Conclusion

      For Joe and Lily, and for all the students they represent, a faithful step forward toward a more just world is to grow in awareness of their racial identity and how their Whiteness is expressed in everyday interactions with the people around them. While students are seeking vocational formation that focuses on a God-given role or occupation, engaging them in considering the impact of their racialized experience will help them grow and help them become women and men who engage with God's work in a racialized world.

Appendix: Branson & Martinez's
"Ethnic Autobiography" Questions

1. What do you know concerning the ethnicity and national origins of your parents, grandparents and earlier generations? If this is different from the heritage of the household in which you were raised, describe those differences.

2. When were you first aware of ethnic (or racial) categories? When were you first aware of persons who were different?

3. How did your parents and grandparents voice ethnic matters or convey to you what they perceived or what they thought was important? How did other members of the household contribute to your understandings about your own ethnic heritage?

4. This about phases of your life—childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, middle and perhaps later adulthood. How did your ethnic identity affect you? How has your awareness changed? What difference did it make in relationships, where you lived, what activities you participated in, how you experienced school, and how you experienced your society (city, nation)?

5. In what sense was who you in your race/ethnicity considered "normative" or in what sense was that aspect of your identity "marginalized" or "suppressed"? What do you remember about experiences of being treated unfairly because of cultural identity? Or of treating others unfairly?

6. How have you experienced significant boundary crossing (either in travel, through relationships or in some organization)? What did you learn about others and yourself?

7. What is the relationship between your ethnic identity and your faith? What difference did or does it make in church? In your beliefs or theology?

8. In what ways do the stories, values and practices of your ethnic heritage parallel the gospel or facilitate and nurture being a Christian? What elements of your ethnic heritage make being a Christian difficult?

9. What do you value most in your ethnic and/or racial heritage? What do you value least?