Chapter 3
Background Experiences, Developmental Perspectives

ABSTRACT

Over the course of our lifetimes, narratives build on one another and gain depth. Erik Erikson's Eight Stages of Psychosocial Development provide a blueprint for helping us understand the world and stories we tell to describe it. A typical college student's life encompasses the first five stages from infancy (basic trust vs. mistrust) to late adolescence (identity vs. confusion). The lives of the interviewees are examined through this psychosocial lens with a focus on the development of their diversity stories, and early interactions and milestones set the stage for their four-year college experience.

INTRODUCTION

When I was about eight years old, we lived in Inglewood, California. At that time, it was predominantly Black. Our neighborhoods were filled with children who looked just like me and we were comfortable. But my parents felt that the area was becoming a little bit too dangerous for us so they decided to move us to an area and that area was Chino, California. It was a nice small quiet town but very much in the process of developing. So we moved there but what was astonishing to me is that I was the only Black child in my school. I went through a lot at that time and I don't really feel that I was accepted by teachers. In my classroom, they seemed to feel a little bit uncomfortable based on my own experience. And growing up in that area we as a family went through situations such as a fire being set on our front lawn. I remember neighbors outside laughing as me and my sisters were home alone trying to figure out what to do. They didn't help us at all. ~Tracy

It is not always easy to identify the specific point in time when stories begin to formulate around the topic of race. For Tracy, the faculty member whose video narrative opens this chapter, the concept likely started brewing before she had language to attach to it. She grew up in Inglewood surrounded by children who looked like her. Her values were shaped with the help of her parents, church, and friends. Schemas about race were literally Black and White: "I am a Black person and the people around me are mostly the same. Black and White people are different. They live in the same city but not in the same houses." And developmentally, she may have successfully managed the highs and lows of childhood with relative ease. Yet all of this changed when Tracy moved from Inglewood to Chino, California where there were few persons of color besides those in her family. With this move, her narrative about race shifted drastically. But how did it shape her from a developmental standpoint? And how would her struggles impact the future stages of her life?

Throughout the life span, human beings follow natural pathways from infancy to early childhood, pre-adolescence to adolescence, and so on. Erik Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development (1980) provides a framework for measuring social and emotional growth from one stage to the next. At the end of each, "there may be a central 'crisis' or task that prompts resolution

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