PERCEPTIONS OF ACTING WHITE IN KENT

A thesis submitted to the
Kent State University Honors College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for Departmental Honors

by

Brittney M. Williams

May, 2012
Thesis written by

Brittney M. Williams

Approved by

____________________________________________, Advisor

____________________________________________, Chair, Department of Psychology

Accepted by

_____________________________________________________, Dean, Honors College
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES……………………………………………………………….10

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS………………………………………………………..vi

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION………………………………………………………..1

   Psychological Context…………………………………………………3

   Psychological Impact & College Students……………………………5

II. METHOD……………………………………………………………….8

   Participants……………………………………………………………8

   Procedures……………………………………………………………8

   Data Analysis…………………………………………………………9

III. RESULTS……………………………………………………………11

IV. DISCUSSION……………………………………………………….12

REFERENCES…………………………………………………………16
APPENDIX

1. APPENDIX A.................................................................29

2. APPENDIX B.................................................................30
LIST IF TABLES

Table 1. Major emergent themes concerning accusers perceptions of acting white

Table 2. Major emergent themes concerning accusers perceptions of acting black

Table 3. Major emergent themes concerning accusers perceptions of blacks that act white
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the Honors College and my defense committee for their time and dedication towards this honors thesis. I would like to give a special thank you to Dr. Angela Neal-Barnett who has helped me not only in the preparation of this thesis, but has been a guiding factor in my interest of research. I am grateful for having the opportunity to learn from her.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

“Acting White” is one of the most controversial issues in African American adolescence research (Neal-Barnett, 2001). Previous research on the accusation of “acting white” has documented the “acting white” trend as a phenomenon among adolescent African American students in which academically accomplished black students are accused of being traitors to their race, or “acting white” because of their good grades and study habits (Buck, 2010). Research indicates this may have an impact on students’ social and academic interactions. Signithia Fordham and John Ogbu were the first to examine this “acting white” accusation in their study “Black Students’ School Success: Coping With the “Burden of ‘Acting White’”. Using ethnographic data from a high school in Washington D.C they found that the fear of being accused of “acting white” causes a social and psychological situation that diminishes black students’ efforts and leads to academic underachievement.

Many studies have talked about the social dilemmas that may come with the accusation of “acting white” (Cook & Ludwig, 1997; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Fryer, 2005; Neal-Barnett, 2001). In addition to academic achievement, popularity has been an investigated variable in the “acting white” accusation. By using a data set from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health Fryer’s findings suggest student popularity, and academic achievement showed a significant relationship. The author found racial differences in these models, and began to narrow it down to the issue of
“acting white”. Fryer claims “I can also be precise about what I mean by acting white: a set of social interactions in which minority adolescents who get good grades in school enjoy less social popularity than white students who do well academically.” By observing student popularity, and academic achievement Fryer suggests this term “intensified” among high academic achievers and schools where there was more interracial contact. Among white students, those with higher grades correlated more popularity, however with black students higher achievement correlated with popularity until about a 3.5 grade point average. In contrast, researchers Cook & Ludwig (1997) found dissimilar results on reviewing the ethnographic results from studies that suggest African American students view academic success as a form of “acting white” and that the peer pressure reduces their level of effort and performance. Cook & Ludwig applied 

*The National Education Longitudinal Study* (1988), which surveyed a group of students, again in 1990, and 1992. The researchers wanted to investigate several domains, one being whether blacks incur social penalties from their peers for succeeding academically. Moreover they found that black high school students are not particularly alienated in school, and in fact the 10th graders that they studied who excelled academically were no more likely to be less popular than other students (Cook & Ludwig, 1997). While the previous studies discuss the “acting white” accusation through academic achievement and popularity, the following literature examines the “acting white” accusation in a psychological context.
Psychological Context

Bergin and Cooks (2002) displayed unique findings in their qualitative study investigating 38 high achieving African American and Mexican-American high school students. These students came from various public and private schools. Their investigation (Bergin & Cooks, 2002) discovered students did not lessen their efforts to attain academic achievement, or loss of racial identity. The students however, reported that they felt resentment toward their peers who accused them of “acting white”, and that the accusation did bother them. These results indicate a psychological component that is expressed when accused of “acting white”. When adolescents experience the “acting white” accusation it can affect their emotional and psychological well-being. By experiencing this accusation literature suggests that it triggers a search for their racial identity, and may enter the “acting white trap” (Neal-Barnett, Stadulis, & Rowser, unpublished). The “acting white trap” is a time when expressions of being Black are expressed and may not reflect the emerging adults true beliefs, however Neal-Barnett (2001) recommends this is important in one’s racial identity development.

Accordingly, students Neal-Barnett has studied often believed that “acting white” meant a wide variety of activities related to “speech, dress, academic performance, and home training”(Neal-Barnett, 2001). In her study College student’s definition of acting White and acting Black, Neal-Barnett and her research team, examined college students’ definitions of the terms acting black and acting white in a liberal education requirement course. Content analysis yielded different categories representing acting white, and several categories emerged for acting black (Neal-Barnett, Stadulis, & Rowser,
unpublished). The findings of Neal-Barnett and colleagues indicate, the “acting white” accusation encompasses a myriad of research issues such as peer group relations, psychological well-being, socio-economic status, self-esteem, and the achievement gap. These lead additional factors for Neal-Barnett and colleagues to take a psychological approach and create the Acting White Experience Questionnaire, which measures individuals direct and indirect experience with the accusation. Examples of the psychological impact can be found in individual’s responses to their experience of being accused of “acting white”.

Based on their research Neal-Barnett et al. offer a definition of “acting white” that differs from Fordham & Ogbu, and of Fryer. Their continuum definition embeds “acting white” in racial identity. The researchers believe that in this country there exists a continuum of what it means to be black. On one end is what adolescents and emerging adults call hardcore or “ghetto” black and on the other end is the idea that being black is no different than being purple or green. The accusation of “acting white” occurs when a person at one point of the continuum perceives a person at another point of the continuum as not being black enough.

This definition was used in a recent study examining the psychological context of the accusation of “acting white”. Researchers discovered higher levels of anxiety among African American teens that were accused of “acting white” (Murray, Neal-Barnett, Demmings, Stadulis, 2012). Murray et al. sampled 100 low-income African American adolescences that completed questionnaires measuring the Acting White Experience, and anxiety. The Acting White Experience Questionnaire (AWEQ) was also distributed to
measure direct and indirect experiences with the accusation of “acting white”. The results suggested that being accused of “acting white” was common among African American adolescents, and adolescents who experienced the accusation of “acting white” directly and indirectly showed higher levels of anxiety compared to individuals who experienced it indirectly. Furthermore the researchers found anxiety as a significant predictor of the number of accusations experienced by adolescents and perceived by the majority of individuals as a distressing experience (Murray, et al., 2012). Building upon the previous studies we begin to look at psychological factors that play a role in the “acting white” accusation, and apply experiences expressed by adolescents to show a relationship of the accusation of “acting white” among college students.

**Psychological Impact & College Students**

Published research has focused primarily on adolescents, little is known about the accusation on emerging adults. Collegiate newspaper accounts indicate that students at both predominantly white, and historically black colleges face the accusation. A personal example comes from the Columbian Missourian examining a student accused of “acting white” (Chan, 2008). The article comes from the Columbia Missourian and identifies a second year graduate students’ experience with being accused of “acting white” at Missouri University. Brandon Stewart who was studying international business at the time of publication states he received a lot of criticism mostly within the black community for “acting white”. He continues with his experience during high school how his classmates would say, “You’re the whitest black boy that I ever met,” and labeled him
an “Oreo” – meaning black on the outside and white on the inside. Stewart describes his experience with the accusation during his undergraduate years:

Stewart was criticized for not wearing the newest clothes and for being too verbal and outspoken. He played volleyball, not basketball or football. He showed his intelligence in the way he spoke and carried himself when he should have been quiet and low-key with a thug-like mentality and athletic ability, he said. Stewart also said he was picked on because he didn’t fit the stereotype of an intimidating black man who was ready to fight somebody. “People would mess with me, thinking I was weak or something,” he said. Stewart was also criticized for taking a lot of advanced placement classes. He was asked a lot of questions that seemed focused not on understanding him, but on figuring him out, “like I’m a math problem to be solved, not a person to get to know,” he said. He said he feels more empowered as a graduate student and the experience has solidified his sense of self. While there is pressure at the undergraduate level to fit into a box, he said, he now feels like he exists above the rat race.

Unfortunately, “acting white” is a problem that most likely won’t easily go away. (Chan, 2008.)

Similar to the case study where an individual is accused of “acting white” on a predominately white college campus, examples exist of students being accused on a historically black college campus. A 2009 article in Morehouse College newspaper *The Maroon Tiger* addressed the acting white issue head on. College students on Morehouse and the adjacent Spelman College campus have been accused of “acting white”. Many of these students were from affluent backgrounds and graduated from private schools. The
students were stunned that they experienced the “acting white” accusation coming from a historically black college.

While these case studies and the previous literature review illustrates the impact of receiving the accusation, little is known about the individuals who make the accusation, in other words those who are the accusers. The research presented in the preceding paragraphs indicates that the accusation of “acting white” exist for college students. However, little research has been conducted with this population. The first years of college are a time of transition for the emerging adult (Parham & Barron, 1998). Research supports college being a time of growth and maturity in students and becoming more knowledgeable, aware of self-concepts, and discovering identity, (Willie, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

The current study hopes to examine the accusation in a college setting. Specifically, we examine why students make the “acting white” accusation on the Kent State University campus. A qualitative approach was used to examine the reasons for making the accusation as well as gaining further insight into what it means to act white and to act black at Kent State University.
CHAPTER 2

METHOD

Participants

The study recruited nineteen African American undergraduates from the Kent State University Campus. The Kent State University Institutional Review Board approved the study and informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Procedures

Using the Kent State University Psychology Department subject pool (SONA 1) nineteen students were scheduled to participate in phase 1 of the study. Nine students failed to show for their screening appointment. Students were screened with a questionnaire that assessed their definitions of acting white, acting black, and whether or not they had faced the accusation, or made the accusation. All screening participants were freshmen, and female.

Student’s who indicated who had made the accusation were invited to participate in phase 2 of the study a face-to-face interview. Three students met criteria to participate in phase 2 of the study. Upon the completion of the face-to-face interviews participants received a $25.00 iTunes gift card, and research points via Kent State University Psychology subject pool (SONA 1). Copies of the screening interview can be found in Appendix A. A copy of the face-to-face interview can be found in Appendix B. In the screening, individuals were asked their definition of acting white, acting black and their experience with the accusation. The interview was developed and piloted by the PI in 2010. In addition to examining the presence of the accusation, the interview was used to
discover why the accusers make the “acting white” accusation. The questions came from a pilot study conducted earlier in the research on an accuser at Kent State University (Williams, 2010). The interview consisted of questions that ask have you ever been accused of acting white? What is acting white? What is acting black? Finally, how do you feel about blacks who act white?

**Data Analysis**

Interviews were transcribed, and all identifying information was removed. Content analyses were used to interpret student’s response. A coding team consisting of three undergraduates read face-to-face interview transcripts. Undergraduates identified major and minor themes in student responses. Once themes were identified a consensus meeting was held to solidify themes.
### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major emergent themes concerning accusers perceptions of acting white</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accusers believe those who “act white” are being stuck up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting better than others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting white is acting like an individual “knows it all”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting proper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting uptight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not a good thing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trying to sound more educated than others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being fake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepting a white identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trying to impress others by acting a certain way</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major emergent themes concerning accusers perceptions of black</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accusers believe acting black is not forgetting where you came from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To know where you came from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know “your roots”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being yourself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not trying to change because of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using more slang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work harder to get where you’re going</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respecting and understanding what those in the past have done</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major emergent themes concerning accusers perceptions of black that act white</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accusers believe blacks that act white are trying to impress others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being fake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting like something you are not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting “higher”, may say things they think an individual might not understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May be because how one was raised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel nothing against them</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

Major and minor themes were identified after consulting the face-to-face interview transcripts. A consensus meeting was held to solidify themes. Several major and minor themes emerged from the individual’s responses. For the question “What is ‘acting white’” major themes that emerged including participants saying “acting white” is acting proper, or being stuck up and up tight, and the minor theme that emerged of acting better than someone, or acting like one knows it all.

Another major theme that the research team discovered was individuals being hesitant in their responses. Individuals would give frequent pauses, and almost unsure of their response. The next question, which asked our sample “What does it mean to be black?” show major themes such as not forgetting where you come from, respecting and understanding what those in the past have done and being yourself. Minor themes that surfaced were use of “own language” and again participants were not being able to verbally explain their answers.

The final question participants were asked was “How do you feel about blacks that act white?” Responses suggest major themes included these individuals are not being themselves, they are fake, and that they may behave in a certain manner because of how they were raised. Minor themes included these individuals act “better” than others, act smarter, and try to impress other individuals.
CHAPTER 4
DISCUSSION

The preliminary literature suggests the accusation of “acting white” is a controversial issue in African American adolescent research. The accusation was first examined in academic achievement in African American adolescents and later developed into examining the emotional and psychological well-being of those accused. Previous literature suggests there is a psychological component that comes with the accusation of “acting white”. Researchers have found individuals who are accused experience resentment toward the accusers (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Bergin & Cooks, 2002). In addition there is evidence that supports higher levels of anxiety in those who are accused of “acting white”, and how the accusation can trigger a search for ones racial identity.

While the research is replete with findings and case studies on individuals who have been accused of “acting white”, little research has been done on the accusers. Given the increased research on the topic the current study aimed to address the perception of individuals who make the accusation on a college campus. Nineteen students were recruited from the Psychology Department (SONA 1), eleven participated in phase one and three individuals were invited to participate in phase two. Themes that were indentified for the first question illustrate perceptions of “acting white” as being preppy, stuck up, and acting proper. This was not surprising as previous research has supported similar findings (Neal-Barnett, et. al, 2010). The interviews suggested that individuals who meet these criteria may be seen as flaunting their education, or perceived as behaving better than African Americans who do not choose to communicate this way.
The above view is supported by themes that emerged from the question what does it mean to be black. A major concept focused on not forgetting where you come from. Accusers associated “acting white” as the opposite of acting black, therefore in the perception of the accuser “forgetting where one comes from” suggests a person accused has taken on a white identity, or pretending to be someone or something else. This creates a racial identity dilemma for the accuser, who may believe it is important “to call out” the individual they see as acting white. This transitions into the next theme that surfaced from the final question how do you feel about blacks that act white.

Individuals expressed discomfort when answering this question on blacks that act white. The major themes that emerged were “being fake” or acting like they are better than others, and the minor theme was that they try to impress someone. Once a consensus meeting was held to solidify themes, we learned a little more about the accuser. This evidence suggests accusers may feel inferior toward the accused and may feel they need to make the accusation to compensate for their true beliefs. However as seen by themes represented in the final question “how do you feel bout blacks that act white?” reluctance exists to go beyond simply stating the accusation. In fact, all participants expressed discomfort before answering the final question.

This discomfort should be further investigated. The term “acting white” was not new to participants. All participants were aware of it prior to the study; each had made the accusation before, however have not been asked their rationale behind the accusation. The frequent pauses and guardedness suggest something else is there. Our next task is to determine psychologically what that represents.
Our research team of coders suggested what they found interesting in reading the interview transcripts was the accusers may have an underlying issue with those accused of “acting white”. The accusers would say something, then follow up their response in a different way in order not be shown in a negative light. In addition the accusers may also not be aware of the harm, or psychological distress that the accusation can have on an individual.

Previous research suggests there is a psychological component that comes with being accused. We learned there might also be a psychological impact that emerges within the accusers. From the interviews we learned the accuser may feel lesser to the ones accused and this was noted in their responses of feeling like blacks that act white act like they are better, or smarter than they are.

The findings also suggest the accusers feel entitled to address when someone is “acting white” or in other words different from how they (the accusers) would normally behave. While we know that those accused of the accusation face some psychological distress the current study themes may suggest those who are the accusers may also face some psychological distress, or discomfort when asked about their rationale on the accusation of acting white.

Some limitations emerged from the current study in conducting face-to-face interviews and several difficulties arose. Participants showed difficulty in responding, and did not want to be shown in a negative light, therefore would hedge around the question. This could have been due to the questions asked, as they are sensitive in nature. Participants had a difficult time answering questions and wanted to “clean up” their
responses. Toward the end of each interview, one participant wanted to add in saying we should not really say people are acting white or act a certain way; in fact it is probably because of how they were raised, or how they were brought up.

Our study was limited in size in the number of participates who participated. A larger sample size would also support the frequency of the accusation of “acting white” on the Kent campus. Lastly, the interviewer was an African American college student and may have created a casual environment for the accuser; this limitation may have had an influence in how the individual responded to questioning.

Despite the limitations, our findings have implications for future research in understanding the accusation of “acting white” and perceptions of those who make the accusation. It appears that discomfort to the accuser may be as important as bother is to individuals who are accused. Further directions should include recruit individuals who make the accusation and examine the psychological impact in making the accusation and investigate whether there are additional factors that go into making the accusation.
REFERENCES


Neal-Barnett, A. M., Stadulis, R., Rowser, L. (unpublished) If acting White is…then what is acting Black? : College students’ definitions of acting White and acting Black. Kent, Ohio Kent State University


Interview I

I: Okay, now first I actually want to ask you what made you decide to sign up for this study?

P: Because it sounded interesting, because it was like for all African Americans and stuff like that.

I: And what did you think it would be about?

P: Probably just about like being an African American in society, and some of the struggles with it, or like um probably the differences between whites and blacks, and how we’re perceived and stuff like that.

I: Okay so I’m going to ask you a couple questions and whatever comes to mind feel free, you know whatever you want to say I’m just going to write it down.

P: Okay

I: Um, what is acting white?

P: Acting white to me is like, just I don’t know like being stuck up, acting like you know it all, and um I don’t know kind of like acting better than others.

I: Okay

P: Not a good thing {laugh}

I: Okay, um and the next question, what does it mean to be black?

P: Um {pause} to be black, that’s a hard one. Probably like uh, to know where you came from and to know your roots, and to respect it.

I: Okay, and what do you mean by respect it? How would you respect it?

P: Like for like all the historians, that like paved the way for us and stuff like that, for like Black History Month come around or like, to like don’t use the n-word, and stuff like that you know respect it because they did so much for us not to be slaves anymore.

I: Okay, um how do you feel about blacks that act white?

P: Um {pause} I feel, I don’t know that their being fake, then again I feel like I can’t say that because maybe it’s like where they were brought up. But I mean I’m cool with them still.
I: Okay can you give me a specific example of how blacks accused of acting white behave toward other blacks? Have you had a personal experience, or witness them acting a certain way toward other blacks?

P: Um yeah, just kind of acting like they were better or more educated and stuff like that.

I: Can you explain how they acted they were better or?

P: Like I don’t know just the way they would talk to you, and like I don’t know just the things they would say when they talk to you and you try to be down to earth with them they act like they have their nose up in the air.

I: Okay, those are all the questions that I have do you have anything else you want to add to it? You can add whatever you want.

P: Hmm I don’t know {laugh} probably need another question. {laugh}

I: Um, how about like on Kent Campus, have you experienced or have seen any black students who act white or have been accused of acting white?

P: Yeah a lot of students.

I: A lot, okay. Like do you have classes with them or do you see them in passing, or do you know them personally?

P: Well, all of that.

I: Okay, and you said it’s a lot on Kent Campus?

P: Hmm mm

I: Okay that’s good; I think those are all the questions I have if you don’t have anything.

P: I don’t. But maybe the last thing I want to add is probably like um, we really shouldn’t like be saying acting white or acting black it’s kind of like unfair. Because it’s like stereotyping and stuff like that and I don’t know.

I: And when you came to Kent this wasn’t the first time you’ve heard of it? You’ve heard of it before like in high school?

P: Hmm mm, I feel like I’ve heard it all my life. It’s always like a big topic.
I: And have you been accused, or accused someone of acting white? What is your experience with it?

P: Well I have actually been accused when I was in high school because like I came from a majority black high school and it was kind of like the hood area where the high school was, and because I didn’t walk around loud and ghetto and rude, like they was like you act white. Or stuff like that because I was a more respectable person.

I: Right, okay lets see what else. So you would be accused because people said you weren’t loud?

P: Hmm mm like loud, and rude, or disrespectful, and I just carried myself like a lady basically.

I: Okay and what year are you actually?

P: I’m a freshman
Interview 2

I: Okay so first I wanted to actually ask you why you signed up for this study?

P: Umm I did it because it was like, it was something different from all the other studies that I did and it asked me questions like I really thought about with the talking black and all that.

I: Yeah

P: I really thought about it, and was like why not try this and see.

I: So what did you think it would be about? I know on the website it shows a little description but was there anything you were expecting or?

P: No, I thought it was gonna’ be about how it was. About the question and how you feel about it, and that was it.

I: Okay, I’m just going to ask a couple questions so to you what is acting white?

P: It’s not; I don’t think there’s such thing as acting white. So like I really don’t believe in if someone says you act white or anything, but if I would have to say acting white was I’d probably just say acting proper, or uptight kinda’.

I: Okay lets see, in your opinion what does it mean to be black?

P: Can you say that again please?

I: What does it mean to be black?

P: What does it mean to be black {pause} I really don’t know, I don’t think it means anything {laugh}.

I: Like does it, just anything how you feel. I know it’s like a hard question.

P: You mean like how do I feel about being black?

I: Or just what does it mean to you to be black? Or what does it mean to be a black person or comes with being black?

P: I guess just being yourself. Just always being yourself, never taking anything for granted, and don’t try to change your ways because of other people.
I: You were going to say don’t change your ways?

P: Hmm mm

I: And what do you mean just like who you are?

P: Hmm mm

I: All right, how do you feel about blacks that act white?

P: I feel like it’s wrong because you’re basically acting like something that you’re not, and you should just be yourself at all times. Don’t try to act like them because you’re trying to impress them. If you just act like you always do, you should never have to try to impress somebody they should always accept you for who you are.

I: So have you witnessed a black person act one way when they are around certain people and then when they get around a white person they act differently?

P: No. I’ve witness people change when they get around different people. But I haven’t seen nobody change when they got around a white person like.

I: Okay, and do you see this a lot on Kent campus. Like have you seen black people on campus that act white or not acting like themselves. Have you experienced anything like that on Kent campus? Do you have class with them?

P: I haven’t experienced it yet.

I: Not yet? Okay are you a freshman?

P: Hmm mm

I: Okay can you give me a specific example of how blacks accused of acting white behave toward other blacks?

P: Hmm okay an example?

I: Hmm mm

P: Okay say like I was with my friends or whatever, and there was somebody white right there or something and I was trying to impress them, I would try to downgrade them. Try to sound more smarter. Try to be more better than they was.
I: And has that ever happened to you? Have you ever been with a group of people and someone did that to you or?

P: No

I: No, okay. And have you ever been accused of acting white or have you accused anyone of acting white?

P: No, I’ve been accused of acting black though.

I: What did they say?

P: They said I act black because I was loud.

I: Who said that? Were they people on campus?

P: A couple people did. Hmm mm

I: How did that make you feel when they said you act black?

P: It made me feel a certain way but then after awhile I didn’t pay attention to it because it’s me. And if I’m loud then you just gonna’ have to accept me because I’m loud.

I: So you’ve heard the phrase before like acting white acting black?

P: Hmm mm, but it never actually crossed my mind. Like I never thought about it.

I: Like the effects I guess?

P: Yeah

I: Oh okay. Well I think that will be it for the interview portion if you don’t have any other questions.
Interview 3

I: Okay thank you for coming in, I’m just going to ask you a couple questions, it won’t take very long. Whatever you say or feel like responding go ahead. First thing, I think I asked you before but I want to ask again, what made you decide to sign up for this study in particular?

P: Um, when I was reading it he seemed really interesting.

I: And it’s different from other studies that you’ve done before?

P: Yeah because like when I was looking at em’ I was looking for the descriptions for them and stuff, and if it’s interesting I’ll do it.

I: And you’re a freshman right?

P: Hmm mm.

I: Okay, to you what is acting white?

P: {pause} Um, it’s more like {pause} like talking really proper in a sense. Yeah that’s the only thing I can say to describe it really. When you see it you can say it, more than explaining it.

I: Okay, so when you see it, have you seen it on Kent Campus?

P: Yeah.

I: Yeah, and what are some, I guess because you say when you see it, you can say it or explain it. What are some of the things you see besides talking proper?

P: Certain like hand gestures or like sometimes the way you act. Stuff like that.

I: Hmm mm, so how would someone acting white act?

P: Um, how can I describe that {pause} sometimes just the tone of voice.

I: Tone of voice? Okay is it high pitch? Low pitch?

P: High pitch.
I: Any other things on how someone would act?

P: Um, sometimes a little hyper in a sense.

I: Okay, how about the next question, what is acting black? Or what does it mean to be black?

P: Um {pause} I really don’t have a meaning for it, it’s just it.

I: What do you mean by that?

P: I mean um black people talk more with slang. Kind of have own type of language in a sense.

I: Anything else what is acting black?

P: Uh, I really can’t think of a way to describe it.

I: We can try and come back to it, do you want to come back to the question?

P: Yeah.

I: Okay, so how do you feel about blacks that act white?

P: Um, I really don’t feel nothing against them just probably where they from, or how they was raised.

I: Have you seen anything whether it be on campus or before you got to campus a black person who was accused of acting white how they acted around other black people, how do they act?

P: Like, they acted more in a proper sense you would say.

I: And this is how they talked, and their hand gestures?

P: Hmm mm.

I: Anything else that they would do? Can you give me a specific example?

P: Like sometimes when it’s a black person kind of acting or talking white, they seem kind of preppy. Sometimes they feel like they’re higher than other black people.

I: What do you mean when you say higher?
P: Like they just better.

I: And when they’re acting like this around other black people do you notice some things that they’re saying or doing to other black people? Or what are they doing that makes them act “higher”?

P: Umm, sometimes they may like talk in a way they think you might not understand. Or say certain words they think you may not know. Stuff like that.

I: Okay, and have you ever accused someone of acting white?

P: Umm, well not really I thought it, but not really said it.

I: So you’ve never said it to anyone?

P: Not not really, I don’t remember.

I: It’s okay, on the questionnaire you did before on have you ever accused anyone of acting white you said yes. So I just wanted to ask you about it. Do you remember when?

P: Umm, {pause}, I was never really like oh you acting white or anything like that but I mean if I see it I would just say it to them.

I: And would this happen here or before you got to Kent?

P: Before.

I: Like high school?

P: Hmm mm.

I: And then what was your reason for saying they act white?

P: They probably tried to make me feel like I was not as smart as they was, or something. Said something to that nature.

I: Okay, and then we’ll go back to that other question what is acting black or what does it mean to be black?

P: Umm {pause} I really can’t think of a good definition.
I: Just whatever comes to your mind.

P: Um probably work harder to get where you’re going. It’s kind of harder for black people in a sense, definitely than any other race.

I: And why do you say that?

P: Because black people kind of came from nothing to something. Going back in the day. Slavery then to now how stuff has changed so much.

I: Okay, so are you saying you have to work hard because of where you are going, or because of where you came from?

P: Yeah where you come from.

I: Okay, and do you have questions or comments regarding the study or anything you’d like to add because that completes my questions on here.

P: Hmm, no not really.

I: Okay, and so you’ve heard this before Kent?

P: Yeah.

I: When was the first time you heard it?

P: Um, I know when I was in high school sometimes like, we would like say {pause} okay I’m from Cleveland, so the high school I went to was in Cleveland, and then like some kids came from like all over. From the Westside, and South and stuff like that, and those kind of like rich neighborhoods, and then like sometimes black kids would come to the school and say you act white because you came from the more of a preppy type of place, and stuff like that.

I: And since you’ve been at Kent have you heard it here? Or have you seen black people acting in a certain way?

P: Um I’ve seen it in the dorms.

I: Dorms, okay, and do you interact with them or is it just in passing?

P: Um, sometimes I talk to them.

I: Alright well thank you very much, and do you have any final questions before I stop the recording?
P: No

I: Thank you.
Appendix A

Directions: Answer the following questions honestly and to the best of your ability. All answers will remain confidential and will only be seen by our research staff representing the Program for Research on Anxiety Disorders for African Americans at Kent State University.

What does the phrase, “acting white” mean to you?

Have you ever been accused of “acting white”?
   a. If yes, how did that accusation make you feel?

Have you ever accused of “acting white”?
   a. If yes, hid accusing someone of “acting white” make you feel?
   b. What was your reason for accusing an individual(s) of “acting white”? 
Appendix B

Face-to-Face Interview Script

Q: What is acting white?
Q: What does it mean to be black?
Q: How do you feel about blacks that act white?
Q: Can you give me a specific example of how blacks accused of acting white behave toward other blacks?

These questions serve as prompts. Follow up questions may be asked in response to a participant’s answer. The follow-up questions will be limited clarification of an answer. Asking for an example.