THE WORD THAT MAKES YOU GO HMMM: EXPLORING THE RELATION BETWEEN
AFRICAN AMERICANS' LINGUISTIC IDEOLOGIES, RACIAL IDENTITY ATTITUDES,
AND USAGE OF THE N-WORD

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

Two-hundred-and-eighty-five African Americans completed a web-based survey to explore their linguistic ideologies (i.e., beliefs about socially embedded words), racial identity attitudes, and usage of the word *nigga*. The current study used a transformative-emancipatory mixed methods approach. Participants completed a survey with published measures, including the Cross Social Attitude Scale (CRIS; Vandiver et al., 2000), items from my previous research (Dodson, 2010), and open-ended questions. The data were integrated during analysis and combined during the presentation of the data in the results and discussion sections. In addition, individual interviews were conducted with philosopher and public intellectual Dr. Cornel West and hip-hop artist and actor Common to further develop key themes identified in the findings.

Although the overwhelming majority of the participants (79.9%) used the word *nigga* at some point in the recent past, 41.5% believed that the word should not be used and half of the participants (50.0%) believed the word both should and should not be used. To examine within group differences in the use of the word *nigga,* I explored if participants' endorsement of linguistic ideologies, or beliefs about socially coded language, were related to acceptance of the use of the word. I investigated five linguistic ideologies: Indexicality (i.e., the word *nigga* can have different meanings depending on the social situation or cultural context), Personalism (i.e., the deciding factor in determining the meaning for the word *nigga* comes from the beliefs and/or intentions of the speaker), Reshaping (i.e., the word *nigga* is a reshaping of the historical racial slur *nigger*), Baptismal (i.e., the word *nigga* can never be harmless because of its original meaning as a racial slur), and Performative (i.e., the word *nigga* should not be used since it may be emotionally harmful to those who hear it). The coding results for participants' responses to the open-ended were consistent with the linguistic ideologies examined in this study.

The context of the usage of the word *nigga* was also investigated. Specifically, I examined if the racial background of the speaker (Black or non-Black) and/or public/private settings influenced participants' beliefs about appropriateness for the word *nigga*. Findings from hierarchical multiple regressions indicated linguistic ideologies accounted for a significant amount of variance in levels of acceptance for use of the word *nigga* in each of three contexts: (1) used among Black individuals, (2) used among non-Black individuals, and (3) used in public spaces. Reshaping ideology (i.e., the word *nigga* is a reshaping of the historical racial slur *nigger*) was a unique predictor of each of these contexts; greater endorsement of a Reshaping ideology was related to greater levels of acceptance of the use of the word *nigga* across each of the three contexts. Contrary to my hypothesis, participants' racial identity attitudes were not related to level of endorsement of the word *nigga* in this study.

To the eternal memory of my grandfather, Frank "Papa" Compomizzi: I owe my life to you.

I also wish to acknowledge my ancestors, some of whom gave their lives for progress and social justice in the face of racism and oppression. I do not take my research on this topic lightly and I am humbled to continue the work that you all started. Ashay.

I will forever work to make you all proud. I Love you.

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Chapter I

Introduction

The word *nigger* has been intended to disparage Black persons living in America since its inception. Slave owners used it against their slaves to dehumanize them and to assert racial superiority. Although the word *nigger* is a volatile and contentious racial epithet, variations on the word have emerged to "represent" different, non-offensive meanings. For example, some individuals use the word *nigga* and argue that this version of the word allows for a reshaping of the word *nigger* into an empowering one or a term of endearment. Conversely, other individuals argue that using the word *nigga* only further perpetuates negative stereotypes of African Americans and that despite good intentions, the word should not be used. Although there is theoretical research in sociology exploring the use of the word *nigga*, there is a dearth of empirical research investigating individual factors influencing African Americans' conceptualizations of the word *nigga*.

Taking theoretical writing on the word *nigger* into consideration, in the current study, I asserted that participants' linguistic ideologies, or beliefs about socially coded language, provide a framework for individuals' conceptualization of the use of the word *nigga*. My belief is that the manner in which participants conceptualize socially coded language will influence how they view use of the word *nigga*. In addition, I hypothesized that there are a number of within group differences that help explain individuals' conceptualization of the word *nigga*. I was particularly interested in exploring if racial identity attitudes were related to one's understanding of the word *nigga*.

The few published empirical studies in this area indicate that the conceptualization of the word *nigga* as appropriate or inappropriate depends on a range of factors including racial identity

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and nationality. Findings suggest that an association exists between the use of the word and

perceptions of authentic Black identities. Specifically, Akom (2007) found that use of the word

nigga is equal to embracing traditional Black values, traditions, and lifestyles. In a related study,

Motley and Craig-Henderson (2007) found that nationality mattered in the use of the word *nigga*.

In their study, African American participants identified collective memories (i.e., "socially

constructed knowledge of the past formed by group members and represents their present

interpretation of events, individuals, and objects from the past," Motley & Craig-Henderson, p.

951) and autobiographical memories of the word (i.e., "the memory of events people have

experienced," Motely & Craig-Henderson, p. 951) compared to Blacks born outside of the U.S.

Participants from the Caribbean and from Africa reported more historical memories of the word

(i.e., "the past stored and interpreted by social institutions," Motley & Craig-Henderson, p. 951)

compared to their American counterparts.

In my earlier research, I found that African American college students conceptualized the

words *nigga* and *nigger* similarly and, for the most part, viewed the words as inappropriate

(Dodson, 2010). More than 60% (61.6) of participants reported use of the word *nigga*, compared

to 84.1% for use of the word *nigger*. However, participants also recognized differences between

the two forms of the n-word. For example, the contexts for which participants reported

appropriate use of the word *nigga* include (a) as a term of endearment, (b) among friends, (c) as a

counter to word *nigger*, (d) to describe behavior not related to race, (e) or in rap music. The

unique context for which participants indicated appropriate use for the word *nigger* was when it

was not used offensively. Collectively, these findings tell us that use of the word *nigga* may not

only be complex and vary between contexts but that acceptance of the word can also be related

to how African Americans understand their Blackness. Although these findings help inform our

overall understanding of the word *nigga*, little is known about the correlates of African

Americans' use of the word *nigga*.

Linguist Geneva Smitherman argued that race is a defining feature of the study of African

American language (2003). Smitherman purported that the process of becoming Black or being

Black is closely tied with language. In her work, Smitherman built a case for the association been

racial identity attitudes and Black language or what is sometimes referred to as Black linguistics.

The current study expands these theoretical assertions by exploring the relation between Black

racial identity attitudes and linguistic ideologies, especially as they relate to the use of the word

nigga. I selected to use the concept of linguistic ideologies in this study because it provides a

framework to understand varied beliefs about the word *nigga* within the sociocultural context of

the United States. In the present chapter, I provide a brief overview of the constructs used in the

current study. Specifically, I discuss linguistic ideologies and racial identity. I then outline the

methodological approach I adopted.

Linguistic Ideologies

Language is a powerful force in human interactions and is a major component of

individuals' conceptualizations of their personal lexicon. I operationalized linguistic ideologies

as perceptions of language held by people that support their cultural and social interests. I chose

five linguistic ideologies in particular to investigate use of the word *nigga*: (a) Indexicality

ideology (i.e., the meaning for words depends on the context in which they are used); (b)

Personalism ideology (i.e., linguistic meaning comes from the beliefs and/or intentions of the

speaker); (c) Reshaping ideology (i.e., meaning is created as the word *nigga* is reshaped to arm

its speakers with a term of endearment against the racial denigration of the word *nigger*); (d)

Baptismal language ideology (i.e., words have a single, correct meaning that can be found by tracing use of the word back to a "Baptismal moment", or when the word was first used), and (e) Performative language ideology (i.e., words have the ability to wound and offend others and

Racial Identity

It may be the case that African American racial identity and the usage of the word *nigga* are intertwined. Black racial identity generally "refers to the process by which an individual of African descent acquires an understanding of his or her racial self-concept in a race-based society" (Whittaker & Neville, 2010, p. 384). If African Americans conceptualize use of the word *nigga* as appropriate, then their racial identity attitudes may be a factor in determining the degree to which they endorse use of the word. Some African Americans who are less connected to their Black heritage may be more likely to subscribe to negative stereotypes about being Black and subsequently may use the word.

I applied Cross's expanded Nigrescence Model (Cross & Vandiver, 2001) because the model incorporates internalized negative racial stereotypes, primarily through its three Pre-Encounter attitude types (i.e., Pre-Encounter Assimilation, Pre-Encounter Miseducation, and Pre-Encounter Self-Hatred). Specifically, Pre-Encounter Assimilation captures a pro-American identity attitudes with no importance placed on being Black. Pre-Encounter Miseducation describes beliefs that align with stereotypes of Black behavior, such as laziness and criminality, while Pre-Encounter Self-Hatred focuses on a dislike of one's Black identity. I used the corresponding Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS; Cross & Vandiver, 2002) because of its strong psychometric support among adolescents, emerging adults, and adults (Vandiver et al., 2002; Worrell, 2008). The CRIS consists of six stages: (a) Pre-Encounter Assimilation, (b) Pre-

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Encounter Miseducation, (c) Pre-Encounter Self-Hatred, (d) Immersion-Emersion Anti-White, (e) Internalization Afrocentric, and (f) Internalization Multiculturalist Inclusive.

Black racial identity attitudes have been consistently related to psychological indicators including psychological well-being and distress (Whittaker & Neville, 2010). Internalization attitudes are associated with positive self-esteem. In addition, research findings have indicated that Black racial identity attitudes were significant predictors of preferences for a counselor of the same race (Ferguson et al., 2008). Research has also found that racial identity was a significant predictor of psychological health above and beyond that accounted for by both gender and acculturation (Pillay, 2005). In summary, these findings suggest that racial identity is linked to numerous outcomes that range from interpersonal dynamics to well-being.

Purpose of the Current Study

In the current study, I investigated how linguistic ideologies and racial identity attitudes are related to the attitudes, language, and communication of the word *nigga*. The specific research purposes were: (1) To describe African Americans' level of endorsement of the word nigga; (2) To explore if African Americans' position on the use of the word nigga is consistent with common linguistic ideologies; and (3) To examine the association between African Americans' racial identity attitudes and the level of endorsement of the word nigga. Thus, I attempted to connect the endorsement of linguistic ideologies and use of the word *nigga*.

To answer these questions, I adopted a transformative-emancipatory paradigmatic mixed methods approach. The transformative-emancipatory paradigmatic approach provides space for social justice work (Mertens, 1999). Specifically, I used qualitative and quantitative data to be able to increase understanding about the controversial, yet under-researched word *nigga*, in hopes that it could improve social justice work around racial dialogue. Given the state of the

literature, I chose to adopt this approach because I recognize a primary purpose of constructing

knowledge is to help inform and improve society (Banks, 1993, 1995). This paradigmatic

approach will help me answer my research questions by providing data through participants'

responses to scales about their linguistic ideologies, racial identity attitudes, and use of the word

nigga while providing participants with space to freely express their thoughts and experiences

with use of the word *nigga*. This approach provides a framework to examine how racial

inequalities and injustices can be further perpetuated by the use of language, with hopes that

findings from the study will inform interventions to address the use of a potentially "damaging"

word among African Americans. Consistent with a transformative-emancipatory approach, the

current study highlights the variance in use and perceptions of appropriateness for the word

nigga, and explores the contextual differences which are shaped along social and cultural

dimensions.

Chapter II

Literature Review

The influence of language on human interaction can be determined by how individuals use and understand the interpersonal impact of certain words. This includes individuals who uphold racist ideals and take advantage of the power of language to further propagate their discriminatory agenda. There are instances in which individuals have used racialized language in conjunction with hate crimes. In 2010, almost half of the reported hate crimes (47.3%) were motivated by race (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2010). Roughly three-quarters of these crimes were motivated by anti-Black bias (69.8%; Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2010). FBI hate crimes database documents numerous cases in which the racial slur *nigger* was used in the attacks against Blacks and African Americans. Furthermore, research indicates the word *nigger* is in over 4,200 state and federal court criminal cases that deal with the cruel and brutal treatment of African Americans (Kennedy, 2002; Parks & Jones, 2008).

In addition to the legal scholarship on the word *nigger*, sociologists have examined the use of the word *nigga*. This literature is largely conceptual. Such research has mainly focused on the origin, history, and usage of the word *nigga* (Kennedy, 2002) or the contrast of the word *nigga* to that of the word *nigger* (Asim, 2007). There are very few empirical studies designed to investigate the contexts in which the word *nigga* is used or the meaning of the various definitions of the word to African Americans.

Emerging empirical findings on the use of the word *nigga* suggest that similar to the word *nigger,* it is also viewed by most as inappropriate. For example, Akom (2000) conducted an ethnographic study of 60 African American men and women and their use of the word *nigga*. Findings suggested that the word *nigga* is a contentious term within the African American

lexicon and also in American popular culture. Akom asserted the word *nigga* is considered "improper" in formal spaces, but is used most often in the "private sector", such as in conversations before friendly basketball games and in barbershops. However, Akom's ethnographic study did not investigate contextual reasons for use or why some participants used the word and others did not.

In the current study, I drew on works in psychology and linguistics to better understand how and why some African Americans use the word *nigga*. The few empirical studies on the n-word focus on the word *nigger*. I chose to focus on use of the word *nigga* because previous studies have shown the word *nigger* was generally conceptualized as a racial slur (Dodson, 2010; Dodson & Burrow, 2008; Motley & Craig-Henderson, 2007). Thus, exploring the word *nigga* is more appropriate because there is less agreement within the African American community about its usage. Because the literature in this area is scant, we know very little about individuals who approve using the word *nigga*, especially as a term of endearment, and those individuals who believe the word should never be used. I assert that both linguistic ideologies and racial identity attitudes may be a factor to describe within group differences among African Americans in their use of the word *nigga*.

In the current study, I primarily sought to explore if linguistic ideologies were associated with the use of the word *nigga*. Linguistic ideologies provide context for understanding how African Americans' conceptualizations of the word *nigga* may be expressed through the use of language. Linguist Allan (2001) noted that the manner in which people use names and terms is influenced by (a) the relationship speakers perceive they have with whom they converse in a context and (b) speakers' attitudes towards with whom they converse. Therefore, to understand the use of the word *nigga*, we should endeavor to understand how individuals construct meaning

from language they choose to use and how much influence they view language has in their relationships.

In this chapter, I provide a historical background and overview of the word *nigger* and how its derivative, *nigga*, has been used under different social situations and cultural contexts. I then discuss how the historical significance of the word *nigga* is closely linked to linguistic ideologies and the importance of language. After this, I explore how individual factors such as racial identity attitudes may influence one's acceptance and us of the word *nigga*. I conclude with my research purposes and an overview of the current study.

The History of the Word *Nigger* and Its Derivative

In his book, *The N Word: Who Can Say it, Who Shouldn't and Why* (2007), journalist Jabari Asim stated that the majority of lexicographers trace the origin of "nigger" and "Negroe" back to the word "niger," which is Latin for "black." The word *nigger* was originally used to denigrate and disparage an entire people for centuries. Asim outlined a history of derogatory use dating back to the 1500s that ranges from comparisons to vile creatures to lusty, hyper-sexualized beings. Slave owners also dehumanized their slaves by calling them *nigger*.

Through the dehumanization process, slave owners communicated slaves' sub-human status by only recognizing them as property. This use of language to deepen racial inequality and separation continued to affect African Americans well into the 20th century. For example, in 1967, the United States Board on Geographic Names recommended that the 143 placenames (the way in which a geographical place is described) with the word *nigger* be changed to "negro" (Bright, 2000). This might be considered a step in recognizing that language had been used in

part to institutionalize racism within the United States. Indeed, the word *nigger* is important to both race relations as well as American politics (Kennedy, 2002).

The word *nigger* outlived slavery and continues to permeate American culture, as well as negatively affect race relations (Asim, 2007). Over time, the word *nigger* has become one of the most widely known racial insults in the United States and has since evolved into the paradigmatic slur. This history has led many observers to argue that the n-word holds a special status as a racial insult. Looking back through history, we can see that *nigger* was more than just a word, but also represented an ideology, originally driven by White supremacists to enforce inferiority on Black Americans (Akom, 2000). For example, throughout the post-civil war Jim and Jane Crow era, the word *nigger* was used to bolster the support of Black minstrelsy while also denying access to equality for the newly freed Black Americans (Asim, 2007). A number of recent incidents highlight how others view the word as a racial animus, including the public criticism of comedian Michael Richards who used the word to chastise a member of the audience and the firing of two radio (Dr. Laura) and TV personalities (Paula Deen) for their public use of the word along with other racialized behaviors.

While the word *nigga* has a negative connotation, there is a difference in terms of how it is perceived when someone who is non-Black uses the word as opposed to when someone Black uses the word. As Akom (2000) discussed, some individuals may view use the word *nigga* as connected to an authentic Black experience. Thus, when non-Blacks use the word, it may be considered inauthentic use of language or cultural misappropriation.

Use of the word *nigga*. There are few historical records for the word *nigga*. There is some basic information on the characteristics of those using the word, and some contexts in which people deem use as appropriate. In addition to knowing the sociocultural origins and how

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understanding appropriate and inappropriate use, the linguistic history of the word also should be considered because language has the possibilities of being generative and empowering (Gillespie, 2010).

The word *nigga* emerged as a derivative of the racial slur *nigger*. As such, the word has shifted from a method of discriminatory, social control, to a "radical tradition", to a word widely endorsed and used in popular culture (Akom, 2000). The word *nigga* has its roots in the Black power movement of the 1960s, surrounding discourses about the new developing concept and identity of "Blackness" (Akom, 2000). Additionally, those who use the word *nigga* can at times allude to their authenticity as "real *niggas*", arguing that their experience is the true Black American experience (Asim, 2007). However, to date, empirical literature has not distinctly sought out to further investigate these opinions to gather information about Black racial identity attitudes.

The word *nigga* is not just a simple change in suffix from the word *nigger*. For those that use it, it is a verbal and visual (i.e., change in suffix from *er* to *a*) representation of their ideology and personal politics. In particular, use of the word *nigga* signifies an orientation that characterizes the thinking of those who use it and speaks to how they choose to connect with others. For some, the word *nigga* represents a term of endearment that is different from the racial slur *nigger*. However, it is unclear to what extent those who use the word *nigga* believe use of the word overlaps and/or shares meaning with the word *nigger*.

In one of the few empirical studies examining the use of the n-word, Motley and Craig-Henderson (2007) explored potential differences in Black adults' attitudes about the words *nigger* and *nigga*. They interviewed 52 people from a range of nationalities/pan-ethnic groups (i.e., African Americans, Caribbean, and African) living in the United States. Findings revealed

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that participants' nationalities mattered. Specifically, African American participants identified collective memories (i.e., "socially constructed knowledge of the past formed by group members and represents their present interpretation of events, individuals, and objects from the past," p. 951) and autobiographical memories of the word *nigger* (i.e., "the memory of events people have experienced," p. 951) compared to the other groups. Participants from the Caribbean and from Africa reported more historical memories of the word *nigger* (i.e., "the past stored and interpreted by social institutions," p. 951) compared to their African American counterparts. This contrast appears to show that African American participants experienced a more personal connection to the word *nigger* than other participants.

Although participants' "responses reflected a shared understanding of the differences in the meanings of *nigger* and *nigga*" (p. 953), Motley and Craig-Henderson (2007) offered little explanation as to how they arrived at the conclusion that participants differentiated use of either form of the n-word. Basically, they concluded by saying "It appears racial status – and other commonalities such as experiences with being the targets of racist language, prejudice, or discrimination – supersedes ethnic origin and numerical majority/minority group status" (p. 953). Additionally, not much was offered to help readers understand African Americans' and non-African Americans' emotional reactions to the word *nigger*.

In my earlier work (Dodson, 2010), I addressed the limitation in previous research by exploring African Americans' acceptance of the word *nigger* separately from the word *nigga.* The 166 African American college students surveyed were also asked about their general understanding of both forms of the n-word, the frequency of their personal use, the frequency in which they observe, and their emotional reactions to use of both forms of the n-word. Almost all of the participants believed the word *nigger* should never or rarely be used (84%). The majority

of participants (61.6%) indicated that, for the most part, use of the word *nigga* was also inappropriate. About a third of the participants indicated that use of the word was appropriate among Blacks, while a little over a quarter stated use of the word *nigga* was appropriate as a term of endearment. Although participants used the word *nigger* considerably less than the word *nigga*, they conceptualized the words similarly as evidenced in both open-ended and quantitative data. The race of the speaker mattered more than the actual form of the n-word; participants viewed it was more appropriate for a Black American to use either form of the n-word than a White American.

Combined, findings from the Motley and Craig-Henderson (2007) and Dodson (2007) studies tell us that some African Americans may decide to use the word *nigga* intentionally in contrast to the historical use of the word *nigger* as a racial slur. For this same reason, some African Americans may also have a negative reaction to use of the word *nigga* when used by non-Blacks. However, neither study sought to examine psychological constructs related to participants' use of the word *nigga* or the influence of one's interpretation of the meaning of the word on their usage. The current study was designed to add to the literature about African Americans' conceptualization and use of the word *nigga* through its exploration of the relation between linguistic ideologies and racial identity attitudes. Both linguistic ideologies and racial identity attitude contain aspects of self-identity and self-expression that may influence individuals' decision to use the word *nigga*.

Conceptualizing the word *nigga*

In the current study, I conceptualized use of the word *nigga* existing on a continuum, as participants from my previous (Dodson, 2010) study identified contexts and settings in which they noted use as appropriate (e.g., in educational settings), while some also indicated that there

was no context in which it was appropriate to use the word. Some of those in support of using the word *nigga* believed the word was less offensive than the word *nigger* and that it could be used as a term of endearment. I have identified linguistic ideologies to capture the reasons why some may support use of the word *nigga* (proponents) while others oppose use of the word *nigga* (opponents). Although I use the short hand of proponent and opponent linguistic ideologies, I understand that individuals may hold competing ideologies simultaneously.

Linguistic Ideologies Applied to Use of the Word *Nigga*

In this section, I provide a brief overview of linguistic ideologies. I then define five linguistic ideologies that either align with those who support use of the word *nigga* (proponents), or with those who oppose use of the word *nigga* (opponents). The selected ideologies were not meant to represent an exhaustive list, but rather, were intentionally chosen because they are directly relevant to use of the word *nigga*. Specifically, I used Hill's (2008) proposed five linguistic ideologies designed to capture the multi-faceted and complex definitions for the word nigga: (a) Indexicality ideology, (b) Personalism ideology, (c) Reshaping ideology, (d) Baptismal language, and (e) Performative language ideology; these ideologies capture beliefs that either support (three ideologies) or oppose (two ideologies) the use of the word *nigga.*.

Linguistic ideologies

Hill (2008) defined linguistic ideologies as "sets of interested positions about language that represent themselves as forms of common sense, that rationalize and justify the forms and functions of text and talk" (pp. 33-34). Hill's quote helps to explain that linguistic ideologies provide a framework in which individuals use language to express themselves and connect with others. Linguistic ideologies are essential in shaping and providing guidelines for discourse, which subsequently influences individuals' beliefs broadly (Hill). They help people understand

language's structure and how the language might be used (Silverstein, 1979.) Linguistic ideologies are not void of axiological assumptions, as they are connected to individuals' values, denoting what speakers identify as good, bad, moral, or immoral (Irvine, 1989; Woolard, 1998). Hill purported that people acquire ideologies because they provide life with structure and that they complement supporters' cultural ideas. Moreover, understanding the "why" behind individuals' choice of language to support their cultural ideas is important because as Akom (2000) stated, language is too often approached from the angle of how people use it rather than why they use it.

The study of linguistic ideology traditionally explored the perceptions individuals hold about language and how these perceptions are projected into discourse. I adopt a somewhat different position on the application of linguistic ideologies as they relate to the use of the word *nigga*. Specifically, I operationalize linguistic ideologies as perceptions of language held by people that support their cultural and social interests. I intentionally took this approach because of the overlap between individuals' beliefs about language and how these beliefs can impact their cultural and social interests to use words such as *nigga*.

Proponents of the use of the word *nigga*. From Hip-Hop artists (Nas, Jay-Z, Yasiin Bey) to college students (Dodson, 2010), there is a large body of people who advocate for use of the word *nigga*. Some individuals view *nigga* as a term of endearment, as a way to take ownership over the racial slur, and/or attempt to use it in other positive ways. In this section, I cite three ideologies to which individuals who support use of the word may subscribe.

Indexicality ideology. Words are ineluctably linked to their contexts (Hill, 2008). Hill (2008) stated that the meanings of words are context-dependent, or emergent from the contexts in which they are used. As it relates to use of the word *nigga*, Indexicality ideology suggests that

meaning of the word is derived from contextual and situational factors and also as it is used by different speakers. Individuals who support an Indexicality ideology might agree with the following: "Historically, the word is white supremacist; legally, it's just another word, and, culturally, it's what you make it" (Washington, 2008, p. 112). In other words, depending on the context and cultural lens one applies to look at use of the word, there can be multiple interpretations. Furthermore, this ideology purports that words can actively transform a context. Indexical meanings may not always be shared across individuals, and every interaction is a space where indexical values can be renewed or can be changed. The context for meaning is created in an interaction and not pre-determined.

Personalism ideology. This ideology argues that the most important part of linguistic meaning comes from the beliefs and/or intentions of the speaker. Personalism asks the question, "Are we always evoking history when using the words even if we are unaware of the historical use?" (Hill, 2008, p. 85). This quote highlights the notion that speakers may either be unaware or indifferent to how listeners place value on the historical use of the word *nigga*. These speakers may argue "Well, I didn't mean any harm by it!"

Himma's (2002) research on foul language stated that the familiarity of the speaker and listener might determine the level of offensiveness and appropriateness. Himma argued that two individuals who spend a fair amount of time together might have a better understanding for each other's linguistic choices than two individuals who have just met or who do not know each other very well. Moreover, Himma stated certain words might be deemed less offensive and have different meanings among a group of friends because they are more likely familiar who the intent behind use of the word. However, if those who support use of the word *nigga* are not familiar

with who is around them, then the speakers may think their intentions are all that are needed for use to be appropriate.

Reshaping ideology. It has been argued that the use and meaning of the word *nigga* among African Americans demonstrates a political act of appropriating the term and reversing its meaning (West, 2007). Reshaping describes the argument that the word *nigga* arms its speakers with a term of endearment from a word that was once a racial slur. Butler (1997) observed that because punishments and proscriptions mainly accomplish "unintended proliferation" (p. 140), words should be reshaped to have new meanings. Consistent with this argument, Randall Kennedy (2002) in his book simply titled *Nigger* asserted "There is much to be gained by allowing people of all backgrounds to yank nigger away from white supremacists, to subvert its ugliest denotation, and to convert the N-word from a negative into a positive appellation" (p. 175). In essence, Kennedy's quote serves as an example of Reshaping because he argued for not only a new definition, but also for a new conceptualization of the way the word *nigga* is used and understood. Kennedy went on to describe this use of the word *nigga* as a "rhetorical boomerang" which could potentially loop around to be used against the White Americans who first institutionalized it against African Americans.

Opponents of the use of the word *nigga*. There are linguistic ideologies that capture opposition to the use of the word *nigga*. For example, Kennedy (2002) referred to those who argue for stopping use of the word *nigga* in any and all contexts "eradicationists". Others may argue that that using the word *nigga* has given rise to the word being overly used in the contemporary, slang vernacular. For example, in 2007, Hip-Hop artist Kurtis Blow, credited with helping create the genre's popularity in the late 1970s and early 1980s, went as far as saying that if individuals wanted to end the oppressive and offensive affects that the word *nigga* has, they

need to stop buying music from the artists that constantly use the word *nigga* in their lyrics (Akom, 2000). In this section, I cite two ideologies used to support one's opposition to the use of the word: Baptismal and Performative.

Baptismal ideology. Eradicationists or those who otherwise oppose use of the word *nigga* would have the closest fit within this ideology. They would argue that words have a single, correct meaning that can be found by tracing when the word was first used or entered into the lexicon, the "Baptismal moment", and that this meaning never changes and cannot be altered or adulterated. For example, at the 2007 NAACP Conference in Detroit, MI, delegates held a funeral to bury the word *nigga* because they felt continued use is offensive and harmful to Black Americans. Furthermore, meaning for the word *nigga* cannot be contextualized, personalized, or reshaped because the word *nigga* is invariably linked to the racial slur *nigger*. Under no circumstances would use of the word *nigga* be independent of the history behind the racial slur, either.

Performative language ideology. This ideology maintains that words have the ability to wound and offend others because whether consciously or not, the speaker's intentions ignore the target's perception of how the word is being used. Any word can potentially wound if the listener perceives it as such. Bright (2000) explained that "Human beliefs and feelings, whatever their origins, are themselves facts, and need to be taken into account. As citizens, furthermore, we can and should fight racism, whether it is displayed in words, deeds, or covert ideology" (p. 215). In this quote, Bright drew attention to the real and acute impact words can have on emotions, and calls for a broader societal understanding of how our language affects one another. With this being said, those who ascribe to the Performative language ideology would say that to make the claim that a speakers' intended use for a word is what gives words their meaning is invalid

because words gain their meaning based on a mutual understanding between the speaker and the listener(s). Hill (2008) wrote that slurs are made visible by Performative linguistic ideology, exposing the idea that words can perform actions. Slurs are understood to "cut" or to "wound."

Potential Influences of Use

Smitherman (2003) argued that race is a defining feature of the study of Black linguistics: "The central issue which we address in Black Linguistics is what *being Black*, or *becoming Black* means in language scholarship" (p. 10). Building on Smitherman's conceptualization of Black language scholarship, it seems that becoming Black or Black racial identity can be considered closely intertwined with Black linguistics. It then follows that because use of the word *nigga* and the linguistic ideologies that one adopts can be racially driven, it is helpful to also consider racial identity attitudes. However, the empirical literature has not yet explored this relation. The current study ventures to explore the relation between racial identity attitudes and linguistic ideologies.

Racial identity attitudes. Black racial identity or "the process by which an individual of African descent acquires an understanding of his or her racial self-concept in a race-based society" (Whittaker & Neville, 2010, p. 384) is related to psychological and educational outcomes. Internalization of an affirmative racial identity has been associated with increased well-being, including self- esteem (Hughes & Demo, 1989; Parham & Helms, 1985; Rowley, Sellers, Chavous, & Smith, 1996), academic performance (Baldwin, Duncan, & Bell, 1987; Chavous, 1996; Taylor, Casten, Flickinger, Roberts, & Fulmore, 1994), and career aspirations (Helms & Piper, 1994; Parham & Austin, 1994). Studies also suggest that internalization of a negative and stereotyped racial identity is related to a range of distress indicators, including low levels of self-actualization, greater feelings of inferiority (Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1998), and

greater levels of depressive symptoms (Munford, 1994). I used Cross's (2001) Expanded Nigrescence Model of Black racial identity attitudes. I purposefully chose this model because it has a corresponding scale, Cross's Racial Identity Scale (CRIS), with strong psychometric properties (Cokley, 2007). Before I discuss the expanded model, I will first discuss Cross's (1971) original model.

   Original Nigrescence model. Cross's (1971) Nigrescence Model is widely known and referenced. In Nigrescence Theory, the study of *Black identity* refers to how a person thinks, feels, and acts in his or her Reference Group Orientation (RGO) Matrix (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). In its original conception, Cross delineated a model to track the change and growth in Black identity from self-hatred to self-acceptance through five distinct stages: Pre-Encounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, Internalization, and Internalization-Commitment (Cross, 1971). The stages Cross described were largely associated within the context of the Black Power Movement of the late 1960s (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). In the Pre-Encounter Stage, individuals' identity as Americans is more salient than their identity as being Black. Individuals within this stage are said to be disconnected from the Black community and have higher levels of self-hatred. In the Encounter Stage, individuals experience an event, an "encounter", which serves as a catalyst for them to reflect on their belief system. For example, if an African American college student feels victimized after experiencing a racist event, he/she may question his/her identity. Cross conceptualized the Encounter Stage as transitioning into the Immersion stage, in which individuals question their previous identities. As such, individuals immerse themselves into what one perceives as Black life and culture. The next stage, Internalization, individuals are able to hold multiple identities which can all be just as important and meaningful as their racial identity.

Finally, in the Internalization-Commitment stage, individuals are now regularly aware of their multiple identities and serve as socially conscious activists.

Parham and Helms' (1981) Racial Identity Attitudes Scale (RIAS) was developed as an instrument to specifically operationalize and test the viability of Cross's Nigrescence theory (Cokley & Chapman, 2009). A number of studies have examined the potential correlates of racial identity attitudes using the RAIS (Worrell et al., 2006). Research has shown that individuals in earlier stages, particularly those in Pre-Encounter, experienced lower levels of psychological functioning (Whittaker & Neville, 2010). Conversely, findings suggested that well-developed racial identity correlates with higher levels of functioning and well-being (Cross, 1991; Rowley, Sellers, Chavous, & Smith, 1998; Sellers, Caldwell, Shmeelk-Cone, & Zimmerman, 2003). Findings from other studies included the relationship between racial identity and class (Carter & Helms, 1988), the elevation of racial identity attitudes to self-actualization and affective states of Black students (Parham & Helms, 1985)

Revised Nigrescence model. In 1991, Cross revisited the Nigrescence Model in which he made two major changes to the original model. The first change was more conceptual in nature. In the revised model, Cross distinguished between what he posited are the two components to one's self concept; RGO – the social identity component of the Black self-concept – and Personal Identity (PI) – the personal identity component. Cross stated that Blackness is viewed more as a social identity than a personality variable. For example, aspects of psychological well-being such as self-esteem are not necessarily affected by RGO (Worrell, Vandiver, & Cross, 2004).

The second change focused on the structure of the model as it was represented in the five stages. In particular, the fourth and fifth stages (Internalization and Internalization-Commitment)

were merged into a single stage. This new stage now has three attitude clusters: a) Black Nationalist (an Afrocentric identity combined with political activism), b) Biculturalist (adoption of two identities – for example, Black and American), and c) Multiculturalist (adoption of multiple identities – for example, racial identity, gender, and American). To better capture the difference between personal and reference group identities, Cross also proposed two types of Pre-Encounter clusters: Pre-Encounter Assimilation (someone who sees themselves as American but does not view race as important to their identity) and Pre-Encounter Anti-Black (someone who harbors negative feelings about being Black and accepts negative stereotypes of Blacks) emerged as two different constructs.

Expanded Nigrescence Model. In the current study, I employ Cross's Expanded Nigrescence Model. In the most recent version of the Nigrescence model, Vandiver, Fhagen-Smith, Cokley, Cross, and Worrell (2001) shifted to a conceptualization of Black identity as comprised of a series of attitudes about one's RGO captured by six types: a) Pre-Encounter Assimilation, b) Pre-Encounter Miseducation, c) Pre-Encounter Self-Hatred, d) Immersion-Emersion Anti-White, e) Internalization Afrocentric, and f) Internalization Multiculturalist Inclusive. The distinctions between RGO and PI that emerged from the revised model are maintained. In this model, Pre-Encounter identity types are further clarified; these identity types describe individuals' racial identity attitudes that do not fully identify with Blackness which are classified as Anti-Black. Pre-Encounter Assimilation describes a person somewhat disconnected from the Black community. A Pre-Encounter Miseducation identity type internalizes negative stereotypes and images of Black culture. In the third Pre-Encounter status, Pre-Encounter Racial Self-Hatred describes individuals who detest their Black heritage and consequentially experience

feelings of self-hatred. Only two Internalization types are retained in this model: Internalization Afrocentric and Internalization Multiculturalist.

Cross Racial Identity Scale. The Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS; Vandiver et al., 2000; Worrell, Vandiver, & Cross, 2004) was developed to measure the expanded Nigrescence model. In the nearly 15 years since its publication, there have been many studies supporting the psychometric properties of the scale. The CRIS has been used to collect data that suggests racial identity is more attitudinal than developmental (Worrell, 2008), Nigrescence attitudes are stable from adolescence through adulthood (Worrell, 2008), and racial identity profiles have meaningful relationships with psychological constructs such as psychological well-being and distress (Whittaker & Neville, 2010).

I chose to use the CRIS for the current study because of its strong psychometric support across adolescents, emerging adults, and adults (Vandiver et al., 2002; Worrell, 2008). Recently, Worrell et al. (2011) argued that the CRIS is "the only Black racial identity instrument that has not been criticized for the psychometric properties of its scores" (p. 638). Cokley (2007) recommended use of the CRIS to study racial identity attitudes based on the expanded version of the Nigrescence Model. Because use of the racially charged word *nigga* among African Americans may be influenced by Black racial identity attitudes, the relation between the two constructs deserves more empirically driven research. Researchers use cluster analysis as the methodology to assess racial identity attitudes as opposed to individual items. Thus, the current study aims to answer these questions by exploring the relation between linguistic ideologies, racial identity attitudes, and use of the word *nigga*.

From the review of the CRIS literature, we gather that individuals who have more salient racial identity attitudes also experience a greater sense of well-being. For those individuals in

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Pre-Encounter stages who have yet to experience an encounter that makes them think more about their racial identity, they may be more inclined to use the word *nigga*. These individuals may not recognize the relation the word has to racism and oppression.

Current Study

Rationale and Purpose

The word *nigga* is highly contentious within the African American community. Some individuals believe the word is acceptable and argue for continued use across contexts while other individuals argue that the word should no longer be used. Although there is much written about the word *nigga* in popular media, there is surprisingly little scholarship on the word and its usage among African Americans. The few empirical studies in this area suggest use of the word *nigga* may vary across the Black Diaspora and have different meanings across contexts. However, these studies have not addressed the connection between how individuals who use the word *nigga* conceptualize their Blackness or how/why use may vary across contexts. The current study was designed to address the gaps in the literature by exploring the connection between language and racial identity attitudes.

Because identity is connected to the use of language, researchers should consider how identities could influence the proliferation of words that can have both disadvantageous and advantageous effects on personal development. This research could be particularly helpful in considering words with a history of racial violence such as the racial slur *nigger*. In the current study, one of my primary objectives is to explore linguistic ideology for those who use the word *nigga*. I am interested in using linguistic ideology to help explain how even though the historical racial slur *nigger* is still in use, it is possible for *nigga* to be used in a positive manner. I designed the study in hopes of investigating how different ideologies, identities, and cultural group norms

can influence attitudes, language, and communication of the word *nigga*. I aimed to contribute to the literature with novel, empirically based findings. By exploring within group differences (i.e., linguistic ideologies and racial identity attitudes) in African Americans' understanding and usage of the word *nigga*, the current study may help uncover links between African Americans' opinions about the use or not use the word *nigga* and their racial identity attitudes.

I adopted a transformative-emancipatory mixed methods approach in the current study. According to Banks (1993, 1995), the purpose of a transformative-emancipatory framework is to construct knowledge, which can have a positive impact on improving society. In general, this approach consists of including qualitative and quantitative data that help shape social justice inquiry, in hopes that the data can decrease social inequalities. The current study was designed to help promote social justice awareness about the variance in perceptions of appropriateness for socially coded language with racial undertones. I used this approach to frame my study by including scaled responses to questions about appropriateness of use of the word *nigga*, as well as providing space for participants to independently share their conceptualizations in an open-ended format. In addition, the current study was grounded in a transformative-emancipatory approach because of the importance to continue to gather insight and knowledge about how socially coded language can affect racial dialogue.

Data were collected online via a web-based questionnaire that included scales to assess racial attitudes and linguistic ideologies and also open-ended questions to explore participants' beliefs about the word *nigga.* In addition, one-on-one interviews were conducted with two prominent cultural figures within the African American community. The interviews with Dr. Cornel West (a public intellectual and philosopher) and Common (a hip-hop artist and actor) were included because of the unique professional and personal experiences these two men have

as African Americans. Dr. West's and Common's expert perspectives were of particular

importance in highlighting the varying beliefs an individual can hold around use of the word

nigga.

The specific research purposes and hypotheses were:

1. I aimed to describe African Americans' perceptions of the word *nigga*.

   - I wanted to explore if participants' use of the word *nigga* was consistent with the five selected linguistic ideologies, if new or different ideologies emerged, and if context of use mattered.

2. I set out to explore if linguistic ideologies were related to participants' level of acceptance of the word *nigga* across context.

   - Hypothesis 1. I hypothesized that participants who have higher levels of Indexicality ideology, Personalism ideology, and Reshaping ideology would have higher levels of acceptance of the word *nigga* in a variety of contexts. Specifically, a) there will be higher levels of acceptance of the word *nigga* in public contexts than in private contexts and b) there will be higher levels of acceptance for Black speakers than for Non-Black speakers (Hypothesis 1a). Conversely, participants with higher levels of Baptismal language ideology and Performative language ideology will have lower levels of acceptance of the word *nigga* across contexts (Hypothesis 1b).

3. I examined the association between African Americans' racial identity attitudes and the level of endorsement of the word *nigga*.

   - Hypothesis 2. I hypothesized that participants' higher scores on Pre-Encounter Assimilation, Pre-Encounter Miseducation, and Pre-Encounter Self-Hatred would be positively correlated with higher levels of acceptance for use of the word *nigga*. My hypothesis is based on the idea that participants who place less importance on their Black identity will be less inclined to view use of the word *nigga* as problematic, per (a) Akom's (2007) findings suggesting that use of the word *nigga* equal to embracing traditional Black values, traditions, and lifestyles (which would earn participants higher scores on the Pre-Encounter subscales) and (b) Motley and Craig-Henderson's concepts of collective and autobiographical memories. Subsequently, these participants will be more open to use of the word *nigga*.

Chapter III

Method

Methodology

The current study used a transformative-emancipatory mixed methods approach. A transformative-emancipatory paradigmatic approach means that I as a researcher assume that knowledge is influenced by human interests and thus is not neutral. Furthermore, knowledge "reflects the power and social relationships within society" (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2008, p. 73) and that knowledge can be used to improve society (Banks, 1993, 1995). A transformative-emancipatory paradigmatic approach grounded in mixed methods allowed me to gather responses from quantitative scales while also providing participants space to express their individual beliefs and experiences with use of the word *nigga*. This paradigmatic approach is unique in that it recognizes societal influences and value systems that can affect methodological inferences. Data and research findings can then be used as a catalyst for social change.

The complex background of the word *nigga* calls for an empirical investigation utilizing mixed methods to afford participants the opportunity to freely express their use of the word, but also to allow themes around use to emerge from participants' responses. In addition, data from participants' responses to scales can be helpful to have when trying to externally validate the measures for this under-researched topic. By using a mixed methods approach, sensitive topics, such as use of the word *nigga*, can be studied in their complexity (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2010). Furthermore, by utilizing a transformative-emancipatory mixed methods approach in particular, I recognized that the reality in which empirical data are gathered is influenced by socio-political and racial/ethnic values. Thus, with this inference, I hoped to uncover the importance of

combining both qualitative and quantitative data that will ultimately be used to create knowledge that can be used to help address social inequities. Specifically, I asked participants to write a short essay sharing their thoughts about their support or opposition to use of the word *nigga*. I complement participants' responses with interviews from two prominent cultural figures. I also measured participants' racial identity attitudes and linguistic ideology responses.

Researcher as Instrument

I identify as a 28-year-old, Biracial man of both European American and African American heritage from a middle class background pursuing my doctoral studies in Counseling Psychology. I also identify as a Black man, but I do not place more importance on one half of my racial background than the other. I provide context about my cultural identities to demonstrate that as a researcher, I recognize my identity as a young Black man conducting this research. I am aware of how ruthlessly the racial slur *nigger* was used to oppress my ancestors and continues to plague my Brothers and Sisters. Investigating use of the word *nigga*, a derivative of the word *nigger*, is a humbling experience because it constantly reminds me that there are not many young Black men within the academy, let alone other researchers in general, who have the cultural capital to pursue such a controversial and divisive topic.

In the current study, I adopted a transformative-emancipatory paradigmatic approach in that I recognize a primary purpose of constructing knowledge is to help inform and improve society (Banks, 1993; 1995). As the Graduate Assistant for African American Outreach at my home university, I am passionate about working on behalf of the Black community, and the transformative-emancipatory paradigmatic approach provides space for such social justice work

(Mertens, 1999). Additionally, I have received training and experience with mixed methods and qualitative research.

Personally aligning with this paradigmatic approach, I find it both fitting and necessary to transparently share my own opinion regarding use of the word *nigga*. I do not believe use of the word *nigga* is appropriate for anyone from any racial background. A reshaping of the meaning behind the word *nigger* to the word *nigga* is a tenuous and futile argument. I most closely align with the baptism ideology because I believe the word can never be harmless due to its original use as a racial slur. I also do not agree with the idea that using the word in a private context with only Black people would constitute appropriate use because there is no way to successfully predict who might be offended by use. Additionally, using the word *nigga* in public settings with individuals of various racial backgrounds would only perpetuate the appropriation of Black culture, further perpetuating the notion of dehumanizing the experience of Black Americans and subjecting them to pop-culture property. Use of the word *nigga* is inextricably linked to race. Consciously or not, any statement, expression, or phrase that uses the word *nigga* contains a latent racial reference. Such a racially charged word is dangerous when used without intentionality or without knowledge of the word's etiology and historical existence as a racial slur. Dialogue about the word *nigga* will remain relevant for as long racism exists.

Research suggests that locating the philosophical assumptions undergirding a researcher's philosophical paradigm is essential for clearly communicating a study's purpose, methods, conclusions, and criteria of quality (Ponterotto, 2005). To articulate my philosophical assumptions for the current study, I borrow Greene's (2007) concept of a mental model, which describes the set of assumptions, understandings, predispositions, and values and beliefs. "Mental models influence how we craft our work in terms of what we choose to study and how

we frame, design, and implement a given inquiry" (Greene, p. 12). I adhere to a constructivist/interpretivist paradigm in that there are multiple, apprehendable, constructed realities that are equally valid (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Ponterotto, 2005) as well as a post-positivist paradigm, as "social science inquiry should be objective" and "real causes of social scientific outcomes can be determined reliably and validly" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, p. 14).

I believe there are multiple ways of knowing an ontological object. In the current study, my ontological assumptions are that I do not believe that there is only one way to understand the reality in which use of the word *nigga* exists. This means that my philosophical beliefs about the nature of the social world in which the word *nigga* is used consists of individuals who conceptualize use of the word differently. The nature of the current study was to further understand how use varies among African Americans. Thus, mixed methodology allows for an understanding of the various facets in the social world (Shweder, 1999), and the ability to investigate the different realities.

Mixed methods studies allow researchers to combine both qualitative and quantitative approaches into a single study's methodology (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2008). If I were to take a purist approach and make the current research project a monomethod study, then I would lose the ability capture the rich use of language and how African Americans conceptualize their racial identity attitudes around use of the word *nigga* (Plano Clark & Creswell). Because empirical research about the word *nigga* is largely absent, I believe that both quantitative and qualitative methods should be used to approach use of the n-word pluralistically, providing depth and context to participants' understandings.

Participants

The participants in this study were 285 (119 men, 164 women, 1 transgender, and 1 did not report gender) self-identified as Black from a nationwide sample. There were 211 participants who indicated they were college students and 70 participants who stated they were not college students (4 participants skipped the question). Two-hundred-and-sixteen participants provided the name of their institution, for a total of 111 different institutions. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 59 ($M = 27.01$, $SD = 8.146$). Two-hundred-and-thirty-eight (85.6%) indicated they were Black/African American, 15 (5.4%) stated they were Caribbean/Caribbean American, 10 (3.6%) identified as African, 7 (2.5%) indicated their background as mixed ethnic, 4 (1.4%) said they were Nigerian, 3 (1.1%) indicated they are Nigerian American, 1 (0.4%) identified as Ugandan, and 7 (2.5%) did not indicate a primary ethnic background. An overwhelming majority ($n = 243$, 86.8%) identified as Christian. The majority of the participants indicated that they were somewhat religious or spiritual ($n = 101$, 35.9%) or very religious or spiritual ($n = 121$, 43.1%). Over half ($n = 156$, 54.9%) were raised in an urban environment. About one third ($n = 98$, 34.5%) were raised in a suburban environment.

Measures

Conceptualization for use of the word *nigga*. To address my first research purpose in describing African Americans' perceptions of the word *nigga*, participants were first asked: "At this point in time, do you agree with use of the word *nigga*?" Participants had the opportunity to answer a) yes, b) no, or c) both yes and no. Then, in essay format, participants were asked who they think should be able to use the word *nigga* and if they personally use the word. The essay prompt was developed through deliberate intent to provide participants with an avenue to voice

how they conceptualize use of the word *nigga*. This intent aligns with my transformative-emancipatory paradigmatic approach because I placed importance on the lived experiences of the participants (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2008).

I asked participants three questions that I used to assess their conceptualizations. The first question asked if participants have ever heard the word *nigga* used (with response choices of yes, no, I can't remember). The responses to this question were helpful in determining how applicable subsequent items about use of the word *nigga* could be. The second question asked participants what the word *nigga* means to them. Two-hundred-and-seventy-three participants provided brief, open-ended answers. Knowing how participants' defined the word was important in understanding how each participant creates linguistic meaning for the word. The third question asked participants if they have ever used the word *nigga* (with response choices of yes, no, I can't remember). These 227 participants then had the opportunity to briefly describe the situation or context of the last time they used it. It was helpful to know if use varied across situations and/or contexts.

Linguistic ideologies and the word *nigga*. Descriptive sentences were created to summarize the major argument for each of five linguistic ideologies as they are applied to use of the word *nigga*. The perspectives were reviewed and edited after consulting with a research team of experts familiar with African American Psychology, racial identity attitudes, and linguistic ideologies. Participants were asked to endorse or reject the acceptability for use of the word *nigga* as it relates to each of the five linguistic ideologies included in this investigation. Specifically, participants were first asked to read the five linguistic ideology perspectives, then rate their responses using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). For example, one linguistic ideology reads:

The word *nigga* can have different meanings depending on the social situation or cultural context in which it is used. Thus, the meaning of the word *nigga* varies, and there is no universal manner in which it is used. For example, "What's up, my *nigga*?" may be deemed appropriate when used by an African American but not when used by a White American (Indexicality).

In Appendix B, I provide the complete survey, which includes all five linguistic ideologies.

To score the linguistic ideologies items, I calculated separate scores for each of the five linguistic ideologies items. Higher scores on the linguistic ideologies item reflect higher levels of endorsement for the specific linguistic ideology.

The Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS). The CRIS, based on Cross's expanded Nigrescence Model (Cross & Vandiver, 2002), was used to measure participants' racial identity attitudes. The six subscales are comprised of 40 items and include Pre-Encounter Assimilation (PA; e.g., "I am not so much a member of a racial group, as I am an American"); Pre-Encounter Miseducation (PM; e.g., "Blacks place more emphasis on having a good time than on hard work"); Pre-Encounter Self-Hatred (PSH; e.g., "Privately, I sometimes have negative feelings about being Black"); Immersion-Emersion Anti-White (IEAW; e.g., "I have a strong feeling of hatred and disdain for all White people"); Internalization Afrocentric (IA; e.g., "I see and think about things from an Afrocentric perspective"); and Internalization Multiculturalist Inclusive (IMCI; e.g., "As a multiculturalist, I am connected to many groups [Hispanic, Asian Americans, Whites, Jews, gay men, lesbians, etc.]"). Responses for the CRIS are rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Reliability estimates for scores on the CRIS subscales have ranged from .76 (IMCI and PM) to .88 (PSH and IEAW) and .89 (PM; Vandiver, Fhagen-Smith, Cokley, Cross, & Worrell, 2001; Worrell et al., 2006; Whittaker & Neville, 2010) for college students and .70 (PSH) to .85 (IA) for adults (Worrell, Vandiver, Cross, & Fhagen-Smith, 2004; Whittaker & Neville, 2010). The CRIS's subscales are

supported by both exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, and factors ranged from .50 to .90 (Vandiver et al., 2001; Vandiver, Cross, Worrell, & Fhagen-Smith, 2002). CRIS scores have been shown to be independent of social desirability and the big five personality factors, and only PSH was found to have a meaningful (i.e., > .30) correlation with self-esteem (Vandiver et al., 2002).

There is also convergent validity support for the CRIS (Whittaker & Neville, 2010; Vandiver et al., 2002). Subscale scores are also related to scale scores on the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997) in theoretically expected ways. For example, PA scores are positively correlated with the humanist (commonalities among humans) scores on the MIBI and negatively correlated with centrality (salience of an African American identity) and nationalist scores (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998; Worrell, Vandiver, Cross, & Fhagen-Smith, 2004).

To score the CRIS, I followed standard CRIS scoring guidelines. Specifically, 30 of the 40 items comprise the six CRIS subscales (Pre-Encounter Assimilation, Pre-Encounter Miseducation, Pre-Encounter Self-Hatred, Immersion-Emersion Anti-White, Internalization Afrocentric, and Internalization Multiculturalist Inclusive) and the six subscales each have scores; there is not a global CRIS score. I summed each subscale's five items to obtain scores ranging from 5 to 35. Higher scores reflect stronger endorsements of the specified attitudes. Per Worrell, Vandiver, Cross, and Fhagen-Smith's (2004) request, I report the internal consistency estimates for subscale scores (see Table 2).

Contextual endorsement for use of the word *nigga*. I explored appropriateness of use of the word *nigga* across 10 unique contextual settings (e.g., It is okay to use the word *nigga* while talking with (Black/NON-Black) friends at someone's home). Special attention was given

to (1) differentiate use among a group of Black friends from a group of non-Black friends and (2) provide settings which ranged from private/formal (e.g., a place of worship/someone's home) to public (e.g., playing a sport). Participants were also asked if it is okay to use the word *nigga* while singing the lyrics to a song; no further details for that setting were given. Participants were asked to rate their responses using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). For the total score, I totaled and averaged the scores across contextual settings. Higher scores indicate stronger endorsement for the word *nigga*.

The 10 contextual settings were divided into two major categories based on the race of the speaker: Black and Non-Black. After that, each major category was divided based on the nature of the setting: public and private. Thus, there were four categories in total: (a) Black Public, (b) Black Private, (c) Non-Black Public, and (d) Non-Black Private. Five settings were designated as public: grocery store, playing a sport, television show/movie, classroom discussions, and business meeting. An additional five settings were designated as private: place of worship, friend's home, car, Skype or a similar video medium, and cellular text conversation. With four categories and five settings, there were a total of 20 types of responses. I assigned point values for each of the responses (*strongly disagree* was worth 1 point and *strongly agree* was worth 5 points).

To explore contextual endorsement for use of the word *nigga*, I first conducted an exploratory factor analysis on the contextual endorsement for use of the word *nigga* across 20 different contexts. Prior to conducting the main principal components analysis, I examined two indicators to determine whether the sample was appropriate for such analysis. I used the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin index (KMO; .92), which exceeded the suggested value of .6 (Kaiser, 1974). This indicated that the sample was appropriate for analysis. Additionally, the Bartlett's Test of

Sphericity (Bartlett, 1954) was significant ($p \leq .000$), which indicated that these data do not produce an identity matrix and are thus approximately multivariate normal and acceptable for factor analysis.

I factor analyzed the contextual endorsement of the word nigga items I created for this investigation. I used standard and accepted factor analysis procedures (Worthington & Whittaker, 2006). Specifically, I conducted a Primary Components Analysis (PCA) followed by an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to explore the factor structure of the items. I examined two, three, and four-factor solutions, all of which met the eigenvalue criteria (i.e., eigenvalue > 1.0; Kaiser, 1958); however, an examination of the scree plot suggested a three-factor solution appeared to be the best fit for the data. I then conducted an EFA using a PCA extraction. Additionally, I used a varimax rotation because I wanted to maximize the dispersion of loadings within the factors. Subsequently, items with cross-loadings greater than .40 were omitted.

Three factors accounted for 79.18% of the variance ($N = 253$). Factor 1, accounting for 55.38% of the variance, included 7 items referring to Black users of the word across the various public and private settings. I named this factor "Black Use." A sample item is "It is okay to use the word '*nigga*' in the following settings…Talking with Black friends at someone's home." Factor 2, accounting for 16.25% of the variance, included 7 items referring to non-Black users of the word across the various public and private settings. Based on racial backgrounds of the speakers in each of the settings, I decided to name this factor "Non-Black Use." A sample item is "It is okay to use the word '*nigga*' in the following settings…Talking with NON-Black friends via Skype or a similar video medium." Factor 3, accounting for 7.57% of the variance, included 4 items. Based on the nature of 2 settings, I decided to name this factor "Public Use." A sample

item is "It is okay to use the word '*nigga*' in the following settings…in a formal setting, such as a company business meeting with Black coworkers."

Table 1

Contextual endorsement of the word nigga *factor loadings*

	Component		
	1 – Black Use	2 – Non-Black Use	3 – Public Use
Black Car	**.94**	.18	.06
Black Text	**.91**	.20	.11
Black Skype	**.93**	.23	.16
Black Home	**.90**	.18	.10
Black Sport	**.84**	.27	.17
Black TV Show or Movie	**.80**	.28	.17
Black Store	**.70**	.38	.33
Non-Black Car	.24	**.88**	.25
Non-Black Skype	.27	**.88**	.22
Non-Black Text	.22	**.87**	.30
Non-Black Home	.27	**.87**	.23
Non-Black Sport	.24	**.86**	.32
Non-Black Store	.23	**.78**	.38
Non-Black TV Show or Movie	.37	**.65**	.26
Black Business	.05	.29	**.85**
Non-Black Business	-.03	.31	**.85**
Black Classroom	.37	.21	**.61**
Non-Black Classroom	.16	.39	**.60**

N = 253

Interviews with prominent cultural figures. To help answer the second research question and get an in-depth account of the connection between linguistic ideologies and the general understanding of the word *nigga*, I conducted interviews with two prominent cultural figures. Philosopher and public intellectual Dr. Cornel West has written several books about race and social justice (*The Rich and the Rest of Us*, 2012; *Democracy Matters,* 2005; *Race Matters,* 1994) in the United States. Lonnie Rashid Lynn Jr., aka "Common", is a pioneering hip-hop artist and is often critical of U.S. race relations and social conditions in his lyrics. The interview with Dr. West was conducted in his office at Union Theological Seminary and due to schedule

limitations, the interview with Common was conducted over the phone. The mixing of these qualitative data with the quantitative data from the scales align with my identified mixed method paradigmatic stance.

Demographics sheet. A 15 item demographic questionnaire was created for this study and included questions about participants' age, gender, educational background, parents' educational background, racial and ethnic background, what type of environment they spent most of their childhood and adolescent years, the racial/ethnic backgrounds of people in their inner circle, religious background, level of religiosity/spirituality, and socioeconomic status.

Procedure

Participants were recruited from public and private institutions of higher education across the country in multiple ways: student organizations that were self-identified with ideals to directly support African American and Black members, Black Greek fraternities and sororities, and African American student email Listservs. I also recruited participants using social media networks, such as Facebook. I received IRB approval for human subjects and the treatment of participants was in accordance with the ethical standards of the American Psychological Association.

All survey participants were given the option to be entered into a lottery to win one of four $50 cash prizes. Participants were asked to complete the survey on an individual basis to allow for more genuineness, privacy, and anonymity. In the informed consent form, participants were reminded that the nature of the experiment is to investigate African American college students' conceptualizations of the n-word. The four $50 cash prize winners were randomly

selected approximately three weeks after final data collection was completed. Winners were notified via email.

The interview with Dr. Cornell West was arranged through the Executive Director of the Common Ground Foundation. I conducted the interview in Dr. West's office at Union Theological Seminary in New York, NY. Dr. West was identified for an interview because of his expertise in race and philosophy broadly and because he recorded a dialogue on the N-word. The interview lasted approximately 40 minutes. Dr. West volunteered his time, and thus, was not monetarily compensated.

I also conducted the interview with Common through my professional relationship with the Common Ground Foundation. I scheduled the date and time with his executive assistant. We were originally scheduled to conduct an in-person interview, but due to time conflicts, we completed a phone interview. Common was identified to interview because of his expertise as an artist and musician; it seemed important to gain the perspective of a hip-hop artist given the contested use of the N-word in rap/hip-hop music. The interview lasted about 60 minutes. Common volunteered his time, and thus, was not monetarily compensated.

Mixing Methods Map

In this section, I discuss the manner in which I mixed methods. As shown in Figure 1, I first collected data using a web-based survey that contained quantitative items as well as open-ended questions. Interviews with two prominent cultural figures were also part of the data collection process. After data collection, I integrated the survey and interview data to help me answer the research questions. Finally, I presented an integrated discussion of the findings.

Figure 1

Mixing methods map
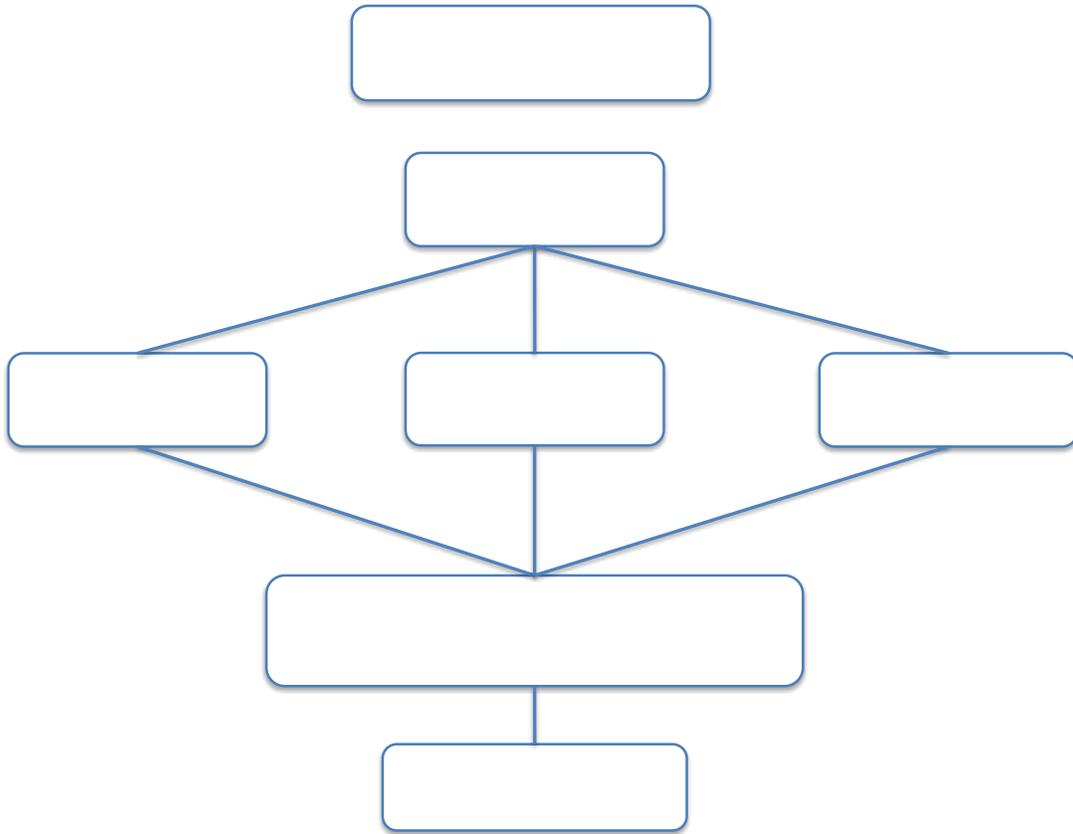
Chapter IV

Results

Preliminary Analysis

In this section, I describe data cleaning and preliminary analyses. First, I checked for missing data. If an observation had more than 15% of missing data on one scale, then it was not included in the analysis for that scale. If an observation had less than 15% of missing data, then series means replacement was used. I used series mean replacement for the missing values with less than 15% of missing data on a given scale. Using the 15% criteria noted, I deleted several observations on specific scales: 5 cases were deleted for linguistic ideologies scales, 30 cases for the CRIS, and 32 cases for contextual use of the word *nigga* scale. I examined and identified outliers by using boxplots. SPSS identified 4 outliers for the Performative linguistic ideology, 4 for CRIS-PSH, 9 for CRIS-IEAW, 4 for CRIS-IMCI, 14 for Blacks Usage, and 4 for Public. However, after I standardized the scores for the outliers using z-scores, there were no scores greater than 4.0. To explore whether the continuous variables met the assumptions of normality, I examined the skewness and kurtosis of the variables. Appendix A provides an overview of the skewness and kurtosis statistics for these variables. The initial CRIS-IEAW did not meet assumptions of normality. To address this, I transformed the subscale using the square root transformation. After the transformation, the skewness statistic was 1.51 and kurtosis was 1.76, both of which were acceptable.

Descriptive Information

This section provides descriptive information for items in the survey. All of the participants indicated they have heard the word *nigga* used. Two-hundred-and-twenty-seven

(79.9%) participants reported that they have used the word. Only 8.5% of participants

exclusively agreed with use of the word *nigga*, while 41.5% did not agree with use and 50.0%

both agreed and disagreed. I provide this information to highlight African Americans'

perceptions of the word *nigga* as it relates to the themes that emerged from the open-ended item

designed to describe the context of the last time they used (if applicable) the word *nigga*.

To obtain a general understanding for participants' endorsement for use of the word

nigga, I first asked "it is ok for [Black…Non-Black] people to use the word 'nigga'". About 40%

of participants disagreed with Black people using the word *nigga* while about 75% of

participants disagreed with Non-Black people using the word.

Table 2 provides an overview for the means and standard deviations for the continuous

variables.

Table 2

Means, standard deviations, and alpha coefficients for continuous variables

	M	*SD*	Range	α
CRIS-PA	13.60	7.39	5 – 35	.88
CRIS-PM	16.67	6.89	5 – 35	.84
CRIS-PSH	10.23	6.23	5 – 35	.80
CRIS-IEAW	8.13	4.62	5 – 35	.88
CRIS-IA	16.41	6.93	5 – 35	.88
CRIS-IMCI	29.11	5.04	5 – 35	.82
Indexicality	3.56	1.41	1 – 5	--
Personalism	2.99	1.38	1 – 5	--
Reshaping	2.77	1.36	1 – 5	--
Baptismal	3.22	1.36	1 – 5	--
Performative	3.66	1.06	1 – 5	--
Black Use	2.67	1.27	1 – 5	.97
Non-Black Use	1.80	1.01	1 – 5	.97
Public Use	1.61	.75	1 – 5	.83

Note: PA = Pre-Encounter Assimilation; PM = Pre-Encounter Miseducation; PSH = Pre-Encounter Self-Hatred; IEAW = Immersion-Emersion Anti-White; IA = Internalization Afrocentric; IMCI = Internalization Multiculturalist Inclusive.

Table 3 shows that the correlations between linguistic ideologies as continuous variables (i.e., based on a Likert-type scale from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*) and the dichotomous variables (i.e., based on the coding from participants' open-ended responses). For the most part, the descriptions created for the linguistic ideologies were consistent with how participants autonomously expressed their perspectives. The correlations were in the expected direction; proponent linguistic ideologies were positively correlated with each other and opponents linguistic ideologies were also positively correlated with each other. It is interesting that with the exception of Reshaping, the highest correlation did not necessarily correspond with the matching ideology. This may be because participants responded to the linguistic ideologies descriptions slightly different from the open-ended responses. In other words, participants may have reacted differently to the provided descriptions of the linguistic ideologies than they did when asked to provide their own views about use of the word *nigga* in their open-ended responses. Reshaping may have been consistent enough between both the descriptions and the prompt for the open-ended responses to garner similar results. Similarly, the description of Personalism may not have evoked enough emotion to resonate with participants and elicit the desired response that captured their belief about intent being impactful on appropriate use of the word *nigga*.

Table 3

Continuous and dichotomous linguistic ideologies Spearman correlations

	Indexicality Dichotomous	Personalism Dichotomous	Reshaping Dichotomous	Baptismal Dichotomous	Performative Dichotomous
Indexicality Continuous	.44**	.06	.26**	-.28**	-.23**
Personalism Continuous	.40**	.08	.24**	-.30**	-.18**
Reshaping Continuous	.46**	.08	.33**	-.40**	-.17*
Baptismal Continuous	-.30**	-.05	-.20**	.25**	.08
Performative Continuous	-.46**	-.13	-.27**	.35**	.16**

Note: *p < .05. **p < .01.

Correlation Matrix. Table 4 shows correlations between age, gender, CRIS subscales,

linguistic ideologies, and factors of acceptance for use of the word *nigga*.

Table 4

Correlation matrix

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1. Age	-															
2. Gender	.11	-														
3. CRIS-PA	-.06	-.15*	-													
4. CRIS-PM	-.19**	-.26**	.32**	-												
5. CRIS-PSH	-.19**	.03	.19**	.35**	-											
6. CRIS-IEAW	-.12	-.12	-.19**	.09	.15*	-										
7. CRIS-IA	-.03	.04	-.27**	.10	.12	.40	-									
8. CRIS-IMCI	-.05	.04	-.02	-.08	-.02	-.28**	-.02	-								
9. Indexicality	-.19**	-.04	.00	-.04	.00	.11	-.03	.07	-							
10. Personalism	-.06	-.08	.19**	.16*	.18**	.02	-.05	.09	.07	-						
11. Reshaping	-.05	-.06	-.10	-.06	-.10	.02	-.07	.11	.23**	-.09	-					
12. Baptismal	.08	.10	-.10	.06	.01	-.13	.13	.02	-.55**	-.14*	-.22**	-				
13. Performative	-.04	-.06	-.03	.01	-.06	-.12	-.06	.03	-.26**	-.11	-.13*	.17*	-			
14. Black Use	-.22**	-.07	.02	.04	.08	.18**	-.09	.05	.64**	.14*	.36**	-.52**	-.28**	-		
15. Non-Black Use	-.08	.00	.22**	.05	.05	.00	-.14	-.05	.32**	.24**	.05	-.35**	-.08	.56**	-	
16. Public Use	-.05	-.07	.12	.02	.13	.10	-.05	-.15*	.24**	.18**	.07	-.30**	-.11	.41**	.64**	-

Note: *p* < .05. **p* < .01. PA = Pre-Encounter Assimilation; PM = Pre-Encounter Miseducation; PSH = Pre-Encounter Self-Hatred; IEAW = Immersion-Emersion Anti-White; IA = Internalization Afrocentric; IMCI = Internalization Multiculturalist Inclusive. Each CRIS subscale score can range from 5 to 35. Black Use = the racial background of the speaker was Black. Non-Black Use = the racial background of the speaker was Non-Black. Public-Use = the word *nigga* was used in a public setting.

Primary Research Question: African Americans' Perceptions of the Word *Nigga*

The first research purpose was designed to describe African Americans' perceptions of the word *nigga*. To address this purpose, I conducted three general types of analyses. First, I explored the open-ended data for the question: "We are interested in better understanding who you think should be able to use the word and if you personally use the word. There is no right or wrong answer. Please write AT LEAST 4 sentences, being as descriptive as possible. Please provide examples in your response as possible." I was primarily interested in whether the open-ended responses were consistent with the five linguistic ideologies targeted in this study and if additional linguistic ideologies emerged that were not captured by the five ideologies.

Second, I investigated participants' definition of the word *nigga*. I place the findings from the open-ended responses throughout this section in conversation with individual interviews with Dr. Cornel West and Common as a way to further elaborate on the key findings and to point out potential silences in the data.

Open-ended data and linguistic ideologies. I reviewed participants' responses and compared them to the five linguistic ideology definitions used in this investigation. I compared the open-ended data to the definitions of the five linguistic ideologies. I carefully read and re-read each response and identified ways in which the responses overlapped with the existing definitions and the ways in which the data extend the ideologies. On the basis of this careful analysis, I determined the data were consistent with the ideologies: Indexicality, Personalism, Reshaping, Baptismal, and Performative. I also reviewed my initial analyses with a senior scholar as a way to check potential biases. I was able to identify a sub-theme under Indexicality ideology, which I titled *Exclusively for or Primarily by Blacks*. Responses noted that use was only deemed appropriate when used to describe Black people or when used by Blacks.

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Table 5 summarizes the frequencies of each of the five linguistic ideologies and the one Indexicality subtheme.

Table 5

Linguistic ideologies and frequencies

Theme	Frequency (%)
Proponent Ideologies	
Indexicality	139 (54.9)
Exclusively for or Primarily among Blacks	63 (45.3)
Reshaping	44 (17.4)
Personalism	19 (7.5)
Opponent Ideologies	
Baptismal	124 (49.0)
Performative	69 (27.3)

Thematic analysis of meanings of the word *nigga*. I assessed participants' responses for the thematic analysis of unique definitions that were offered. "Themes that emerge from the informants' stories are pieced together to form a comprehensive picture of their collective experience" (Aronson, 1994). Specifically, I thematically coded participants' essays to further understand their conceptualizations of the word *nigga*. Taylor and Bogdan (1989) reported that themes are derived from such patterns as "conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, feelings, or folk sayings and proverbs" (p.131). Based on participants' descriptions of their use of the word *nigga*, I looked for the particular vocabulary and activities that reoccur across responses. When participants' responses were coded into one theme, it did not disallow the responses from being coded into another theme. In addition to coding the data myself, a fellow graduate student and a tenured Counseling Psychology/African American Studies faculty member independently coded the data. Discrepancies were handled via consensus. Remaining

consistent with my transformative-emancipatory mixed methods paradigmatic approach, I used both the thematic codes from the open-ended responses as well as responses from the survey's scales to analyze the data about participants' conceptualizations of the word *nigga*.

As I read through participants' responses, new themes were created when content varied from pre-existing themes. My overall goal was to capture unique themes based on various meanings, but to also conceptualize the meanings in such a way where I would not have too many themes. Specifically, I combined and catalogued related patterns into sub-themes. The following nine themes emerged from the open-ended definitions of the word *nigga* 1) *Friend/Term of Endearment/Familiar/Salutation*, 2) *People*, 3) *Popular culture use*, 4) *Depends on Context; Who Uses It/How It is Used/Intention*, 5) *No Meaning/Other*, 6) *Stereotypical Behavior/Negative Connotations/Derogatory/Ignorance*, 7) *Reflective of Speaker's Ignorance/Lack of Education*, 8) *Nigger/Derivative of Nigger*, and 9) *Slave/Savage/Prisoner/Subhuman/Accepting of Subordinate Group Status*. Of the nine themes, one theme represented a positive meaning (+), four themes represented a neutral meaning (n), and four themes represented a negative meaning (-). The description and example of each theme is provided in Table 6.

Stereotypical Behavior/Negative Connotations/Derogatory/Ignorance (-). Almost half of the responses indicated that the word *nigga* represents negative connotations and/or meanings. *Nigga* was defined as a being degrading, derogatory, and/or disrespectful towards the target. According to this perspective, the word also conveyed racist, oppressive, and/or hateful ideals. These responses characterized *nigga* as behavior that some considered lazy, loud, violent, "ghetto," or "hood." A few participants identified this behavior as "stereotypical" of Black people, while others did not reference a racial background.

People (n). About two-in-five participants stated that the word *nigga* described or referenced a person or people. Four subthemes emerged for the type of *People* the word *nigga* typically refers to: 1) Black man - describes or represents the identity of a Black man and is used by either the Black man himself or by others, 2) Black/African American - describes or represents the identity of a Black person, 3) Black youth - may describe Black youth, and 4) Noun/Person, place, or thing/man/woman (no race specified) - Responses included acknowledgement of the word *nigga* as a noun. Additionally, participants said the word *nigga* is a person, place, or thing. *Nigga* in this theme described or represented the identity of a person, more times than not a male, with no acknowledgement of race.

Friend/Term of Endearment/Familiar/Salutation (+). Less than a third of the responses identified the word *nigga* as having a positive meaning. In these responses, the word *nigga* was defined as a term of endearment between two or more parties. *Nigga* in this theme also referred to a salutation among friends or familiar parties.

Depends on Context – Who Uses It/How It is Used/Intention (n). A little over 10 percent of participants identified that use of the word *nigga* depends on the context, who uses it, how it is used, and the intentions with which speakers used of the word in various contexts.

Popular Culture Use (n). Less than 10 percent of participants defined that the word *nigga* as a slang word used to evoke feelings of levity or to otherwise add emphasis to a sentence or phrase. *Nigga* can also be used as a music or rap lyric.

No Meaning/Other (n). Seven-out-of-ten participants argue that the word *nigga* is void of meaning and may serve instead as colloquial jargon or conversational filler.

Reflective of Speaker's Ignorance/Lack of Education (-). A few participants stated that the use of the word *nigga* resulted from ignorance or lack of education on the part of the speaker.

Nigger/Derivative of Nigger (-). A handful of participants considered the word *nigga* as being synonymous with the word *nigger*. Participants also reported that the word *nigga* may be a derivative of the word *nigger*.

Slave/Savage/Prisoner/Subhuman/Internalization of Subordinate Group Status (-). Nearly ten percent of participants said that the word *nigga* served to dehumanize the target. *Nigga* also referred to a slave or someone imprisoned. Participants expressed that the target of the word might internalize a subordinate group status, thinking they deserved to be treated as inferior.

Table 6

Themes, examples of themes, and frequency of themes for meanings of the word nigga

Theme	Example	Frequency (%)
Positive Meanings (+) Friend/Term of Endearment/Familiar/Salutation	"Today, to me, the word nigga is definitely looked at as synonymous to words such as dude, man, homie, etc. In no way, shape, or form, do I think about its prior meaning during the time of slavery when I use it."	81 (29.7)
People	"The word is a derogatory word meaning black man, which has several connotations that contain the history of brutality and disrespect."	110 (40.3)
Neutral Meanings (n) Depends on Context; Who Uses It/How It is Used/Intention	"The meaning depends on who is using it and the context."	31 (11.4)
Popular Culture Use	"To me it is slang that is meant to be a more colloquial, acceptable version of nigg**."	22 (8.1)
No Meaning/Other	"I don't know. I use it without really thinking of a meaning. But more and more the word is causing an internal conflict for me."	19 (7.0)
Negative Meanings (-) Stereotypical Behavior/Negative Connotations/Derogatory/Ignorance	"'Nigga' refers to a friend or is used as a salutation. It's also used to refer to individuals, specifically Blacks, who behave according to stereotypes. They're lazy, loud, violent, etc."	121 (44.3)
Nigger/Derivative of Nigger	"People say it's different from nigger, but I view it as the same thing"	17 (6.2)
Reflective of Speaker's Ignorance/Lack of Education	"I think it means that the person using it is ignorant of the word's origins, ignorant of how the use of the word makes them look, and disrespectful."	6 (2.2)

Context in which the word *nigga is used*. I also used thematic analysis to help explore

answers to "What does the word *nigga* mean to you?" and "…describe the situation or context of

the last time you used the word *nigga*."

The following nine themes emerged from the content of the responses to the question "…please BRIEFLY describe the situation or context of the last time you used the word 'nigga.'": Of the nine themes that emerged from the 225 responses, two themes represented a positive meaning (+), five themes represented a neutral meaning (n), and two themes represented a negative meaning (-).

Informally or casually with/about friends/family (n). Almost half of the participants said that the word *nigga* could be used among friends or family to refer to or about one another in settings that are perceived as informal or casual.

Colloquial use (+). Close to a third of participants indicated that they used the word *nigga* in a lighthearted manner to convey a sense of playfulness. The word *nigga* was also used by a speaker to indicate endearing qualities about/to the listener. The following phrases capture this perspective: "this *nigga*," "my *nigga*," "*nigga* please," or "*niggas*…shake my head."

Greeting (n). Only about 6% participants noted that they have used the word *nigga* in the context of a greeting to a friend or familiar party. A popular phrase used within this theme as a greeting was "What's up, my *nigga*?"

People (n). About two-in-ten participants stated they used the word *nigga* in a setting to describe or reference a person or people. There were four possible subthemes under *People*: 1) Referred to African American men, 2) referred to Blacks/African Americans, 3) about or with men (no race specified) – *nigga* was used to reference men in various settings and situations. The race of the man or men targeted was not mentioned, and 4) as a name/noun to describe or acknowledge a person – *nigga* was used as a word to generally describe other individuals, including people whom the speaker may not know.

To describe unfavorable/ghetto/ignorant behavior (may or may not include race)/ derogatory/dismissive/disdain (-). One-in-five participants said that they used the word *nigga* to describe something they characterized as unfavorable, ghetto, and/or ignorant behavior. It may or may not have included the racial background of the target. *Nigga* was used in the context of choosing to dismiss or express disdain for another individual.

Song lyrics (n). Close to one-in-ten participants voiced that the word *nigga* is used as a rap word in a song or rap lyric and may subsequently be recited.

Previously used in earlier years of life/used by or during youth (n). A handful of participants reported that their use of the word *nigga* occurred in the past. Some participants noted the duration of time that has passed (e.g., "years ago") while others were vague, for example: "I know that I have, but it's been at least 5 years since I've used it. I'm unsure of the context."

Discussing usage/opinions of the word (n). Less than ten percent of participants believed that the word *nigga* is limited to discussions about the word itself or when individuals voice their opinions about the word.

With negative emotion such as anger or frustration (-). Twelve participants reported that they used the word *nigga* when they experienced emotions such as anger or frustration with an individual or situation.

Table 7

Themes, examples of themes, and frequency of themes for contextual use of the word nigga

Theme	Example	Frequency (%)
Positive Contexts (+)		
Colloquial Use	"In a joke. For example, 'nigga please!'"	63 (28.0)
Greeting	"If I greet one of my friends I say "what's up my nigga."	14 (6.2)
Neutral Contexts (n)		
Informally or Casually With/About Friends/Family	"used it in context while speaking to friends informally"	103 (45.8)
People	"I most recently used to word to refer to African American males."	47 (20.9)
Song Lyrics	"I was rapping along with a song I was listening to."	23 (10.2)
Previously Used in Earlier Years of Life/Used by or during Youth	"The last time I used the word I was a Sophomore in High School. I am now a Junior in college. I just used to use a lot of foul words and was merely speaking to a group of friends about normal stuff that hormonal young men talk about."	16 (7.1)
Discussing Usage/Opinions of the Word	"Used when talking about a time someone called me a 'nigga'. I don't use it to refer to friends, or really at all, except for the purposes of discussing the use of the word."	13 (5.8)
Negative Contexts (-)		
To Describe Unfavorable/Ghetto/Trifling/Ignorant Behavior (May or may not include race)/Derogatory/Dismissive/Disdain/"Shaking My Head"	"I don't remember the exact time but I probably said something like 'niggas shaking my head' in reference to an ignorant nigga moment I witnessed"	44 (19.6)
With Negative Emotion Such as Anger/Frustration	"I used the word because i was angry."	12 (5.3)

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Interview with Dr. Cornell West. The interview with Dr. West focused largely on my

conceptualizations of linguistic ideologies and how I applied them to usage of the word *nigga*.

After I spent time summarizing each ideology, Dr. West stated:

> I think you covered the bases in terms of the options and alternatives. What the
> real possibilities are. And of course, we're speaking at the normative level in
> terms of what *ought* [emphasis his] to be the case…It is important to be clear as to
> why one thinks this *ought*, and I'm underlining the *ought* for the normative.

> When asked if and how the linguistic ideologies correlate with proponents' and

opponents' use of the word *nigga*, Dr. West shared the following:

> I've never used the word. It's just not part of my language, my lexicon. And it
> doesn't make me better than anybody else. It's just something I've opted for, for
> 59 years. My brother doesn't use it. My parents didn't use it. My sisters don't use
> it. It's just this word that has this weight that's tied to terrorizing folk and
> traumatizing folk. And stigmatizing folk not just physically, or socially or
> politically, but linguistically and psychically and spiritually.

Dr. West's rationale for not using the word *nigga* is consistent with the Baptismal linguistic

ideology; the word *nigga* can never be harmless because of its original meaning as a racial slur.

> Although Dr. West personally does not use the word, he mentioned there are contexts in

which it is acceptable for people from any racial or ethnic background to use the word *nigga*; he

would "…accept it in practice if love is at the center of it." He went on to say:

> See, if Martin Luther King Jr. wants to use the word and he loves us enough that
> he's willing to die for us, that's alright with me. If Elijah Muhammad wanted to
> use it or Garvey wanted to use it, I mean these are people who I might disagree
> with their ideologies, their political ideologies. These are people who have proven
> they have a profound love for Black people. So, if they use a term for Black
> people, its endearment, because the love has already been displayed and manifest
> in a concrete way on the ground. So in that sense, if Martin came back from the
> dead or Donnie Hathaway wanted to use it, hey, if Curtis Mayfield…or if John
> Coltrane wanted to use the word everyday, it's fine with me. I'd have a smile on
> my face because my argument for a moratorium has to do with love at the center.
> And when you love people, you don't terrorize, traumatize, and stigmatize them.
> So in that sense, the indexical use or the Reshaping use, I would resonate with
> Brother Dyson or Brother Nas if one could show in one's behavior over time that

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you have been a serious lover of Black people. And it would cut the other way, too, in terms of on the vanilla side of town. You know if John Brown wanted to use the n-word, saying 'I'm dying for you n----,' I'd say, well, I think the brother loves us.

In the interview, I summarized findings from my previous research (Dodson, 2010) in which participants were more inclined to agree with use of the word *nigga* when the speaker was Black. However, Dr. West disagreed with this perspective, sharing the following:

You got many Black people that don't love Black people. Just because a Black person uses it doesn't mean they love us! Where as a John Brown, he showed he loved us. John Brown, on the vanilla side of town, showed he loved Black people more than a lot of our Black politicians…

In summary, the interview with Dr. West provided insight surrounding the use of linguistic ideologies as a viable means of investigating African Americans' perceptions of the word *nigga*. The interview also was important because Dr. West described how one's connectedness or separation with Black identity would be the influential factor for him in determining appropriate use for the word *nigga*. The content of the interview with Dr. West shared similarities to the findings from the survey. Specifically, Dr. West recognized the importance of language as it relates to expressing one's beliefs and how it can be informed by the various beliefs one holds. However, Dr. West's opinion did not necessarily correspond to African American college students' in my previous research (Dodson, 2010) or with African Americans' in the current study. Dr. West argued that acceptability for use of the word *nigga* is more informed by speakers' commitment to the betterment of the Black community than it is by their racial background.

Interview with Common. The interview with Common also provided rich detail about the use of the word *nigga* and linguistic ideologies. Common's perspective complemented Dr. West's. During our phone interview, Common shared that he supports use, largely because he

believes "the word *nigga* does not mean the same thing it once meant. It's not used in the same context as it once was to lessen someone as a human being." This was similar to participants' responses that were coded for Indexicality; the word *nigga* can have different meanings depending on the social situation or cultural context in which it is used.

Common continued on to say that his decision to use the word initially was influenced during his time as an undergraduate at a Historically Black College & University, Florida A&M University and with the rise of other hip-hop artists such as NWA (Niggas with Attitude) and A Tribe Called Quest. Common recognized the importance of language, sharing that it is a "large component in communication. Being able to communicate is not just about the words we use but important in how we use them and more importantly, the way it is conveyed and the emotionality behind it. What's at its core." Common's assertion contains the same sentiment as one of the themes for contextual use of the word *nigga* because he recognizes the emotionality behind the word. However, when asked to define the word, he offered:

> The word came from a derogatory connotation and eventually changed to become a word among Black culture. It refers to someone you know, you relate to, as a reference, and usually to a male figure. It's more of a street word, more slang than anything. You don't hear people using it in business settings.

Participants with responses coded for Reshaping shared references to the word *nigga* coming from the racial slur *nigger*. Common continued to say "Non-Blacks should not be able to use the word. We understand its origin. We've established a new meaning as a culture. When Non-Blacks use it, it doesn't feel right." This view is consistent with the Indexicality sub-theme of exclusively for or primarily among Blacks uncovered in the participants' open-ended responses.

Hypothesis 1: Linguistic Ideologies and Acceptance of the Word *Nigga*

In this study, I asserted that linguistic ideologies would be related to the acceptance of the word *nigga.* Specifically, I hypothesized (1a) that participants who had higher levels of Indexicality ideology, Personalism ideology, and Reshaping ideology would have higher levels of acceptance of the word *nigga*. Conversely, I hypothesized (1b) that participants with higher levels of Baptismal Language ideology and Performative Language ideology would have lower levels of acceptance of the word *nigga*. To explore participants' endorsement of the use of the word *nigga*, I conducted three hierarchical multiple regression analyses. To control for the potential influence of demographic variables, age and gender (dummy coded 0 = *men* and 1 = *women*) were entered into the first step. The five linguistic ideologies were entered as the second step. The three contextual factors (Black Use, Non-Black Use, and Public Use) served as the criterion variables. The findings are presented in Tables 8, 9, and 10.

Table 8

Endorsement of the word nigga – *Black Use*

	Step 1			Step 2		
	B	SE β	β	B	SE β	β
(Constant)	3.90	.37	--	2.87	.39	--
Age	-.03	.01	-.19**	-.01	.01	-.07
Gender	-.24	.16	-.09	.01	.11	.002
Indexicality	--	--	--	.17	.05	.18**
Personalism	--	--	--	.14	.05	.15
Reshaping	--	--	--	.30	.05	.32**
Baptismal	--	--	--	-.08	.04	-.09
Performative	--	--	--	-.37	.06	-.30**

Note: *p < .05. **p < .01.

Table 9

Endorsement of the word nigga – *Non-Black Use*

	Step 1			Step 2		
	B	SE β	β	B	SE β	β
(Constant)	2.24	.30	--	2.39	.42	--
Age	-.02	.01	-.11	.00	.01	.00
Gender	-.01	.13	-.00	.13	.12	.07
Indexicality	--	--	--	-.08	.05	-.11
Personalism	--	--	--	.08	.06	.11
Reshaping	--	--	--	.21	.06	.27**
Baptismal	--	--	--	-.10	.05	-.14*
Performative	--	--	--	-.27	.06	-.28**

Note: *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Table 10

Endorsement of the word nigga – *Public Use*

	Step 1			Step 2		
	B	SE β	β	B	SE β	β
(Constant)	1.80	.22	--	1.65	.34	--
Age	.00	.01	-.03	.00	.01	.04
Gender	-.07	.10	-.04	.01	.10	.01
Indexicality	--	--	--	.04	.04	.06
Personalism	--	--	--	-.02	.05	-.04
Reshaping	--	--	--	.13	.05	.23*
Baptismal	--	--	--	-.02	.04	-.03
Performative	--	--	--	-.14	.05	-.20**

Note: *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Black Use. The overall model for the Black Use subscale was significant ($F = 54.88$; $p < .001$). The model accounted for 62% of the variance. This means that the five linguistic ideologies accounted for a significant amount of variance over and above that accounted for by age and gender. There were three unique predictors of Black Use: Indexicality ideology, Reshaping ideology, and Performative ideology. There were three unique predictors in the expected direction: two of the proponent ideologies (i.e., Indexicality and Reshaping) predicted

higher acceptance of using the word *nigga* among Black individuals in private spaces and one of the opponent ideologies (i.e., Performative) was a unique predictor of lower levels of use of the n word in the same context.

Non-Black Use. The overall model for the Non-Black Use subscale was significant ($F = 13.99$; $p < .001$). The model accounted for 30% of the variance. This means that the five linguistic ideologies accounted for a significant amount of variance over and above that accounted for by age and gender. There were two unique predictors of Black Use: Reshaping ideology and Performative ideology. There was one unique predictor in the expected direction: one of the proponent ideologies (i.e., Reshaping) predicted higher acceptance of using the n word among Black individuals in private spaces and one of the opponent ideologies (i.e., Performative) was a unique predictor of lower levels of use of the word *nigga* in the same context.

Public Use. The overall model for the Public Use subscale was significant ($F = 5.75$; $p < .001$). The model accounted for 15% of the variance. This means that the five linguistic ideologies accounted for a significant amount of variance over and above that accounted for by age and gender. Similar to the Non-Black Use factor, there were two unique predictors of Public Use: Reshaping ideology and Performative ideology. There was one unique predictor in the expected direction: one of the proponent ideologies (i.e., Reshaping) predicted higher acceptance of using the word *nigga* among Black individuals in private spaces and one of the opponent ideologies (i.e., Performative) was a unique predictor of lower levels of use of the word *nigga* in the same context.

In sum, these findings collectively suggest that linguistic ideologies accounted for a significant amount of variance in participants' views of the use of the word *nigga,* over and

above age and gender. Additionally, two linguistic ideologies - Reshaping ideology and

Performative ideology - were significant, unique predictors for appropriate use of the word *nigga*

across Black/non-Black and public contextual use. As a whole, these findings support my

hypothesis, in that I posited (Hypothesis 1) participants who have higher levels of Reshaping

ideology would have higher levels of acceptance of the word, and (Hypothesis 1b) participants

with higher levels of Performative language ideology will have lower levels of acceptance of the

word *nigga* across contexts.

Hypothesis 2. Racial Identity Attitudes and Level of Endorsement of the Word *Nigga*

In this study, I proffered that there would be an association between African Americans'

racial identity attitudes and the level of endorsement of the word *nigga*. Specifically, I

hypothesized that participants' higher scores on Pre-Encounter Assimilation, Pre-Encounter

Miseducation, and Pre-Encounter Self-Hatred would be positively correlated with higher levels

of acceptance for use of the word *nigga*. Figures 2 to 4 illustrate the subscales' distribution

within each cluster. These names are reflective of the cluster and not individually based attitudes.

In order to create the desired cluster groups, I first examined the pattern of responses on

the CRIS using cluster analysis. Hair and Black (2000) stated "cluster analysis is a group of

multivariate techniques whose primary purpose is to assemble objects based on the

characteristics they possess" (p. 147). To test my hypothesis, I performed a hierarchical cluster

analysis on the six subscales of the CRIS using Ward's method. The findings from the inspection

of the dendogram three-cluster solution seemed to capture the data. I then followed-up with K-

means cluster analysis in which I specified a three-cluster solution. In this sample, cluster

profiles were interpreted and named based on standardized z-scores. Clusters ranged in size from 21 (8.2% of sample) to 154 (60.4%).

Figure 2

Separated clusters

Cluster 1: Multiculturalist
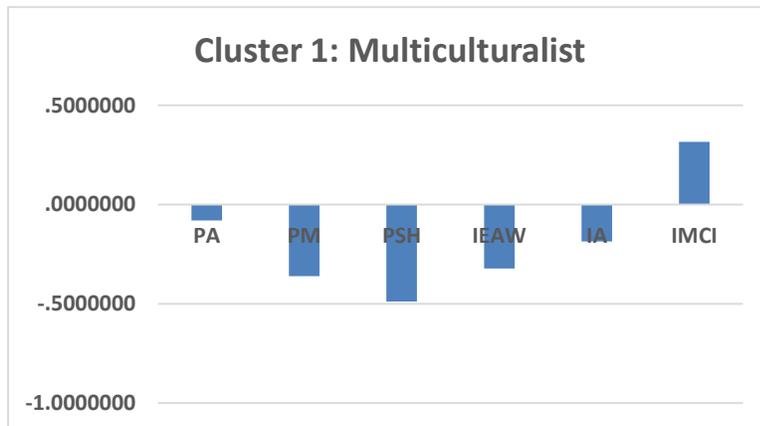
Cluster 1 (n = 154) contained the largest number of participants from the study. I named this the Multiculturalist group because the IMCI was the only elevated subscale score. Specifically, this group had higher scores on the internalization multiculturalist inclusive subscale (z = .32) and the lowest scores on the Pre-Encounter Miseducation (z = -.36), Pre-Encounter Self-Hatred (z = -.49), and Immersion-Emmersion Anti-White (z = -.32).

Figure 3

Separated clusters

Cluster 2: Anti-White
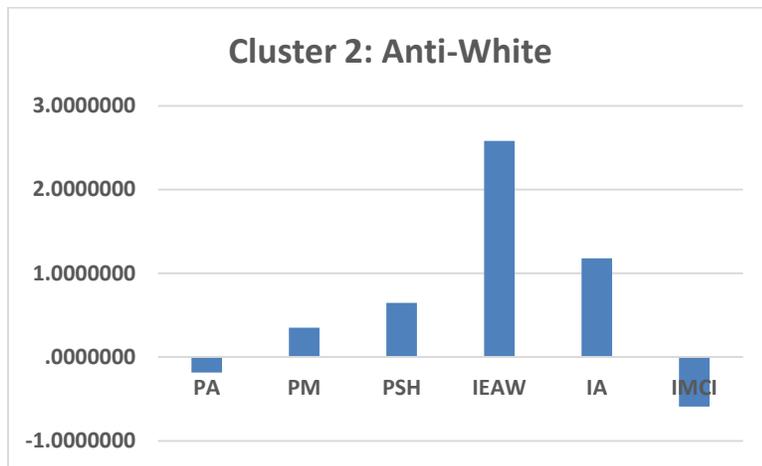
The scores for Cluster 2 ($n = 21$) received the highest subscale score for Immersion-

Emmersion Anti-White ($z = 2.58$). Thus, Cluster 2 was named Anti-White because of the

emphasis placed on a hatred for Whites. There was less endorsement for the Internalization

Afrocentric subscale ($z = 1.18$) and even less for the Internalization Multiculturalist subscale ($z =$

-.59).

Figure 4

Separated Clusters
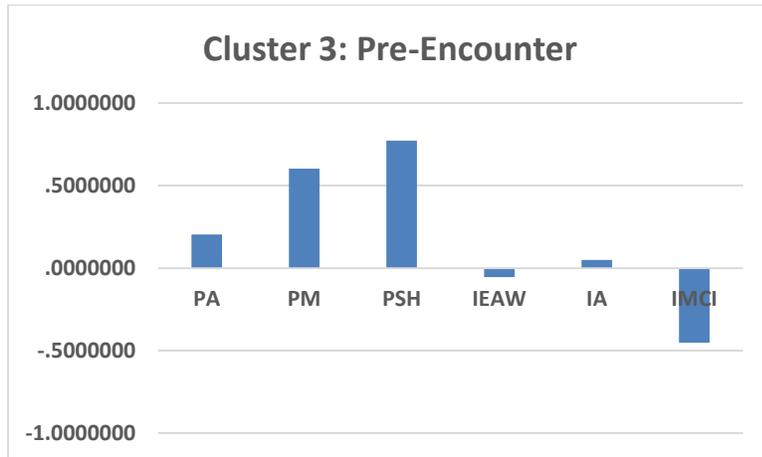
Cluster 3 ($n = 81$) was named Pre-Encounter because it had the highest overall scores for the three Pre-Encounter subscales (Assimilation, $z = .20$; Miseducation, $z = .60$, and Self-Hatred $z = .77$). These results indicate that these 81 participants largely thought of themselves as individuals and as Americans but have not began to conceptualize or engage the concept of Black identity.

Table 11 shows the three-cluster solution means and standard deviations for each of the linguistic ideologies.

Table 11

Cluster means and standard deviations for linguistic ideologies

	Cluster 1		Cluster 2		Cluster 3	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Indexicality	3.53	1.40	3.95	1.36	3.46	1.43
Personalism	2.88	1.40	3.33	1.28	3.09	1.36
Reshaping	2.78	1.39	2.86	1.32	2.70	1.34
Baptismal	3.17	1.37	3.14	1.32	3.34	1.37
Performative	3.56	1.09	3.57	.81	3.76	1.05

Note. Cluster 1 = Multiculturalist, Cluster 2 = Anti-White, Cluster 3 = Pre-Encounter

To test the second hypothesis, I conducted a one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), using the three-cluster racial identity attitudes clusters as the independent variable and the three factors of acceptance for use of the word *nigga* as the dependent variable. Wilks' Λ was not significant ($p = .32$).

Chapter V

Discussion

The word *nigga* is ubiquitous in the United States. The word is spoken in popular media as well in both pubic and private conversations. Despite its wide usage, the word is controversial given its connection to the racial epithet *nigger*, and as a result, there is debate within the African American community about whether or not the word is offensive. Although there is ongoing discussion about the term *nigga,* there is surprisingly little empirical data on African American's views about the word. The current study was designed to address the gaps in the literature by exploring African Americans' perception of the word *nigga* and more specifically the linguistic ideologies they use to support their position. In general, findings from this investigation suggest linguistic ideologies are connected to beliefs about appropriateness for use of the word *nigga*, as is the racial background of the speaker. Acceptance of and opposition to the word *nigga* was related to the selected linguistic ideologies in conceptually consistent ways. Additionally, findings shed let on the infamous "double standard" for why use of the word *nigga* may be conceptualized differently depending on the race of the speaker. .

Below, I outline the key findings for identifying participants' use of the word *nigga*, participants' perceptions of the word *nigga*, an operationalization of linguistic ideologies, linguistic ideologies and acceptance of the word *nigga*, racial identity attitudes and level of endorsement of the word *nigga*, the limitations of the study, and implications/directions for future research.

African American Participants' Use of the Word Nigga

From the descriptive information, we see support for key findings pertaining to use of the word *nigga*. Specifically, the overwhelming majority of participants previously have heard and used the word *nigga*. Nearly all participants reported having both heard and also used the word *nigga*. This aligns with what we know from the literature and observation. However, only 8.5% of participants exclusively agreed with use of the word *nigga* – 41.5% did not agree with use and 50.0% both agreed and disagreed.

Although use of the word *nigga* as a reference to identifying people was also a finding from my previous research (Dodson, 2010), results in the current study often used the word *nigga* as a major placeholder for someone's name. This finding showcases the connection between language and identity. It is of importance to note the specificity in which participants were able to articulate use of the word *nigga* as associated with Black individuals, primarily Black men. This association has larger societal implications; for example, the possibility of further perpetuating negative and racist connotations towards Black people, highlighting the strong connection between the word *nigga* and race.

When participants used the word *nigga* in a negative way, the most frequently used definition described someone's stereotypical behavior or ignorance. My findings from 2008, as well as Kennedy (2002), similarly argued that while use could be viewed as positive, many African Americans still consider use to be negative. One definition that emerged from the current study that is unique to previous literature is that a few participants stated that the use of the word *nigga* resulted from ignorance or lack of education on the part of the speaker as opposed to the target.

Similar to previous findings (Dodson, 2010), context of use of the word *nigga* matters. Findings in the current study suggested that on average, participants believed it was acceptable

for Blacks to use the word *nigga* in certain private and public contexts. This corresponds with the finding that half of the participants both agreed and disagreed with use of the word *nigga*. Conversely, participants on average thought that it was not acceptable for non-Blacks to use the word or for anyone to use the word in public spaces like in the classroom. An example of this would be White Americans using the word *nigga* as slang in music, movies, or television shows.

Participants' negative reaction to non-Blacks such as White Americans using the word *nigga* may begin to address the argument some make about a "double standard" for use of the word *nigga*. Specifically, some may question why the use of the word *nigga* by Blacks is viewed as appropriate but as inappropriate when it is used by non-Blacks. Approximately half of the participants in this study believed that not only is appropriate use of the word *nigga* contextual, but that one of the necessary contexts for appropriateness is that it is used exclusively or primarily among Blacks. However, while there are some individuals who both use the word *nigga* in various contexts with intentional positive sentiment (e.g., Personalism ideology) as well as perceive the word to be mutually exclusive from the racial slur *nigger*, there are also individuals who use both the word *nigga* and the word *nigger*, with malice and racist intent. This suggests that the meaning of the word remains controversial. Within the Black community, there is not major consensus to say if it is possible to reshape the meaning of the word *nigga* in a way that is mutually exclusive of the original racial slur *nigger*. In fact, individuals in the current study point to this history, and intentionally use the word in order to reshape and rebuke the racism behind the word. This "reshaping" occurs even when the original racist word *nigger* is still in circulation (e.g., Paula Deen). Ultimately, Black folks who view reshaping the word *nigga* as important may have a bias against those who are not Black because they do not have the same history to reshape.

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African Americans' Perceptions of the Word *Nigga*

Overall, participants were split between proponents (African Americans who support the word *nigga*) and opponents (Africans Americans who oppose use of the word *nigga*). It is important to note that in the current study, I conceptualized that use of the word *nigga* falls on a continuum in which individuals may feel that it is appropriate to use the word in certain contextual circumstances, but inappropriate to use it in other contextual circumstances. One of the intriguing aspects of the data was the unique way linguistic ideologies were operationalized when participants shared their perceptions of the word *nigga* through their open-ended responses. The correlations between the continuous forms and dichotomous forms of the linguistic ideologies are consistent with the sociological literature. Proponents for use of the word *nigga*, primarily Indexicality ideology and Reshaping ideology, were consistent with background information provided by Kennedy (2002) and Asim (2007). These authors argued that use of the word *nigga* has been seen as an exclusive right among African Americans as a rhetorical boomerang against racist use of the word *nigger* or as a term of endearment. As Common stated in his interview, "…the word *nigga* does not mean the same thing it once meant…We've established a new meaning as a culture." Interestingly enough, almost half of the participants' responses that were coded for Indexicality contained language for use of the word *nigga* to be exclusively for or primarily among Blacks. Nearly 3 out of 10 of the participants felt the word *nigga* was ok when used as a term of endearment. This statement is consistent with the Reshaping ideology from the current study that says use of the word *nigga* is appropriate when it is used as a linguistic mechanism to counter the racial slur *nigger*. This describes a sense of empowering one's self by using a derivative of the hurtful word. Thus, some participants conceptualize use of the word *nigga* with definitions that have diverged from the word *nigger*.

Operationalization of Linguistic Ideologies

One of the more interesting findings was that participants independently created rationales for using the word *nigga* that were consistent with the five selected linguistic ideologies. On the basis of the nine themes that emerged from the open-ended data for definitions of the word *nigga,* it appears that participants' definitions were able to be grouped into three categories: (a) positive, (b) neutral, and (c) negative. Definitions that reflected a sense of endearment or positivity highlight that at times, use of the word *nigga* is not considered to be negative or harmful. This positive use is consistent with literature such as Motley and Craig-Henderson (2007) and my findings (Dodson, 2010) in the sense that they evoked a sense of endearment when used. Similarly, definitions that had more neutral undertones were most frequently used to specifically describe people. However, there were unique findings for ways in which the word *nigga* was used in a negative context; for example, to refer specifically to an African American man or acknowledgment of the speaker's ignorance.

Almost three-fourths of participants' open-ended responses argued as proponents for use of the word *nigga*. In other words, 3 out of every 4 participants believe use of the word *nigga* is appropriate. However, it is important to note that while 75% of participants believe use is appropriate, they may not necessarily argue that use is universally appropriate across all contexts. The open-ended responses, as well as the quantitative data, highlight that it is simply not the case that the final level of appropriateness will be either/or, yes/no. Simply put: Because proponents are for the word does not mean that they cannot also be against the word. The contextual malleability of the word *nigga* may perhaps give the false perception that use cannot have one distinct meaning when used by Blacks, and a separate meaning when used by non-Blacks. However, use of the word *nigga* can be perceived as appropriate when used by Blacks

and less appropriate/inappropriate altogether when used by non-Blacks. Variance in appropriateness is perhaps one of the larger, societal take home messages from the current study.

Opponents of the word *nigga* provided rationales consistent with the literature, namely Baptismal ideology. Nearly half of the participants indicated that use of the word *nigga* was unacceptable because under no circumstances would use of the word *nigga* be independent of the history behind the racial slur *nigger*. This finding is similar to delegates of the 2007 NAACP conference in Detroit, MI, who also believed that since the word *nigger* was originally used to demoralize and disparage an entire people for centuries, the word *nigga* would have the same effect. Subsequently, continued use of the word *nigga* might only uphold harmful effects on Black Americans.

The investigation of linguistic ideologies and their relations to the word *nigga* adds to the literature by providing significant empirical support for the differences in African Americans' views on the appropriateness of the use of the word *nigga*. All five selected linguistic ideologies were represented in various frequencies throughout the open-ended responses. Nevertheless, participants' open-ended responses were predominantly representative of Indexicality and Reshaping ideologies. This could possibly mean that participants not only viewed acceptable use of the word *nigga* as contextually based, but that acceptable use of the word *nigga* is largely informed by the reshaping of the word *nigger*. Moreover, the reshaping of the word provides a unique context informed by linguistic understanding for which the word *nigga* can be used. Due to the socio-historical influence on the word *nigga*, it is not difficult to gather that socially coded language like linguistic ideologies inform the framework for which conceptualization of the word *nigga* can be understood. From the positive (+) and neutral (n) open-ended response themes, which accounted for the majority of the positive/neutral/negative (-) contextual use, it

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also appears that these participants draw a distinction between the historical definition of the word *nigger* and the reshaped definition of the word *nigga*. This reshaping is similar to what both Kennedy (2002) and Asim (2007) posited, when they argued that the word *nigga* has been used as an adapted counter against racist use of the word *nigger*.

Findings indicated there was not a statistically significant correlation between the Personalism ideology continuous and dichotomous variables. Participants may not have been able to clearly interpret the description of the ideology. For example, in writing "The deciding factor in determining the meaning of the word 'nigga'…" I may have influenced them to respond in an undesired way. Furthermore, by using the quote "Nigga, please!" participants may have interpreted this quote too differently to give consistent responses. This quote was found in close to a third of participants' open-ended responses for the theme *Colloquial Use*, thus changing the intended message or make-up of the description.

Linguistic Ideologies and Acceptance of the Word *Nigga*

As predicted, linguistic ideologies were related to the acceptance of the word *nigga*. Generally, the data suggest that linguistic ideologies were related to acceptance of the word *nigga* in conceptually consistent ways. Proponent ideologies were related to support of the use of the word *nigga* in each of the three contexts investigated: Black Use, Non-Black Use, and Public Use. Reshaping ideology was related to each of the contexts of use for the word *nigga*. This is an important finding because participants viewed a transition from the historic racial slur *nigger* to a more acceptable version in the word *nigga* across various contexts. Additionally, through its utilization of the Indexicality ideology, the current study brings attention to how fundamental it is to understand the context in which the word *nigga* is used; specifically, who (race of the

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speaker) and where (public vs. private locations). The transition from the meaning of the word *nigger* to the word *nigga* is helpful in understanding that participants possibly viewed the words *nigga* and *nigger* as having two separate definitions and different contexts for use. Furthermore, we can compare this finding to Baptismal ideology, as participants appear to acknowledge the divergence in definition.

Additionally, the opponent linguistic ideologies highlighted that participants identified ways in which the word *nigga* was not acceptable because (a) it is too closely linked to the racial slur *nigger* and (b) it may be harmful to those who hear it. This suggests that while there is support for the word *nigga*, there is still a substantial amount of people who do not agree with its use. A possible explanation for this may be because participants recognize the word has the potential to wound, as evidenced in the statistical significance in the Performative ideology across Black Use, Non-Black Use, and Public Use. Subsequently, if the word *nigga* can wound and be perceived as offensive, then this would be disallow universal acceptance of usage across contexts. Furthermore, because Baptismal ideology predicted lower levels of acceptance for non-Black use, we gather that non-Black use of the word *nigga* is still closely associated with the racial slur *nigger* and can still be perceived as offensive or racist.

Racial Identity Attitudes and Level of Endorsement of the Word *Nigga*

Participants' racial identity attitudes were not related to level of endorsement of the word *nigga* in this study. A possible explanation for why there was not statistical significance could be that the variation with which participants racially identify did not correlate with the variation in which proponents and opponents conceptualize use of the word *nigga*. Racial identity attitudes, as measured by the CRIS in the current study, do not appear to have statistically significant

impact on conceptualization of use of the word *nigga*. It is reasonable to think that there are other

individual characteristics that serve as mediators or moderators for perceptions of

appropriateness of the word *nigga*. As the findings showed, socially coded language (linguistic

ideologies) accounted for a large portion of the variance for appropriate use of the word *nigga*.

Thus, racial identity attitudes may have a certain degree of influence, but could perhaps be a step

or two removed from having a significant impact.

Limitations

Although the current study provides additional empirical data on the use and

conceptualization of the word *nigga*, as a preliminary study, there are inherent limitations. The

self-report nature of the study could be a factor in the way participants responded; social

desirability may have been a factor. Specifically, participants' may have wanted to appear more

or less accepting in use of the word *nigga* and thus responded in a way that is different from their

actual conceptualizations. Furthermore, the length of the web-based survey may have

discouraged participants from completing it in its entirety, potentially serving as an intended

screener for participants.

There were also other limitations with the scales used. Only the CRIS has empirical

support and thus the remaining items to assess the contextual appropriateness of use of the word

nigga and use of linguistic ideologies have not been empirically supported or validated in

previous empirical research. Although findings provide initial construct validity and acceptable

reliability estimates for the contextual appropriateness of use of the word *nigga* and

understanding of linguistic ideologies, it is unclear if they would also be found in other samples.

Furthermore, it remains unclear if the five linguistic ideologies selected could have been

expressed differently in the vignette, or if they were as significant as intended. It is important to note that the results should not be overly interpreted without stronger psychometric support.

The measures used in the current study, which included the quantitative descriptions of the selected linguistic ideologies, may not have been detailed enough to relate strongly to the CRIS. Comparing the selected linguistic ideologies to the six subscales of the CRIS may not have been as intuitive as desired. Specifically, measuring endorsement of the word *nigga* through the selected linguistic ideologies may not be correlated to the quantitatively measured CRIS subscales.

Findings from this study are based on one sample of African Americans, the majority of whom have a college education or are currently seeking a degree. It is unclear if these findings will generalize to other African Americans throughout the country. Recruiting participants who are not in college would allow for widening of the participants' age range and other influential background characteristics.

Implications and Directions for Future Research

The inclusion of five frequently used linguistic ideologies was a deliberate first attempt to investigate the intersection of psychology and linguistic ideologies. However, more research is needed to further understand the role language plays in self-expression and self-identity around use of the word *nigga*. This line of research can be particularly helpful for exploring racial identity attitudes, especially of Black men. Previous research has shown that men use and observe the word *nigga* used more often than women (Dodson, 2010). Findings from the current study similarly highlighted that the word *nigga* is frequently used by men and to describe Black men. Thus, in addition to the future exploration of Black men's racial identity attitudes, it may be

of importance to continue to research what type of impact use of the word *nigga* may have on Black masculinity.

Additionally, as popular culture use has shown, the word *nigga* is largely misappropriated by those who do not identify as Black or African American. It could be of interest to investigate how use of the word *nigga*, particularly as it applies to the Reshaping linguistic ideology, may be connected or used as a form of resiliency to counteract deleterious affects of oppression and racism. If participants recognize use of the word *nigga* as largely negative, future open-ended and mixed methods research may consider exploring the role that slang or foul language has on interpersonal dynamics. While individuals may have neutral definitions of the word when referencing a Black person, one should be mindful of how this use may be perceived by Non-Blacks. Future researchers may consider including participants who do not identify as Black and explore how they conceptualize use of the word *nigga*.

It may very well be the case that future research on use of the word *nigga* and racial identity attitudes can be explored from a counseling psychologist's perspective. Counseling Psychologists receive ample training around research, multiculturalism, and identity development. As a field, we would be able to connect multidisciplinary bodies of research and collaborate with professionals in other disciplines to approach this topic. If nothing else, the current study has further elucidated the complexity around usage of the word *nigga*. Counseling Psychologists would also be able to develop multiculturally sensitive measurements and sophisticated mixed methods models to allow participants to have their individual voices heard.

Conclusion

The use of the word *nigga* is an intricate topic and draws on multiple bodies of research. In the current study, I investigated African Americans use of the word in relation to linguistic ideologies, racial identity attitudes, and contextually based settings. Linguistic ideologies accounted for a significant amount of variance in levels of acceptance, with the continuous form of linguistic ideologies' variables being correlated with their dichotomous form. Findings showed participants defined the word in positive, neutral, and negative ways. Context of use was found to be an influential factor for endorsement of use, influenced by public and private settings as well as the racial background of the speaker. Prominent cultural figures Dr. Cornell West and Common provided insight that aligned with participants' quantitative and qualitative responses.

The results show that the decision to use/not use the word *nigga* and if the word is acceptable/unacceptable is not as polarized as we may have previously hypothesized. In fact, half of the participants in the current study both agreed and disagreed with use of the word. Less than 9% of participants exclusively agreed with use of the word *nigga*, while 41.5% did not agree with use. Largely, data appear to show that it is not a question of if, but a question of when for the majority of the participants. This shows us that conceptualization of the word *nigga* is more complicated and multi-layered than originally thought. More research is needed in order to continue to move towards feelings of how nuanced and contextually driven use is.

The importance of how language is interpreted plays a pivotal role in understanding the use of the word *nigga*. With that, participants' racial identity may not be the best indicator for how they conceptualize use. Future research should explore the contextual use for when use of the word *nigga* is viewed as acceptable. For example, age and gender may be more robust indicators.

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Table 12

Skewness and Kurtosis

	Skewness	Kurtosis
CRIS-PA	.82	.01
CRIS-PM	.35	-.71
CRIS-PSH	1.28	.84
CRIS-IEAW	2.01	4.03
CRIS-IA	.42	-.21
CRIS-IMCI	-1.09	1.57
Indexicality	-.67	-.93
Personalism	-.06	-1.33
Reshaping	.12	-1.29
Baptismal	-.19	-1.24
Performative	-.56	-.34
Black Use	.01	-1.30
Non-Black Use	1.23	.70
Public Use	1.27	1.38

APPENDIX B

Survey

SECTION 1

The use of the word *nigga* within the African American community is controversial. Some people argue that it is okay for Black people to use the word, others believe the word should never be used, and some people's views fall somewhere between these points.

We want to learn your opinion.

At this point in time, do you agree with use of the word *nigga*?
a) Yes
b) No
c) Both yes and no

Please tell us more about your answer. We are interested in better understanding who you think should be able to use the word and if you personally use the word.

There is no right or wrong answer. Please write AT LEAST 4 sentences, being as descriptive as possible. Please provide examples in your response as possible.

Thank you in advance for your candid and honest response!

1. Have you heard the word *nigga* used?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. I can't remember

2. What does the word *nigga* mean to you?

3. Have you used the word *nigga*?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. I can't remember

4. If yes, please BRIEFLY describe the situation or context of the last time you used the word *nigga*.

SECTION 2

Directions. Using the 5-point scale, please indicate how much you agree with each of the following perspectives.

1) The word *nigga* can have different meanings depending on the social situation or cultural context in which it is used. Thus, the meaning of the word *nigga* varies, and there is no universal manner in which it is used. For example, "What's up, my *nigga*?" may be deemed appropriate when used by an African American but not when used by a White American.

   This point of view reflects my personal opinion:
   a. Strongly Disagree
   b. Disagree
   c. Neither Disagree nor Agree
   d. Agree
   e. Strongly Agree

2) The deciding factor in determining the meaning for the word *nigga* comes from the beliefs and/or intentions of the speaker. For example, an individual might say, "*Nigga*, please!" with the personal understanding that he/she is not speaking with malice or ill intent. Thus, under these conditions, use of *nigga* is appropriate, regardless of what listeners believe or feel.

   This point of view reflects my personal opinion:
   a. Strongly Disagree
   b. Disagree
   c. Neither Disagree nor Agree
   d. Agree
   e. Strongly Agree

3) The word *nigga* is a Reshaping of the historical racial slur *nigger*. While it may be a derivative of *nigger*, the word *nigga* is used as a term of endearment or as a term of empowerment. For example, in the song *Y'all My Niggas*, Hip-Hop artist Nas raps: "We changed the basis of derogatory phrases/And I say it's quite amazing/The use of ghetto terms, developed our own language/No matter where it came from/It's celebrated, now, people are mad if they ain't one" (*Nigger*, 2008). In short, the word *nigga* is acceptable because speakers have reshaped its meaning and taken the power away from the racial slur *nigger*.

This point of view reflects my personal opinion:
   a. Strongly Disagree
   b. Disagree
   c. Neither Disagree nor Agree
   d. Agree
   e. Strongly Agree

4) The correct meaning of the word *nigga* is directly linked to the word *nigger*, which was first used as a racial slur. For example, at the 2007 NAACP Conference in Detroit, MI, delegates held a funeral to bury *nigga* because they felt continued use is offensive and harmful to Black Americans. Therefore, the word *nigga* can never be harmless because of its original meaning as a racial slur.

This point of view reflects my personal opinion:
   a. Strongly Disagree
   b. Disagree
   c. Neither Disagree nor Agree
   d. Agree
   e. Strongly Agree

5) The word *nigga* should not be used since it may be emotionally harmful to those who hear it. For example, a speaker may believe that it is not offensive when he/she says, "*Nigga*, are we gonna go there or not? Stop playin'." However, because the listeners don't believe *nigga* can be used appropriately in any context, they may feel offended and emotionally upset.

This point of view reflects my personal opinion:
   a. Strongly Disagree
   b. Disagree
   c. Neither Disagree nor Agree
   d. Agree
   e. Strongly Agree

SECTION 3

Directions. Please tell us about yourself by circling or filling in the following information as completely as possible:

1. Age: _____

2. Gender: ___ Male   ___ Female   ___ Transgender

3. Are you a college student?
   a.   Yes
   b.   No

4. If so, what year are you?
   a.   First-Year
   b.   Sophomore
   c.   Junior
   d.   Senior
   e.   MA, MS, or equivalent
   f.   Ph.D., JD, MD or equivalent

5. What college do you attend? _____

6. What is your major? _____

7. Which religion or spiritual beliefs do you identify with?
   a.   Christian (Please specify _____)
   b.   Muslim
   c.   Hindu
   d.   Jewish
   e.   Buddhist
   f.   Agnostic
   g.   Atheist
   h.   Other (Please specify _____)

8. Currently, how religious or spiritual are you?
   a.   Not at all religious/spiritual
   b.   A little religious/spiritual
   c.   Somewhat religious/spiritual
   d.   Very religious/spiritual

9. Where did you spend most of your childhood and adolescent years?
   a.   Rural environment
   b.   Urban environment
   c.   Suburban environment

10. Using the scale below, please indicate the racial/ethnic backgrounds of people part of your inner cycle. Please select the number below that corresponds to your response for each row: (0 or Almost None; 1 = Very Few; 2 = Some; 3 = The Majority; 4 = All or Almost All)
    a.   Asian/Asian American
    b.   Black/African American
    c.   Latino/Hispanic (Non-White)
    d.   Native American/American Indian
    e.   White/European American

11. What was the class background of your family when you were growing up? Please select all that apply.
    a.   Poor (for example, one or both parents/guardians received welfare/TANF/relief or had employment without benefits, etc.)
    b.   Working Class (for example, one or both parents/guardians had manual labor, clerical, or unionized jobs, etc.)
    c.   Middle Class (for example, one or both parents/guardians had professional or technical jobs such as teacher, manager, accountant, social worker, small business owner, etc.)
    d.   Upper Middle Class (for example, one or both parents/guardians had high paying professions such as doctor, lawyer, engineer, etc.)
    e.   Wealthy (for example, one or both parents/guardians was a CEO, manager/owner of a major financial institution or corporation, etc.)

12. What is your racial or pan-ethnic identification?
    a.   Asian/Asian American
    b.   Black
    c.   Latin/Hispanic
    d.   White
    e.   Biracial (please specify _____)
    f.   Multiracial (please specify _____)
    g.   Other (please specify _____)

13. What is your primary ethnic background (e.g., African American, Filipino, Chinese, Taiwanese, French, Mexican American, Italian, Haitian, English, Cuban, etc.)?
    _____

14. Please indicate the highest education level of your parent(s)/guardian(s) growing up below.

Mother (female guardian growing up)
  a.   Some High School
  b.   High School Diploma or Equivalent
  c.   Some College
  d.   College (Bachelor) Degree
  e.   Master's Degree
  f.   Doctoral or Professional Degree (e.g., JD, MD, Ph.D.)
  g.   Other _____

Father (male guardian growing up)
  a.   Some High School
  b.   High School Diploma or Equivalent
  c.   Some College
  d.   College (Bachelor) Degree
  e.   Master's Degree
  f.   Doctoral or Professional Degree (e.g., JD, MD, Ph.D.)
  g.   Other _____

SECTION 4

Cross Social Attitude Scale

Please note that the Cross Social Attitude Scale (CRIS) has been omitted from this

dissertation publication in order to honor the copyright protection of the scale.

SECTION 5

Directions. Please answer the following questions in regards to your understanding of the word *nigga*.

1) It is ok for Black people to use the word *nigga*
    a. Strongly Disagree
    b. Disagree
    c. Neither Disagree nor Agree
    d. Agree
    e. Strongly Agree

2) It is ok for NON-Black people to use the word *nigga*
    a. Strongly Disagree
    b. Disagree
    c. Neither Disagree nor Agree
    d. Agree
    e. Strongly Agree

3) *Nigga* is an offensive word
    a. Strongly Disagree
    b. Disagree
    c. Neither Disagree nor Agree
    d. Agree
    e. Strongly Agree

4) It is ok to use the word *nigga* to describe someone who you thought was acting inappropriately.
    a. Strongly Disagree
    b. Disagree
    c. Neither Disagree nor Agree
    d. Agree
    e. Strongly Agree

5) It is okay to use the word *nigga* in the following settings:

    a. Talking with Black friends at a place of worship
        i. Strongly Disagree
        ii. Disagree
        iii. Neither Disagree nor Agree
        iv. Agree
        v. Strongly Agree

b. Talking with NON-Black friends at a place of worship
   i. Strongly Disagree
   ii. Disagree
   iii. Neither Disagree nor Agree
   iv. Agree
   v. Strongly Agree

c. Talking with Black friends at someone's home
   i. Strongly Disagree
   ii. Disagree
   iii. Neither Disagree nor Agree
   iv. Agree
   v. Strongly Agree

d. Talking with NON-Black friends at someone's home
   i. Strongly Disagree
   ii. Disagree
   iii. Neither Disagree nor Agree
   iv. Agree
   v. Strongly Agree

e. Talking with Black friends in a public setting like a grocery store
   i. Strongly Disagree
   ii. Disagree
   iii. Neither Disagree nor Agree
   iv. Agree
   v. Strongly Agree

f. Talking with NON-Black friends in a public setting like a grocery store
   i. Strongly Disagree
   ii. Disagree
   iii. Neither Disagree nor Agree
   iv. Agree
   v. Strongly Agree

g. Talking with Black friends while playing a sport
   i. Strongly Disagree
   ii. Disagree
   iii. Neither Disagree nor Agree
   iv. Agree
   v. Strongly Agree

h. Talking with NON-Black friends while playing a sport
   - i. Strongly Disagree
   - ii. Disagree
   - iii. Neither Disagree nor Agree
   - iv. Agree
   - v. Strongly Agree

i. Talking with Black friends in the car
   - i. Strongly Disagree
   - ii. Disagree
   - iii. Neither Disagree nor Agree
   - iv. Agree
   - v. Strongly Agree

j. Talking with NON-Black friends in the car
   - i. Strongly Disagree
   - ii. Disagree
   - iii. Neither Disagree nor Agree
   - iv. Agree
   - v. Strongly Agree

k. A Black character in a television show or movie
   - i. Strongly Disagree
   - ii. Disagree
   - iii. Neither Disagree nor Agree
   - iv. Agree
   - v. Strongly Agree

l. A NON-Black character in a television show or movie
   - i. Strongly Disagree
   - ii. Disagree
   - iii. Neither Disagree nor Agree
   - iv. Agree
   - v. Strongly Agree

m. Talking with Black friends via Skype or a similar video medium
   - i. Strongly Disagree
   - ii. Disagree
   - iii. Neither Disagree nor Agree
   - iv. Agree
   - v. Strongly Agree

n. Talking with NON-Black friends via Skype or a similar video medium
    i. Strongly Disagree
    ii. Disagree
    iii. Neither Disagree nor Agree
    iv. Agree
    v. Strongly Agree

o. In a cellular text conversation with Black friends
    i. Strongly Disagree
    ii. Disagree
    iii. Neither Disagree nor Agree
    iv. Agree
    v. Strongly Agree

p. In a cellular text conversation with NON-Black friends
    i. Strongly Disagree
    ii. Disagree
    iii. Neither Disagree nor Agree
    iv. Agree
    v. Strongly Agree

q. Classroom discussions with Black peers
    i. Strongly Disagree
    ii. Disagree
    iii. Neither Disagree nor Agree
    iv. Agree
    v. Strongly Agree

r. Classroom discussions with non-Black peers
    i. Strongly Disagree
    ii. Disagree
    iii. Neither Disagree nor Agree
    iv. Agree
    v. Strongly Agree

s. In a formal setting, such as a company business meeting with Black coworkers
    i. Strongly Disagree
    ii. Disagree
    iii. Neither Disagree nor Agree
    iv. Agree
    v. Strongly Agree

t. In a formal setting, such as a company business meeting, with non-Black coworkers
    i. Strongly Disagree
    ii. Disagree
    iii. Neither Disagree nor Agree
    iv. Agree
    v. Strongly Agree

u. Singing the lyrics to a song
    i. Strongly Disagree
    ii. Disagree
    iii. Neither Disagree nor Agree
    iv. Agree
    v. Strongly Agree

7. I have heard the word *nigga* used so much, I have become desensitized to its use
    a. Strongly Disagree
    b. Disagree
    c. Neither Disagree nor Agree
    d. Agree
    e. Strongly Agree

Thank you for your participation!

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Overview

The Word that Makes You Go Hmmm: Exploring the Relation between African Americans'
Linguistic Ideologies, Racial Identity Attitudes, and Usage of the N-Word

You are invited to participate in a study examining the social attitudes of young adults conducted by Milo L. Dodson, a doctoral student in the Counseling Psychology Program, and Helen Neville, Ph.D., a Counseling Psychology faculty member, from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Through the use of a survey, this project investigates students' views on social issues and the use of the "n-word."

Participation consists of completing a survey that should take about 20-25 minutes to complete. You must be at least 18 years of age to complete the survey. Participation in this project is completely voluntary. There will be no negative consequences if you decide not to participate. You have the right to discontinue your participation at any time without penalty. Your participation decision will not effect your status at, nor relationship with, the university you attend. The risks of completing this survey are no more than normally encountered in daily living, however, there is a small chance that you may experience some emotional discomfort. You may choose to skip an item, and may choose to end participation by closing your web browser at any time.

Findings from this study will result in a dissertation and may be presented at a conference and/or published in an academic journal. However, you will not be identified as an individual and all of the information that is obtained during this research project will be kept strictly confidential. Your name will not appear on the survey that you complete. Additionally, please do not supply identifiable information in any narrative response. If you happen to do so, please be assured that we will screen all responses prior to analysis and de-identify any identifiable information that may happen to appear in a your responses. As a token of appreciation, you will have the opportunity to be entered into a lottery to win one of four $50 cash prizes. There is approximately a 1 out of 50 chance in winning a cash prize. Final odds will depend on the amount of surveys received. Anonymity of responses is preserved for all participants, including those who choose to enter the lottery.

If you have any questions about this study, you may contact Milo L. Dodson (dodson4@illinois.edu) or Dr. Helen Neville (hneville@illinois.edu or 217.244.6291). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Illinois Instituional Review Board at (217) 333-2670 (collect calls will be accepted if you identify yourself as a research participant) or via email at irb@illinois.edu.

APPENDIX D

Informed Consent for Interviews

The Word that Makes You Go Hmmm: Exploring the Relation between African Americans'
Linguistic Ideologies, Racial Identity Attitudes, and Usage of the N-Word

Thank you for your willingness to spend time conversing about the "n-word" for a study examining the social attitudes of young adults conducted by Milo L. Dodson, a doctoral student in the Counseling Psychology Program, and Helen Neville, Ph.D., a Counseling Psychology faculty member, from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The interview will consist of questions pertaining to your conceptualizaiton, use, and/or percieved use by others of the n-word. The duration of the interview should last about thiry to forty-five minutes. The required audio recording that will be used during the interview is to ensure accuracy in transcription purposes and will not be used for dissemination. Furthermore, the audio recording to be used during the interview is only to ensure the accuracy of your quotes and will not be published in conjunction with the current project or any other future project. Findings from this study will result in a dissertation and may be presented at a conference and/or published in an academic journal.

By signing below, you are indicating that you consent to the use of identified partial or full quotes to be used in the project and that your name will be linked to your quotes/interview in the current project. Participation is voluntary and you may refrain from responding to certain questions. You may also choose to discontinue the interview at any point. You warrant that you are at least 18 years of age and that you are competent in your own name insofar as this consent is concerned. You further attest that you have read this consent form and fully understand its contents.

If you have any questions about this study, you may contact Milo L. Dodson (dodson4@illinois.edu) or Dr. Helen Neville (hneville@illinois.edu or 217.244.6291). If you have any questions about your rights as a interviewee in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Illinois Instituional Review Board at (217) 333-2670 (collect calls will be accepted if you identify yourself as a research participant) or via email at irb@illinois.edu.

I have read and understood this consent letter, voluntarily agree to participate in the interview, and for the interview to be audio recorded.

Printed name: _____

Signature: _____