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Exclusion of the Included: Racialized Microaggressions at Predominantly White Universities

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by
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Abstract

This project explores the challenges black students face when completing their undergraduate degree. When enrolled at predominantly white institutions (PWIs), black students are subjugated as "the other" and are forced to come to terms with learning in often if not regularly hostile academic environments. The hardships are crucial to examine, as attending college in contemporary U.S. society is becoming a prerequisite to entering the workforce and decreasing wealth gaps (UNCF). I argue that the increasing diversity enrollment of black students at PWIs does not go hand-in-hand with the lives of the students enrolled there being positively affected. The presence of more black students does not necessarily increase the amount of resources and pathways for black students to graduate successfully. To investigate this notion, black students from a small (fewer than 2,000 students), liberal arts college in the Northeast of the U.S. were interviewed twice and asked to complete the method of photo elicitation to better comprehend how their college experience may or may not be impacted by racial discrimination on campus. Nineteen students participated in this study and 17 completed it. The students who completed it were compensated for their time and efforts. After transcribing and coding the data using the computer-based programs Trint and Dedoose from 36 interviews, the challenges black students experienced were revealed. Black students identified and described several challenges that adversely impacted their lives, including the lack of black faculty, the lack of a diverse curriculum and the racial profiling by public safety. Their race not only affected them in academic buildings, but in non-academic spaces as well. Racialized incidents took place in the dormitory area and on the university's path. The near daily encounters and experiences having to do with racial microaggressions, (colorblind) racism, hierarchy/domination and isolation communicate their relationship with their institution. This project contributes to the research documenting black students' experience at PWIs, as well as identifies future research worthy of exploration regarding the experiences of black students at the nation's PWIs.

Keywords: racial microaggressions, black students, higher education, quantitative method

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Chapter 1: Introduction

THE PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

Higher education in the United States of America is an important institution to analyze as black students are increasingly attending colleges. Colleges now admit students from a variety of inclusive, rather than exclusive, categories such as gender, race, sexual orientation, abilities and religions (Pappano 2019). This diverse pool of applicants ranges beyond the original scope of individuals who were admitted to universities. Although higher education has been opened to reach students who identify besides white, rich males, it does not mean these institutions are capable of providing for students who study in these settings. Labeled as a minority group in these settings, the experiences of black students throughout their time in higher education will be different than that of their white peers (Brown 2019).

The increase of black students at predominantly white institutions does not mean there are enough resources to help these students fully succeed and thrive during their undergraduate career. In order to study the black undergraduate population, I have chosen to analyze the experiences of black students attending a small, private, liberal arts institution in the Northeast of the U.S. In this paper, it is not possible to address every racial demographic, nor each marginalized group. Therefore, this project focuses on how racial discrimination, through the experience of racial microaggressions, negatively impacts black students. Each experience of racial discrimination can be analyzed and categorized based on the identity of the student who is being discriminated against and the identity of the perpetrator. It is important to analyze the power dynamics that exist between that individual and the one(s) who discriminate against them. The location of these acts is also imperative to investigate because public (i.e. classrooms) and private (i.e. dormitories) spaces are monitored differently by staff and students. This project

focuses on how racial discrimination impacts the lives of black students and their overall college experience.

It is critical to continue investigating the experiences of black students in college because colleges are not exempt from the systematic racism that exist in the U.S. Research within Sociology, Psychology, Education and other fields has taken the charge to study this topic as it pertains to black students attending Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) (Breaux 2003). Continuing this research today is unique because it gives a new perspective on the tension black students face from white peers, faculty and staff in an era when hate crimes are on the rise at post-secondary institutions (Nelson 2019). The purpose of completing this research is to add to the literature on this topic. Research studies such as this one remains necessary in contemporary society and are crucial to understanding how black students obtain their education at a PWI.

Racism on college campuses ranges on the spectrum from blatantly overt behaviors to covert microaggressions which can be seen and felt by all community members, especially black students (Levchak 2013). The incidents of racist behaviors on the campuses of U.S. colleges and universities are numerous. They include the following relatively recent examples: American University had an incident back in May 2017 where nooses hanging bananas were found on campus (Fortin 2017). Racist graffiti was drawn at Goucher College's campus in November 2018 (JBHE 2018a). Two white college, football players, were arrested for hurling racial slurs while pulling down the statue of Frederick Douglass at St. John Fisher College in December 2018 (JBHE 2018b). Four white students posed in black face on Colorado State University's campus in September 2019 and have had no punishments for their actions due to being protected under the rights of the First Amendment (JBHE 2019a). A black student was attacked by white peers after they shouted racial slurs at them at the University of Arizona on September 2019

(JBHE 2019b). Two white students were arrested for yelling racial slurs captured on video on the campus of the University of Connecticut (JBHE 2019c).

Acts of racial discrimination are not limited to classroom spaces, cafeterias or dormitory buildings. They can occur in any place and at any time on campus, as the examples above illustrate. The perpetrators of racial discrimination against black students are typically white faculty, staff and students, but it is not always reported, documented nor rectified (Jaurique, Ryan and Smith 2016). This cycle of violence on black students studying at PWIs does not improve their academic work, student engagement or mental health (Jaurique et al. 2016).

Racism and the discrimination that accompanies it should be analyzed from the perspectives of all students of color attending universities. It would be unfair to combine their experiences into one story especially since different racial and ethnic groups experience racism very differently from one another (Treitler 2013). To solely examine how black students navigate PWIs gives a glimpse into how the systematic disenfranchisement of black people affect black students on college campuses. With this focus in mind, I will explain my research questions for this project. Then, I will review theoretical concepts which will be fully clarified in my literature review. Next, I will provide a brief explanation of the methods I used to answer my research questions. Finally, I will concisely summarize the findings from my investigation.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This body of research aims to answer five questions to fully grasp the livelihood of today's black college students attending PWIs. Firstly, how have black people been oppressed through systematic racism as it pertains to education? Through various points in history, slavery, Jim Crow, The Civil Rights Movement and post-Civil Rights Movement, black people have been denied and have had limited formalized educational opportunities (Cokley 2016; Lattimore

2017). It is important to see the trajectory of education for black people in the U.S. and to not analyze the contemporary struggles of black students without any background. How formalized education for black people has evolved over time and how it has hindered their access to better opportunities will be explained briefly in the literature review.

Second, why are black college students still experiencing racism on college campuses if we live in a "post-racial" society? The rhetoric of American society being "post-racial" is detrimental to people who experience racism on a daily basis and ignores the institutional racism that is ingrained in our white supremacist society. When racist incidents occur, they are easily overlooked because racism is rarely analyzed as a structure versus individual events. Utilizing Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's (2017) research to examine how racism has changed over time and how colorblind racism has evolved will help explain the environments in which black students are learning. The literature review will include an analysis of other theorists who do believe America is in a post-racial society to illustrate various perspectives on the matter.

Third, how does the history of PWIs affect how current enrolled students experience racial discrimination? When looking at PWIs as independent sites for research, it would be misleading to view only the present environment of the campus and current student body as complete representations of the institution being analyzed. Universities change over time. Some for better and some for worse. Depending on who you ask and when you ask them will determine the answer you are given. Looking at institutions from their inceptions and through key points in their history helps give a holistic view of the university when it is being investigated. It is possible that the same race-based battles that were happening in the late 20th Century are still happening in the 21st Century. One would not know these various issues unless they researched what was happening at that institution at different points in history.

Fourth, what are the experiences of black students when they experience racial discrimination on campus? Often times, black students will go through their undergraduate experience without sharing with their family members, peers, faculty or staff at the university the times they felt they were wrongly treated based on their race (Byrd, Brunn-Bevel and Sexton 2014). It can be a burden that they carry for many years if they do not have an opportunity to release it. On the other hand, educators and administrative staff in colleges are not regularly asking students who are disadvantaged by society what their experience is like at their institution. It is the responsibility of the university to ask what it can do to improve their experience in the classroom, in the residence halls and in the rest of campus. Black students in particular face a unique set of challenges while attending PWIs because traditionally they were not intended to be there as scholars (Brown 2016). Based on that fact, it is imperative that the experience of black students constantly be examined and transformed to better support their needs. A glimpse into what some black students are experiencing daily at PWIs is examined in this project.

Finally, how can institutions better support black undergraduates while they are completing their bachelor's degree? In the Discussion section of this research, applicable suggestions will be made regarding what institutions can do to reform their policies and campus practices.

When black students were asked about their experience, they directly and indirectly told me how they wish to see the institution changed. This is one of the aims in asking students about their undergraduate experiences, as they are living the institution on a daily basis. Some of the changes that will be proposed are structural and will be discussed in later sections of this work.

These changes must be implemented by the President's Office, Provost's Office and the Board of Trustees who are the ones that can make massive changes at the university. Other adjustments that can be made will need to come from individual growth and understanding by peers, faculty and staff. The best way for this to take place will come from unconscious or implicit bias and diversity trainings to improve behavior, thoughts and hold people accountable for their actions (SafeColleges). When everyone is held to the same standard, it is easier to address moments when bias or discrimination occur and how to correct it.

By answering these five questions, it will become apparent that colleges must be aware of the experiences of black students and must find solutions to address the issues that need to be changed.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to examine how black students navigate post-secondary education, there are critical theorists and concepts that are useful to this subject matter.

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's (2017) concept of colorblind racism plays an intricate role in understanding how racism operates today. Contemporary racism looks different than it did during the 19th Century and 20th Century, even though the roots of racism have stayed the same. When someone states that they do not "see color," it is not what it seems. Colorblind ideology and how it negatively affects black students in environments where they are the minority population will be examined in the literature review.

Patricia Hill Collins' (1998) strategies of surveillance and hypervisibility are essential to understanding how black students feel they are viewed on campus. The small number of black students attending PWIs, are monitored differently and more extensively than their white peers. Their visibility in campus spaces is deemed invisible yet highly visible at the same time.

Analyzing how black students are perceived will help clarify how they are being treated and why it is so different from white students.

Many researchers have done work in interpreting racialized microaggressions on college campuses utilizing Racial Microaggression Theory (Levchak 2013; Jaurique et al. 2016; Ceja et al. 2017; Komanduri and Vyas 2017). This form of racial discrimination is usually done in a covert way that does not always scream racism to the black students on the receiving end. When talking out these situations, the black students involved arrive at a deeper understanding of what transpired and why. This type of research comprises many different studies that evaluate racialized microaggressions in three different ways: verbal, visual and physical. Evaluating these types of microaggressions will give a better understanding as to what black students are enduring one-on-one with white peers, faculty and staff.

RESEARCH METHODS

To best investigate how black students navigate PWIs, I have conducted qualitative methods-based research with in-depth, semi-structured interviews with black undergraduates attending a small (less than 5,000 students), liberal arts college in the Northeast (CollegeData 2019). The university involved will remain anonymous due to the small campus size and even tinier black population. I made it a priority to have participants in the study represent a range from all class years to get the outlook of as many black students enrolled at the institution as possible. The study involved black students who were at least 18 years of age who believed they had been subjected to racial discrimination during their undergraduate career. If students met these stipulations, they were able to participate. Upon completion of the study, participants were given a $10 gift card or cash. The project required students to complete two interviews in

addition to walking around the campus to take photographs of sites where they felt like they were mistreated because of their race utilizing the method of photo elicitation.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

In short, 19 students participated in the study while only 17 completed each step of the process. The goal was to have all types of college students represented in the sample which include domestic/international, commuting/residential and first year/transfer applicant. After speaking with the participants, the formation of these categories heavily influences their experience at a PWI. For example, a black international student that resides on campus describes their journey as being different than a black domestic student that commutes to college. These unique personal experiences illustrate interesting comparisons to one another but also direct change of action that can take place in the future as each type of student needs assistance from the institution in specific ways.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review serves to explain how education for black people in the U.S. has been a structural barrier from slavery until contemporary society. It will include an analysis of colorblind racism and how this ideology affects college campuses as well as clarify the concepts of surveillance and hypervisibility noting how they impact the treatment of black students. The analysis will also include descriptions of stereotype threat and the concept of "belonging," and a discussion regarding the influence of racial microaggression theory and the triple labor of academia at PWIs. The literature review will conclude with a recount of the history of the PWI examined in my project to highlight how the past of a university is significant to the current students enrolled there.

THE SYSTEMATIC EXCLUSION OF BLACK PEOPLE OBTAINING THEIR EDUCATION

One cannot immediately begin to examine education today without looking to the past and understanding how black people have been systematically harmed by being unable to receive an education. Historically, black people have been systematically and institutionally barred from receiving an education and learning during legal, chattel slavery beginning in 1619 to 1865 (Thirteen) Not only was this instituted from plantation to plantation, but it was established through government with anti-literacy laws (Thirteen) Those caught having taught slaves how to read and write could be imprisoned or fined (Thirteen). People realized educating slaves would cause rebellions and restricted their resources to learn immensely (Thirteen). Nathaniel "Nat" Turner's famous rebellions in 1831 were inspired by his ministering of the Bible to various plantations in Virginia which spearheaded slave revolts in the years to come (The National Museum of American History). Slaves could not freely learn to read and write but had to do it in secret (History is a Weapon). Most often, states passed laws to enforce that no one, free or enslaved, taught slaves how to read, write and count numbers (History is a Weapon). Many

slaves did learn to read and write during this time period and also taught others when it was safe to do so (Cornelius 1983). With the ending of slavery in 1863, the Reconstruction Era was supposed to be a promising time for African Americans to gain education freely, but that was not the case for all newly freed slaves (National Park Service). Finding proper schoolhouses, teachers and school materials all proved to be a challenge (National Park Service). Education through the role of the Church was an immense support to black people during this time, but the difference between white and black education reflected inequities (National Park Service).

Specifically, in the Southern United States, education for black people under the confinement of the Jim Crow Era was incredibly challenging. In the early 1900s, the image of racially segregated schools with dilapidated schoolhouses was rampant (Brooker 2013). The value of whiteness was still a priority and it was illustrated as schools that served white children only were given more public money for construction, teachers and learning materials (Brooker 2013). Schools that served black children were overcrowded and barely had enough up-to-date books for everyone to use in class (Constitutional Rights Foundation). Depending on their city or rural locations, segregated schools received funding from Northern foundations to contribute to the growing number of black children in schools (Brooker 2013). Black children during this time period also did not get the luxury or privilege, like white children did, of finishing their education due to working on farms (American Federation of Teachers). Not being able to finish their education hurt their chances of being able to strive for better things and higher paying income to provide for themselves and their families in the future.

After decades of inequitable education, the Civil Rights Movement became a beacon for better opportunities. Two prime examples during this time were the cases of the “Little Rock Nine” and Ruby Bridges, which created the entryway to allow black children to learn with white

children. First, in September 1957, nine black students, six black women and three black men, decided that they deserved the chance to attend the all-white school, Central High, in the state of Arkansas (Smith 2017). They felt empowered by the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision which ruled segregated education as unconstitutional (Smith 2017). Their first day of the school year was marked with hostility and the national guard blocking their entrance (Smith 2017). After three weeks, the nine students tried to gain access to Central High again and braved through the crowds of white students yelling at them (Smith 2017). Due to their efforts, they became known as the "Little Rock Nine" and the first to integrate the school. Second, Ruby Bridges was the oldest of eight children and was incredibly bright growing up (Encyclopedia Britannica). When her family moved to New Orleans, black children took tests to see who could attend all-white schools (Encyclopedia Britannica). Although six students were chosen to integrate the school, William Frantz Elementary, Bridges was the only one to attend school on November 14th, 1960 ((Encyclopedia Britannica). She was escorted to the school by four federal marshals for protection and her presence made the white parents and students irate (Encyclopedia Britannica). For the remainder of the year, Bridges was in a classroom all alone and instructed by a white teacher (Encyclopedia Britannica). This was monumental for black children across the nation because they were afforded better educational opportunities in all-white schools. These pinnacle moments in America's history helped all black children begin to integrate schools in their neighborhoods.

As did their ancestors, black children today face barriers and struggles based on their race. While in school, black children are often asked to change their identity, like the style of their hair, to fit the stereotypical look (Lattimore 2017). Relevant cases include: Andrew Johnson was barred in 2019 from wrestling at a New Jersey high school unless he cut the dreadlocks in

his hair unless he cut them, in a Texas high school in 2020 Deandre Arnold was faced with in-school suspension and not processing at his graduation if he did not cut his dreadlocks and Asia Simo was removed as the captain of her cheerleading squad for not following "correct" hair protocols in Louisiana in 2020 (Asmelash 2020; Lynn 2020; O'Brien-Richardson 2020). These students faced a hair penalty for not conforming to white or Western standards of beauty. Not only does hair styling play a factor, but there are overwhelming rates of suspension and expulsion for black students in comparison to white students (Wright 2018). People believe that black children misbehave more than white children and they think the repercussions for their behavior are justified (Wright 2018). Data reported in 2014 reported that black students are suspended and expelled at a rate three times greater (16.4%) than white students (4.6%) (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights). This can be examined further through gender with 20% of black boys and more than 12% of black girls having received an out-of-school suspension (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights). As black students get suspended and are deemed deviant, they are criminalized and pushed from schools to prison (Cole 2019). The consequences black students face today are staggering and disruptive to their education.

COLORBLIND RACISM

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's (2017) research on contemporary racism can help elaborate how black students attending PWIs can still face inequitable, racist treatment from community members. Colorblind racism, defined as a way to ignore skin color in the treatment of others while being racist, began to intrude when Former President Obama was elected in 2008 and then again in 2012 (Bonilla-Silva 2017). His electoral wins were seen as victories in the battle against racism and as improvement for black people (Fleming 2018). Unfortunately, neither of those two

things occurred; racial inequality still exists today under the guise of colorblindness (Bonilla-Silva 2017). The concept of "new racism," colorblind racism, is "more sophisticated and subtle than those typical of the Jim Crow era" (Bonilla-Silva 2017:17). Americans no longer abide by signage that explicitly tells citizens where they can go or with whom they can interact (Cockrell 2011).

Colorblind racism is "coded language," phrases and comments that racist people use and say without thinking it is racist because they choose not to see skin color (Bonilla-Silva 2017:79). The key about the use of this language today is that racists do not want to be caught as their true selves (Bonilla-Silva 2017). This version of covert racism allows racists individuals to come from out of the shadows or comforts of their own home because it is acceptable to say these things in public (Bonilla-Silva 2017; Flemming 2018). With the elections of a black president, it is viewed as completely acceptable to not see color but to see everyone as the same (Bonilla-Silva 2017). Yet, these racists remarks that are said on a daily basis are in fact said while seeing skin color, but more importantly, while seeing the difference between themselves and the people to whom they are referring.

Colorblind Ideology Within Higher Education

This ideology affects black students attending PWIs in their daily interactions on campus. Institutions may paint themselves to be equitable and fair to all students, when in reality, that is not the case. First, PWIs are notorious for lacking safe spaces for students of color to gather, learn and enjoy one another's company (Wong 2017). These institutions were created to represent the epitome of whiteness which reflects how the campus was constructed and what spaces were left out of that construction (Wong 2017). In a colorblind world where skin color does not matter, areas for students that come from oppressed groups in the U.S. are not made as a

priority nor seen as a necessity. For campuses that are working to make their students feel included, cultural centers or centers for diversity and inclusion are in place to be a safe haven for those who need it (Boone 2018).

Second, names of buildings on campuses pay tribute to painful histories that have not been changed to reflect growing, diverse campus populations (Anderson 2017; Brooks 2017). Whether it was Tillman Hall at Clemson University that was named after a racist demagogue in the post-Civil War South, Saunders Hall at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill that was named after the state's leader of the KKK or Byrd Stadium at University of Maryland that was named after a segregationist, these buildings encompassed the racism of the past and contemporary times (Harris 2015; Ojalvo 2017). When black students begin to learn the histories of their institutions, they become even more unsettled that their universities have not changed the names of these buildings. Students often display their frustrations by protesting and addressing their administrations to force the boards and presidents to make the name changes that need to occur (Lamm 2015).

Third, campus police within colleges do not always reflect symbols of "protect and serve." Although they operate in the frame of "harm reduction model of crime control," their tactics are still similar to the violent strategies used to suppress Vietnam War and civil rights protests (Anderson 2015; Lustbader & Gullapalli 2019). Without there being a systematic approach across all colleges and universities, institutions range in having police that are sworn in officers, patrol officers that are not recruited members of the police academy, and those that have assault weapons and no weapons at all (U.S. Department of Justice). Interactions with campus police can go from what appears to be a simple traffic stop to a fatal shooting like the three cases of black male students killed by University of Cincinnati police (Hernandez 2015). Students are

yielded to unlawful exchanges and harassment between themselves and campus police although they reside off campus like at George Washington University (Gurcuillo 2013). These and many other experiences between students and officers on campus continue the cycle of violence and the threat of violence.

STRATEGIES OF SURVEILLANCE

Patricia Hill Collins' (1998) concept of surveillance illustrates the experience black individuals go through on a daily basis in public spaces. Collins (1998) theorizes how citizens interact with each other on a race-based level. It is by no accident that people of minority groups face racism in public spaces. What allows this to happen is the system of institutional racism that has been operating in America prior to the Founding Fathers with the genocide of indigenous peoples (Smith 2012; Grandin 2020). Although everyone is to be treated equally in the eyes of the law, public spaces are controlled by citizens, but only the "right" type of citizens (Collins 1998). This concept of informal and formal citizenship rights details the differences between citizenship determined by the law and citizenship that allows individuals to go about their daily activities without any social barriers (Collins 1998). These public spaces are controlled by white people who have both formal and informal citizenship rights (Collins 1998; Robinson 2003; powell 2005). They are protected by the law and they are able to skate through life without racial persecution (Collins 1998). Since black people are not permitted informal citizenship rights, this requires them to be watched and controlled by whites (Collins 1998). As she stated, "the formal right of citizenship to be in public spaces may not translate into substantive rights of equal treatment in public spaces" (Collins 1998:34). When black people enter public spaces, they are not free on their own accord to act the way they want to. They must bend to the rules of the space that are created, shaped and dominated by white people.

Surveillance in public spaces can happen anywhere you can think of. Prominent examples have been analyzed and captured through hashtags such as #BBQBecky, #PermitPatty and #CornerstoneCaroline (Farzan 2018). White women, particularly in the past five years, have been active agents in the observation of black bodies. It takes only one black person to be "out of place," or "doing something they are not supposed to be doing," for a white person to call the authorities, who assess and escort the black person away from the area.

In the instance of #BBQBecky, in April 2018 April Schulte called the Oakland, California police to help her by having them confront black individuals (Zhao 2018). She called the police because she believed two black men were illegally operating a grill in a park and felt threatened by their presence (Zhao 2018). The men were not doing any harm and they were cooking their food in the zoned grilling area of the park; the white woman did not want them to be in the park at all (Zhao 2018). When she called the police, the dispatcher repeatedly asked her to leave the men alone and walk away, but she did not (Zhao 2018). In the case of #PermitPatty, Alison Ettel called the police to report someone illegally selling water across the ballpark in San Francisco, California in June 2018 (Aponte 2018). The person she called the police on was an eight-year-old black girl selling water outside of her home which was near AT&T Park (Aponte 2018). Ettel claimed she only pretended to call the police due to the disturbance Erin Austin's daughter was making, but there is clear evidence of her making the phone call (Aponte 2018). In the event of #CornerstoneCaroline, Teresa Klein accused a black nine-year-old boy of groping her and "grabbing her behind" in a deli in Brooklyn, New York in October 2018 (Grenoble 2018). According to surveillance footage, the child's hands were nowhere near her, but his backpack accidentally grazed her (Grenoble 2018). The president of the Brooklyn Borough characterized the event as a "modern-day Emmett Till moment," recounting how extreme the

situation could have become (Grenoble 2018). Although these three examples differ in terms of circumstance and location, they illustrate the ease of white women calling the police on black individuals over non-violent transgressions (Farzan 2018). This type of surveillance is not always named with a hashtag, but it is the culmination of people posting numerous accounts on social media to gain traction. These incidents were recorded, but they aren't always.

The Strategies of Surveillance Within Higher Education

This concept underlines how black students are constantly watched because they are deemed "the other" and outside of the in-group crowd (Collins 1998; Staszak 2008). As minorities moving through PWIs, they are relentlessly invisible and visible (Collins 1998). They are invisible because they lack the numbers to be seen and counted as a major part of the institution (Lewis 2016). However, they are incredibly visible because they cannot blend into the majority of white students that attends their university (Collins 1998).

First, black students are punished for being in spaces in which they are allowed. An example of this happened at Yale University when a black graduate student, Lolade Siyonbola, fell asleep in the common room of her dormitory in May 2018 (Caron 2018a). After working late on her assignments, she took a nap on the sofa (Caron 2018a). At 1:30am, she was awakened by a white student, Lynn Cooley, saying she would call the police to remove the person who was in the space (Caron 2018a). When the police arrived, Siyonbola was asked to hand over her identification and prove that she lived in that dorm (Caron 2018a). She gave the officer her student identification card and her apartment keys as proof. Another example occurred at the University of Florida's commencement ceremony in May 2018 when black graduates were grabbed and escorted off the stage (Caron 2018b). Many of the black graduates performed their fraternity strolls as they crossed the stage, and the platform marshal, an unnamed university

faculty member (who was put on paid administrative leave afterwards), restrained the student and took him off stage (Caron 2018b). The student, Oliver Telusema, stated, “I was shocked. He literally wrapped his arms around me. I didn’t understand what was going on” (Caron 2018b). The video evidence that showed this also displayed white students being hurried across the stage, but in a much less aggressive manner (Caron 2018b). Another student, a black woman named, Nafeesah Attah, was grabbed so hard that her cap fell off her head (Caron 2018b). From the two examples discussed above, it is questionable, if university personnel and students recognize black students as true members of their institution. If they did, they would not have responded that way.

Second, black students are looked to answer questions that are representative of the black community. This is where their visibility becomes apparent in the classroom, when the professor or students need to hear from black voices on black issues. This occurred at Brigham Young University in February 2020 during a panel discussion of the black immigrant experience (Tanner 2020). The panelists were taking questions from the audience through phone submission, but the questions had nothing to do with their experiences (Tanner 2020). The questions were: “What is the percentage of African Americans on food stamps?” “Why do African Americans hate the police?” and “Why don’t we have any white people on stage?” (Tanner 2020). The panelists were frustrated. They felt like they wasted their time being there because they were unable to answer questions that related to their identity (Tanner 2020). This example illustrates that no matter where you are on campus, in class or in a public forum, white people will ask black people questions they think pertain to them simply based on the color of their skin.

RACIAL MICROAGGRESSION THEORY

How can we categorize the racist behavior and experiences black students face when they enroll in PWIs? Researchers Komanduri and Vyas (2017) use Racial Microaggression Theory to explain the relationship between students of color and white faculty, staff and students. They describe this theory as the process in which white members of the institution offend black students through subtle actions (Komanduri and Vyas 2017). Microaggressions can be expressed verbally, non-verbally, visually or environmentally (Levchak 2013; Jaurique et al. 2016; Ceja et al. 2017; Komanduri and Vyas 2017). The reason why individuals perpetuate these racist acts in a covert way is because they do not recognize their actions as racist at all (Bonilla-Silva 2017; Levchak 2013). Overt microaggressions do happen on college campuses, but how and where they occur are much different than covert microaggressions. (Ceja et al. 2017).

Microaggressions are actions that can take many forms. Komanduri and Vyas (2017) developed a method to describe types of microaggressions. There are three categories of microaggressions which include microassaults, microinsults and microinvalidations (Komanduri and Vyas 2017). Microassaults are explicit racist ridicule from whites who feel they have lost power in their sphere or feel unsafe (Komanduri and Vyas 2017). Microinsults are disrespectful and unkind messaging to belittle the black students' identity (Komanduri and Vyas 2017). Microinvalidations invalidate the experiences of black students because their race is no longer defined by struggles they may face (Komanduri and Vyas 2017). Microaggressions can occur at any time and place on college campuses. Some white people believe black students are subordinate to them which makes them think they have the right to treat them as inferior (Cornell & Hartmann 2007; Treitler 2013).

THE SETTING OF PREDOMINANTLY WHITE COLLEGE CAMPUSES

It is not by chance that college campuses reproduce racial inequality in their communities as they are not exempt from the larger system of racism that exists in our society (Cornell & Hartmann 2007). These sites of higher learning institutionalize Eurocentric interest and values. They were created and meant for white people; they were not built for students of color (Green 2019). PWIs maintain white supremacy by uplifting certain values and dismissing others (Okun 2001). Some of these standards include "worship of the written word," "fear of open conflict," and "right to comfort" (Okun 2001). Each belief invalidates how students of color learn and navigate college campuses in ways that ignore their contribution to the college.

The first one, "worship of the written word," values organizing thoughts and ideas when they are on paper (Okun 2001). This is harmful to black students attending PWIs because that is not the typical way their histories or traditions are distributed (Hamlet 2011). Oral storytelling and repetition are primary forms of communication that are passed to the present generation (Hamlet 2011). When this is not considered, professors may not understand or value this way of learning (Hamlet 2011). The second one, "fear of open conflict," emphasizes being polite in spaces that contain power and not addressing issues of concern (Okun 2001). This does not support the journey black students take in undergrad because the administration will automatically dismiss what they consider to be "modes of aggression" (DeGregory 2018). Protests done on college campuses, especially when done in the effort to achieve better resources for black students, are seen as direct threats to the institution (DeGregory 2018). In some cases, they are, but that does not mean the university should not be open to hearing from their students. The last one, "right to comfort," focuses on giving those in positions of power "the right to emotional and psychological comfort" even though they are the ones that may cause harm to

others (Okun 2001). This standard is a disservice to black students because it allows those in places of power to remain that way and not change their titles or positions to better help students (DeGregory 2018). This also helps explain why members in the administration or faculty members may be in positions that appear to be long-term because the university is comfortable with them being there even though they may not serve students to the best of their abilities (Seltzer 2018).

Since the transition to a more diverse college population, it is important to examine how black students experience an institution that was not designed for them or with them in mind. Investigating how racial injustice is perpetuated at PWIs helps us understand what happens to black students and how campus environments directly impact their experiences. According to Ceja et al. (2017), every college campus has a positive or negative racial climate. There are limitations to what is considered acceptable in each climate. They describe four elements that give a college campus a positive racial atmosphere: (1) people of color represented as faculty, staff and students; (2) contemporary and historical curriculums that express experiences of people of color; (3) campus resources that support students of color through every stage of the college process; and (4) a mission statement that reflects their commitment to having a community filled with multiple backgrounds (Ceja et al. 2017). One notion I believe the authors missed was the willingness of colleges to be open to discussing racial inequality and injustice. Without that element, the four concepts mentioned above may not happen as part of the university's goal. This would address the need for continual conversation surrounding these topics, and not just when a racialized incident occurs. A negative campus racial climate lacks these elements (Ceja et al. 2017). Breaking down the setting of college campuses in this manner helps us to realize the state of racial tensions. Although racial inequality and acts of racism can

still exist in positive racial climates, it is possible that those institutions may be better at handling racist behavior and incidents. It is also important who considers the college to have a positive or negative campus racial climate. When researching PWIs with a negative campus racial atmosphere, it is important to recognize if there is an absence of inclusion and/or equal treatment towards members of the community who are people of color.

Another significant part of the college campus environment to explore is the culture of each institution. Jaurique et al. (2016) realize that students of color, just like their white peers, choose to attend a specific college because they are drawn to it. There are many reasons that make up this decision, but the main one discussed is community membership (Jaurique et al. 2016). In other words, some institutions have school spirit that all students want to feel a part of during their time at the university. Non-white students want to feel like they are included in the same degree as their white peers. When they face discrimination from white people, they feel ostracized from the campus spirit that pulled them to that specific institution in the first place. Not only does it make them feel excluded, but it also shifts their perception of the college's morality (Jaurique et al. 2016). The scholars argue, "To experience or witness discrimination suggests that university community members lack the 'multi-cultural' competence that students expect or want," which means students of color view their college as immoral for not upholding racial, equitable standards (Jaurique et al. 2016:358). They will no longer want to identify with their college because it allows or justifies racial discrimination against them and members of their racial group.

HISTORY OF THE PWI EXAMINED

The school in which I completed my research was originally founded in the 19th century and like many colleges, has a Christian background. Today, it is recognized as a small university.

The liberal arts college was integrated became inclusive of women and men in 1942 and by race in the 1950s. It is comprised of three divisions: a seminary, a liberal arts college and a graduate school. The campus, and larger community in which it is located, has experienced multiple examples of racial discrimination over the years. Due to the limitations of time for research and the campus' longstanding history, it is impossible to analyze each site that holds a marker of racial discrimination, but I will survey contemporary history of the university since the 2010s to help situate where the university stands today. Long lasting impressions that have been marked into the university's history have been issues concerning Public Safety, the decline of the Pan-African (Pan-Af) Studies Program, the defacement of the university's Black Lives Matter sign and the hanging of white supremacist posters on campus. Examining structural and individual issues are crucial to see how the university operates. These moments are examples that demonstrate the university's struggle with racial equality which has made black students uncomfortable and feel like their presence does not matter as much as white students. Not only do they illustrate present racial struggles, but they establish how black students are living in the shadows of these events or issues that happened on campus.

Public Safety at The University

The personnel that make up the university's Public Safety is small and known for its high turnover rate. There are less than 15 staff currently hired and they vary by race. Not all of the photos of team members are made available online, but there is one black man and woman on the squad. There are a handful of Hispanic/Latinx staff, but the majority is white. The staff are unsworn and unarmed, so referring to them as "officers" would not be an accurate representation of the team. They drive marked, patrol cars on and off campus in the university's perimeter to complete rounds. One point of contention was when a staff member chose to put a Blue Lives

Matter sticker on the university vehicle. This caused an uproar with many students and it was addressed to the Director of Public Safety when it occurred in the 2018-2019 academic year. The sticker was removed. It is important to know that the town in which the university is located in also has a town police force which flies the blue lives matter flags outside of their building.

Personnel also walk into academic buildings, dining spaces and dormitories daily. Whether they are on rounds or addressing a situation, they are most visible outside of the Public Safety Office at the entrance of campus. There is a patrol booth that a staff member would sit in to inspect who was coming on and off of campus, but due to the lack of staff, it is no longer utilized for that purpose. Students often reflect about their experiences of entering the university being forced to show student identification, and even car registration to prove they owned the vehicle. The patrol booth on campus is a highly contestable sight for the participants in my study. Public Safety takes their orders from the university president and enact their requests on campus.

The Decline of The Pan-African Studies Program

This program was first founded at the university in the 1960s. It has been a constant struggle to hire professors to teach in this program and make courses available to be taught. In the university's archives, black student organizations can be seen pleading with the university's president from the 1980s to offer more courses in this subject area. In the letters back to them, the president claims that having one to two courses taught the next semester would suffice. The past helps explain the current situation of the Pan-Af Program. Since 2016, the two central faculty members who taught courses within the discipline have left the university and their positions have yet to be replaced. Beginning in 2018, the program has been suspended and is no longer accepting new enrollments. According to the institution's website, the program is still advertised as if students are able to take the courses listed. Although the program is still in

existence, there is no disclaimer on the page description stating the program is not fully active with all listed courses being taught.

The Defacement of The Black Lives Matter Sign

This incident caused a lot of disruption on campus when it occurred in Spring 2017. What makes the incident interesting to analyze was that the sign had been hanging in the seminary building for at least a year prior to its vandalization. The seminary building is one that has a lot of foot traffic from staff, students and professors whether they are or not affiliated with this division of the university. Many students find themselves taking courses in this building in areas such as humanities and the social sciences. The sign was posted high on a wall near the foyer area and required a ladder to reach.

One day towards the end of the 2017 Spring semester, it had been reported that the sign had been defaced. Instead of it saying, “Black Lives Matter” in all capital letter, the word “Black” was crossed out and replaced with “All.” Faculty, staff and students from the seminary organized a town hall to reflect on the situation. The room was packed with attendance from various roles and divisions on campus. To end the town hall, seminary student leaders did not let the defacement define this experience. Instead, they took the sign and painted it to reflect a stained-glass window to highlight the past and present iterations of the sign. The sign currently hangs in the seminary building. To this day, the university does not know who defaced the sign, their reason to do so or if the person was affiliated at all with the institution. Unanswered questions about this incident still linger for those that remember when it took place. During this time, the university’s president did send emails stating the institution does not tolerate intolerance but did not go further into denouncing the All Lives Matter platform in response to the Black Lives Matter movement.

White Supremacy Posters Hung on Campus

One evening during the 2019 Spring semester, students began to report there were hate group fliers posted around campus. Due to the campus' location in the town, people who are not members of the institution have access to the grounds. This was brought to the attention of university deans and the president. Public Safety became involved to inspect the posters, take them down and looked at surveillance video footage to see if they could find the individual(s) behind this act.

The campus turned upside down in the span of a few short hours due to this incident occurring after the typical workday was complete. In the following weeks, meetings between numerous student organizations and members of the administration took place to inquire how the university would go about protecting its students from future individuals stepping foot on campus to recruit new members. Hate group organizations can be found all over the U.S. and the Northeast is no exception. External community groups must ask permission to post fliers for their cause at the university and it was clear that this group did not follow the appropriate procedures. Since the incident in 2019, no other sightings of hate group fliers have been seen on university grounds. After the posters were seen on campus, the president also sent out emails to the community speaking of peace and equality, similar to the emails sent after the defacement of the black lives matter sign.

Chapter 3: Methods

To further investigate the experiences of black students attending PWIs in the Northeast, my research study consists of qualitative analysis and the method of photo elicitation. I conducted research with the participation of 19 students in total. In order to participate, students had to be at least 18 years of age, complete one month of undergraduate studies at the college and identify as black. An office at the university collects and maintain data and information on such matters and recorded that their black students make up about 7% (117 students) of the University's undergraduate school whereas white students make up about 48% (800 students). Due to the stark contrast of black and white students enrolled; it was important to reach out to black students in a variety of avenues to make sure they had the opportunity to participate in the study. Students were contacted via two avenues: student-run organizations and professors that taught in at least 40 different academic departments in the CLA. Students of all racial backgrounds received information on the study from either one or both points of contact in hopes that black students would contact the Principal Investigator (PI) if interested in participating.

SAMPLING METHOD

I made it a priority to have participants in the study range from all class years to get the outlook of as many black students enrolled at the institution as possible. This consisted of a voluntary response sampling which means students volunteered to speak with me about their experiences. The project required students to complete two interviews in addition to walking around the campus to take photographs of sites where they felt like they were mistreated because of their race utilizing the method of photo elicitation. The data collection took place beginning in mid-October 2019 and ended at the end of November 2019. Students were asked to engage in three steps in order to complete the study in full. First, students interviewed with me on campus

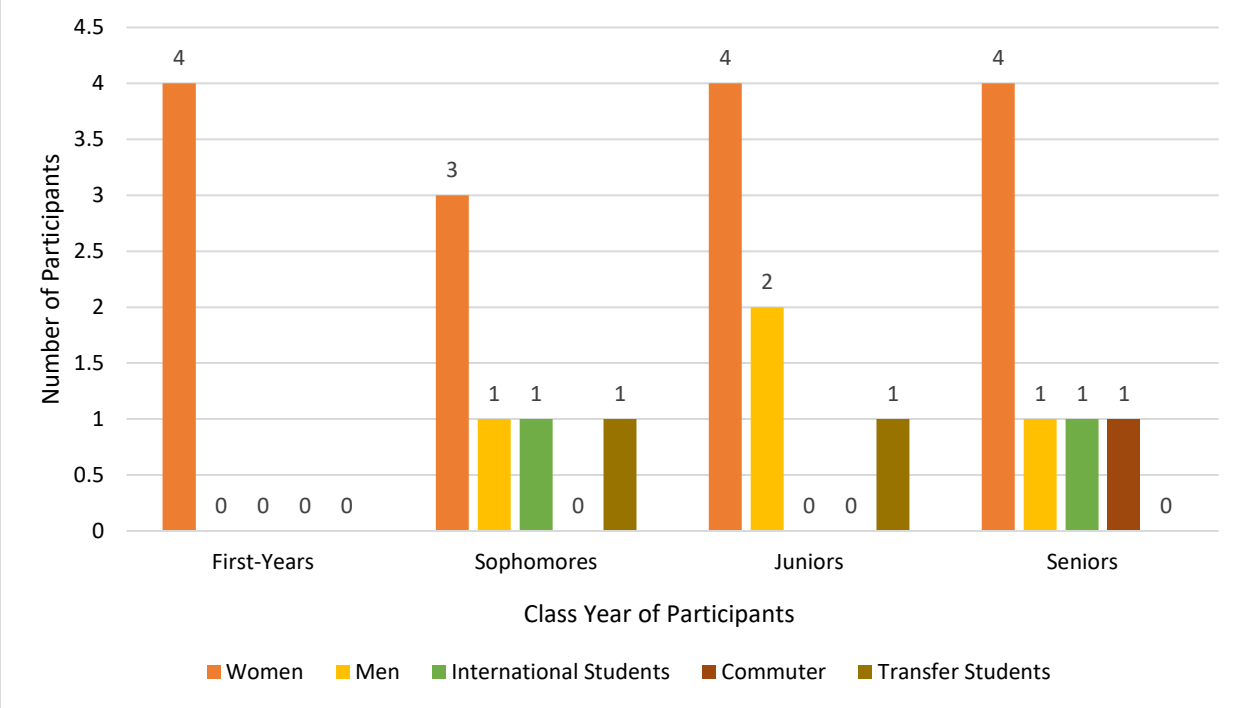
in a private location for me to get a better understanding of their individual experience and to learn more about their racial identity. The interviews were set to take place for no more than two hours, and on average, were completed in about 50 minutes. In each interview conducted, a white noise machine was placed outside the door to prevent individuals from hearing our conversations on the opposite side of the door. Second, students were then given instructions on how to complete the second step of the research study, which involved students walking around campus and having access to an object that could take pictures. Participants were asked to take pictures of one to five sites on campus where they believed they were racially discriminated against. Third, students completed the second and final interview to discuss their photos and the significance of these locations on campus. Once those three steps were completed, participants were compensated with either $10 cash or gift card. To keep the identity of the students confidential, they were asked to choose a pseudonym to make sure their experiences could never be tied back to them individually. Any examples of racial discrimination listed have been altered only to maintain confidentiality for the participants.

The app used to record all of the interviews is called VoiceRecorder. Once they were recorded, the files were downloaded and uploaded to two computer-based programs. First, the transcripts were uploaded to Trint to make sure each piece of audio correctly matched the text listed on the document. Once that step was complete, the transcripts were uploaded to Dedoose to begin the coding process. 37 codes were created to highlight the varied experiences of the participants. Afterwards, coding was complete.

Chapter 4: Results

The diversity of students that were involved in this study showed the various characteristics of students that are enrolled at the institution. Although 19 students participated, only 17 completed the study, which included two interviews and the process of photo elicitation. In the figure below, all 19 students are included. Table 1 in the Appendix section demonstrates the participant demographics. The figure below reflects gender, class-year status, domestic/international status, residential/commuting status and transfer status. Racial demographics comparing the university examined and state level data are located in the Appendix.

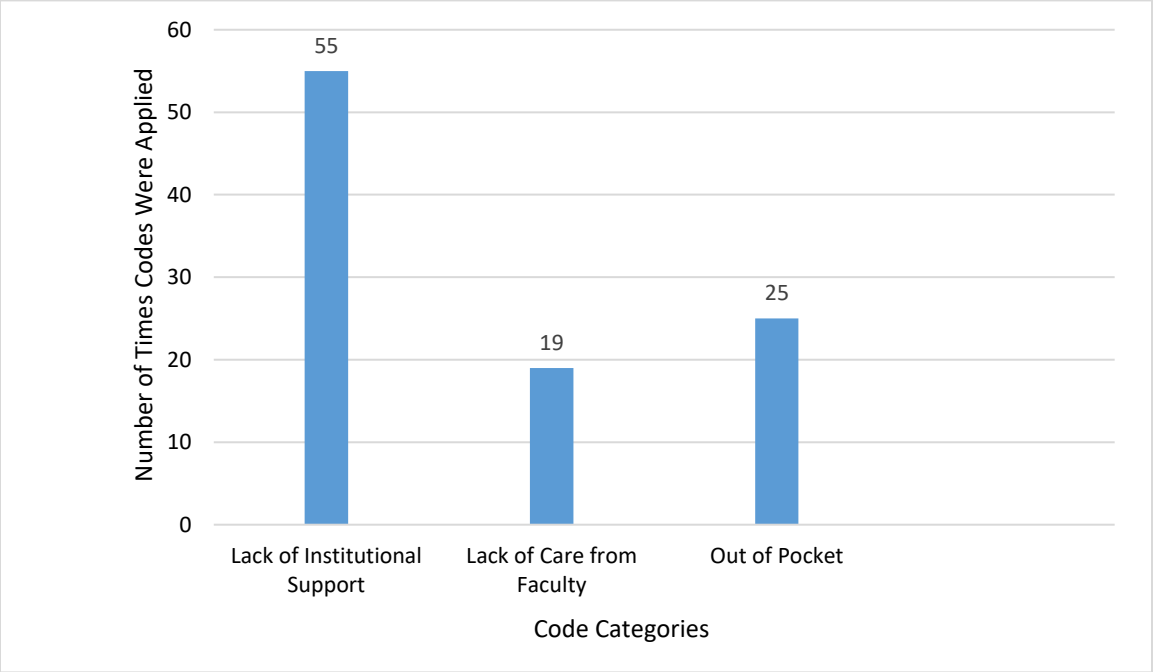
Figure 1. Characteristics of Sample Participants.



Three codes were prominent in my coding process which is the primary focus of this chapter; this process can be found below in Figure 2. The first code was labeled “lack of institutional support” which highlighted how the students interpreted their relationship with the

university's administration. The second code was categorized as "lack of care from faculty," which detailed how participants believed their professors were oblivious to race in the classroom or actively made them a target during class sessions. The third code listed was "out of pocket experiences," which described experiences from students that shocked them to their core. In the analysis, photographs of sites on the campus are included to denote the photo elicitation process. Table 2 in the Appendix section includes the code name and descriptors for all codes used in this study.

Figure 2. The Number of Times These Prominent Codes Were Used.



LACK OF INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

Participants stated they believed their presence at the university was not supported at an institutional level. They discussed four areas in which they experienced daily injustices which included: the disappearance of the Pan-African Studies (Pan-Af) Program, the relationship between the university president and the community, the Center for Counseling Services and

confrontations with Public Safety. These aspects of campus life were important because they displayed challenging parts of the students' academic careers, although each of these relationships or programs should be in place to assist students with all of their needs.

Pan-African studies program. Students explained their unique relationship with the Pan-African Studies Program. The relationship was labeled distinct because some black students were a part of the program for their studies, while others were very close with the director of the program. It was primarily directed by one black, male faculty member, although many faculty members in the college taught courses that cross-listed within the major. When the interviews took place in Fall 2019, the director of the program was no longer teaching at the institution since Fall 2018 which is when the program was suspended.

Once the director of the program left the university, the participants declared they had lost a mentor and someone they could look up to on campus.

> "[The head of the program,] was like a dad on campus so you could go to him…He was there to support black students. I've never taken a class with him. But he knew me. He knew my name. And whenever he saw me always checked in on me…He made it like a goal to learn about like every single student of color. Mostly black students…but like all because he kind of took us under his wing."
>
> -Alexandra, Senior

This senior was one of the students who did not major or minor in this program but was able to forge an incredible bond with its director. She valued the connection with this faculty member very much. She illustrates how crucial black professors are at her college by being a resource and someone she could count on. The institution has less than seven black professors, only two of whom are women, that teach in the college. The loss of one tremendously hurts the

campus and the students who have bonded with them which can be felt in the absence of their presence.

The students also described they felt like their history was not worth being taught at the institution in the absence of the Pan-Af Studies Program. When the director of the program left, the position was not filled to lift the program's suspension which left an instructional gap to either be picked up by other professors in other disciplines or not fulfilled at all.

> "Now with the dismantling of the Pan-Af major, we no longer have that opportunity to learn about African contributions and people from the African diaspora and their contributions to life and culture because that program is pretty much gone...Do I feel that my culture is underrepresented here? Absolutely…And no wonder I haven't taken a Pan-Af class. I can't now. But it wasn't really made aware to people that that program was no longer here. It just disappeared."
>
> -Tyrone, Junior

This participant expressed many concerns he has with the program's current state due to the absence on instruction and direction moving forward. He is not able to see himself reflected in the material due to the lack of classes offered in this subject area. When he stated he could no longer take a Pan-Af class, that is not exactly accurate. Students can take courses that are cross-listed with the Pan-Af program, but they will not count towards a minor or major in the program since it is suspended. Students may have seen the limited number of courses offered with the label of Pan-Af in the past four semesters, since Fall 2018, and assumed no courses were being taught. This points to the ambiguity of the program and its current status within the college. Students are unclear of what is going on with the program and may not be as willing to take these courses if they think they are not being offered or if they think they will not count for credit

in the discipline. The participant also stated that their culture and history are not mirrored in the curriculum. Combining the lack of black history being taught at the institution with the bleak structure of the Pan-Af program, black students like Tyrone are left without many options to continue their studies in this field.

One participant was also unsure how they and other students were going to complete the requirements of the program since the director left the university.

> "And it just shows, again, if you really cared about black students like you claim, or if you really even cared about the minor or the major like you claimed, you would do the work to improve it. I was lucky enough to only need to have one more class taken this semester and I'll be done. But what about the students that this was their major or this was a minor and there's like nothing they can do…So now they don't have classes…and there's still nothing being done about the major [or] minor." -Ayanah, Junior

She, and many others at her institution, were at a loss of how the program was going to continue without the director. As stated in the transcript above, with one year's absence, Ayanah was shocked that no one had replaced the director of the program to continue the program. Students majoring or minoring in the program were left unassisted in trying to complete their requirements.

The Pan-Af Program's presence on campus is crucial for black students. Without it, students believe they have lost a curriculum that illustrates their history and knowledge of the program's status for present and future students. From the participants in my study, it is evident that the university needs to actively work on amending this situation and regain what was lost with the Pan-Af Program.

The Relationship Between the University President and Students

Some of the participants reflected that the size of the institution made it possible to connect with many faculty and staff members, but they do not have the same relationships with the university's president. The participants understand the power structures of the university and realize the president has the capability to push for effective initiatives. Below are concerns from participants who believe the president is not connecting enough with them as black students.

> "I feel like it would be nice to see something from the higher ups, maybe from the president. I know now currently compared to my freshman year, there have been improvements. But I feel like it's almost always on the student level and there's always a student behind it." -Ayanah, Junior

In the excerpt above, Ayanah explained she wants the president of her institution to be the one championing for change on campus. She shares similar sentiments with other participants about the amount of work student leaders do. Students prepare a lot of events and annual programs to spark conversation and community, but those events are not attended by the president nor members of the cabinet.

If the college believes in equity and inclusion, it is important that those sentiments can be felt by the students from the president. The current relationship between the participants and the president is almost non-existent.

> "I think the president really doesn't have much of a presence. Like once in a while she has to send an email saying we don't condone racial discrimination or any discrimination of any kind. But after that, like, I may see her at an admissions event, and she smiles as she walks by. But I don't feel her really doing anything to have that support, personally." -Denzel, Sophomore

The participant above feels as though the president is a recognized figure on campus but does not have strong interpersonal relationships with him and other students. The most interaction they may have is through the emails she sends. Like many college presidents across the U.S., they will send an email to the community when there has been a disturbance in the community. With every email sent, the president shames the acts that were done, but they do not go any further than that. The community does not come together to hear the president denounce the acts in person or make an action plan to make sure the incident that occurred does not happen again nor are there policies implemented to change the institutional climate that allows such acts to occur.

The Center for Counseling Services

At the university in which the study took place, the Center for Counseling Services (the Center) runs a lot of programs for its students to partake in; however, black students do not believe they are supported in the aspect of mental health. The Center has one black part-time clinician, and one Asian clinician, and the remaining four are white. The other black, full-time clinician left the university at the end of the 2019 Spring semester. Communication between the institution, the Center and the student body is not entirely clear about who works there. Although the website is updated, the students that I interviewed were under the impression that zero clinicians of color, particularly black clinicians, work there. Table 3 includes figures to better understand the relationship between students and the Center's staff. Excerpts below highlight that miscommunication.

Table 3. Breakdown of Staff-Student Support in the Center for Counseling Services.

Number of Students enrolled in the College	1,668
Number of Students of Color enrolled in the College	434 (26%)
Number of Clinicians employed at the Center	6
Number of Clinicians of Color employed at the Center	2 (33%)
Ratio of Clinicians to the Students enrolled in the College	1:278

The participant below describes why she does not utilize the Center at her institution.

> "For me, as a black student, I do not go to the counseling services…because they do not have representation for black and brown students on campus. I feel like the staff doesn't fully understand the experiences of black and brown students, and I actually did try I did go to counseling services for about a semester and I felt like I was being praised for doing things that I always do and that I wanted to be critiqued or I wanted to have somebody just be real with me. And I feel like that would only come from another black person who understands what black people have to [go through]." -Tasha, Senior

This participant explained that she would only go to the counseling services if she knew a black therapist would be able to work with her to help her make progress. Her perspective suggests that the identity of the therapists in the Center are not clearly marked. If she had known there was at least one part-time black therapist, her frame of the Center may have been different while we discussed it during the interview. Information must be widely disseminated from the institution to let students know who is available in the Counseling Center. One can hope that non-black counselors are aware of racial inequality and racial dynamics and are cautious of this when working with clients.

Not all of the students were aware that one of their faculty members doubled as a therapist in the Center. When the student below found out this information, she stated how helpful it would have been in the moment she needed it.

> "I took Intro to Psych like last year, and then I found out that my [black] professor [does] counseling and that would have been nice [to have known]. Nice information to know that he was on campus and was available because I feel like coming from a black person, it's more relatable." -Marie, Senior

In addition to reflecting on her experience, this participant is speaking to a larger issue within higher education. For example, students may take the Psychology professor's classes all the time but may be unaware he counsels students. It would prove helpful to hire more therapists of color in the counseling center as well as letting students know who can provide counseling services in the community outside of the formalized establishment.

Encounters with Public Safety

Contact with Public Safety ranged across all class years in the sample of participants. Interactions with the officers made my participants anxious, cautious and at many times, frustrated. The excerpts below display a range of incidents with Public Safety personnel.

Although the experiences with Public Safety staff members vary on campus, the students I interviewed shared encounters with them in situations where they were not called to solve a problem or an emergency. The excerpt below describes a student's experience with Public Safety who interfered with her friend driving on campus, which felt unnecessary.

> "One of my friends, we hung out. He was dropping me back to campus. When we pulled into campus, public safety was in front of us. Then they moved. They stopped so that we can go around. And then they followed us. We got to my

> [residence on campus] when we stopped. Public safety also stopped behind us. When I was getting out the car and I asked, “why are we being followed.” Public safety responds. “no, I'm just doing rounds.” If you're doing rounds, wouldn't you just keep driving? Why stop? It was a white male officer.” –Ayanah, Junior

Ayanah. 2019. “Photo Elicitation Describing Public Safety Incident.”

In this instance, Ayanah described her experience with Public Safety in which they were not called to come assist her nor her friend. The action of this staff member irritated her because she did not understand their reasoning. This type of interaction displays how black students may question the presence of Public Safety as they move about on campus.

Another incident with Public Safety that was disturbing with some members of the college was the detailing found on the patrol cars. At least one vehicle, owned by the university’s Public Safety unity, had a blue and black sticker on it to symbolize Blue Lives Matter. This “movement” came in response to the Black Live Matter movement to show allegiance with police officers and to protect their right to defend themselves on the job (Shonekan 2017). The student below described her feelings towards the officer who decided to put that sticker on the university owned car.

> "I feel like what you feel in your personal life outside of work. I can't take that away from you. But I feel like when you work for a university and there are black students on campus and when we know what blue lives matter originates from. [Having a Blue Lives Matter sticker on a patrol car] becomes an issue. And you can also make students feel unsafe." -Ayanah, Junior

The excerpt above details how a Public Safety team member expressed their personal views while at work. Ayanah explicitly stated that this sticker could make black students feel uncomfortable. This sticker does not illustrate the university's mission nor diversity, equity and inclusion statement. This incident occurred back in 2018 and the Director of Public Safety, at the time, had the personnel remove the sticker from the car because it was unprofessional.

Racial profiling was a popular phrase used to describe Public Safety when this aspect of campus was discussed in our interviews. 26% of the students had been racially profiled directly from an officer while others said it happened to their friends. Another point in time in which students discussed being racially profiled was at the entrance of the school. On the school's small campus, there are at least four entrance and exit locations to campus. At the main gate, there is a booth that is supposed to stop cars in the evenings to see why they are coming onto campus. It is the belief of the black students in the sample that Public Safety officers do not stop cars driven by white people, but they do when it is a student of color.

> "When there is a[n] [officer] at the [booth], [they let the] white students just pass by. But if it's a black student, I guess too many black people in the car, they always stop, and go, 'Hey, where are you guys coming from? Can I see some I.D.?' Even if they literally saw you leave campus [and] come back in...It is always the same thing." –Alexandra, Senior

The profiling that takes place at this location on campus is crucial to the black student experience. After nine o'clock in the evening, the other gates on campus are closed and cannot be used. When students, or anyone else, are trying to enter their school, which may also be where they reside, they are not treated with equity and respect in comparison to their white peers. Black students are aware they will be asked to show their student identification card or driver's license if they have one, and car registration.

Public Safety employees also have a unique interaction with students as some of the grounds on campus must be cleared to use with their permission. The university's club soccer team is one of the many organizations that must ask Public Safety to use the outdoor soccer field for practice before going on to the field. The incident below explains how different Public Safety officers treat the members of club soccer team who are mostly students of color.

> "In club soccer, there's been times when we we're using the turf at night and we had booked it and everything and the public safety officers come around prying, asking, 'What are we doing?' And they're like, 'no, no, no. [you cannot] be here." A lot of people on the team kind of felt offended by that. Me too. We were allowed to be there; we were given permission by the Public Safety officers [at first]. [They] looked at us and…they just didn't trust us. We weren't doing something [wrong]. And for some reason, they didn't trust us to be [t]here…It was mixed with students of color and white students." – Denzel, Sophomore

Denzel. 2019. “Photo Elicitation Describing Public Safety Interaction.”

Denzel’s experience with Public Safety as a member of the club soccer team was interesting because not only is he a black student, but he is an international student as well. The incident with members of Public Safety kicking off the club soccer players from the field made them upset because that was their normal location to practice. Denzel also told me the treatment by Public Safety staff was not new; the previous captain of the team told them of the disrespect they had received in years past.

LACK OF CARE FROM PROFESSORS

Participants responded that they believed like their professors, mostly their white professors, were oblivious to race in the classroom or actively made them a target during class sessions. The pattern that evolved in the data illustrated there was a difference in treatment from professors and staff to black students depending on their area of study. Four students identified themselves as Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) majors and 15 students were non-STEM majors. Although a majority of the 19 students expressed discomfort being a token and being underestimated in the classroom, STEM-majors heavily carried a burden with them being black and in a science-based field. The non-STEM majors did not stress their race being as much of a hinderance in their field of study.

Stem-Majors at the University

As mentioned previously, STEM-majors identified themselves during the interview process as being a black student at a PWI while also majoring in a field that is also predominantly white within and outside of the university. It is a difficult learning environment for them as they are not often reflected in the material; there are zero non-white faculty members in the department. STEM-majors also face enormous amounts of pressure to gain internships and research opportunities to further their skills, which can be a challenge for non-white and/or women students.

The participant below explains what her life is like as a STEM-major. She highlights how the department is focused on training researchers for the field but may neglect important aspects such as race and gender in the discipline.

> "I feel that especially in sciences, it's like a hard life, just hard existing in that space. It's such a bubble. And you can especially when you get into the more intermediate and advanced courses, you can feel like that tension because everyone in there will either go to medical school or go to graduate school for research. So getting into [the] research program [at school], they're all white [and] male. But like, no, you know, black influence. Nothing like that." –Desi, Junior

As a junior, Desi has had a lot of time to get to know how her department works and the expectations of students. She is aware of the goals that need to be achieved while also recognizing the seclusion within those spaces. Not only is the learning environment white, but the field she will be entering is white as well. Even in her research program at the institution that was supposed to mentor her and expand her skillsets in the lab there was isolation due to race and gender.

Another example of a STEM-major experiencing difficulties in her department shared that mentorship and support were hard to find.

> "[The (white male) professor] condescendingly asked me if I knew what ozone was. I [told him what it was] and he was like, "Oh, you know, about ozone?" So I was just like, yeah, I do. I basically just like went in depth about like to show him what my knowledge was and how, like, my knowledge wasn't just superficial. It was deep…He's also not a good professor for students of color...Just in the difference in how he talks to students of color, and also, like based on my experience, maybe [he likes] white students [more]. He exemplifies like favoritism and things like that." –Desi, Junior

Desi. 2019. "Photo Elicitation Depicting Incident with a White STEM-based Professor."

Desi's experience highlights the tension in the classroom between white professors and black students. In a classroom where you want to show the professor your knowledge and expertise, those things are met with uncertainty. From this example, it is important for professors to always watch tone in which they are speaking to their students. Any type of attitude, accidental or purposeful, can be mistaken to show the student that they do not really care what

they have to say. The professor the participant is speaking of was also brought up in the following except with another participant named Marie.

The example below exposes how difficult it is to exist in STEM-based courses. More favoritism is displayed in another course this professor teaches.

> "In that class, they do something called "Bio Idol." And I feel like that's where we find out who's the favorite, because it's the most random thing where [the (white male) professor] gives you an absurd amount of points. Let's say [he gives] five points just doing like this video on a science topic. But like, obviously you got to be in a good group and you have to have someone write the lyrics with all this extra stuff and [it] just happen to be the people who are the highest [scoring] in the class [get the extra points]…Like this one group, they did a video and it wasn't good at all and they still won because some because the people who choose it are like the people who won last year. [The ones that] always win, always just happen to be in the top percentage of the class." –Marie, Junior

Marie. 2019. "Photo Elicitation Depicting an Incident with a White STEM-based Professor."

Marie and Desi shared with me that their experiences of working with a white, male professor who demonstrates bias in his courses. Any type of bias in the classroom does not allow

all students to show the professor their skills and knowledge. As black students taking classes where there are already few black students present, any type of bias shown to other students is not a comfortable feeling. Where black students feel as their voice cannot be heard as the minority, all professors should validate their student's ability to learn, grow and share what they know about the topic without being compared to those they may align with. From these two examples, it is clear that this professor has another prerogative they follow during his instruction.

Non-STEM Majors at the University

79% of the participants described themselves as non-STEM majors and defined themselves as either a Humanities or Social Sciences major. Their classroom experiences differed from their STEM-major peers because they did not describe themselves as being isolated within their field in addition to their individual classroom experiences. Often students expressed the lack of representation in faculty and curriculum that made them feel unwanted. It was clear that these encounters stuck with the participants, as many of them recounted racialized instances that had not taken place during the 2019-2020 academic year.

> "I think that it is important [to be taught by a black professor]. I feel like representation in all aspects is important...I'm not going to say that the professors that teach here don't do their best. But when you have a professor that might not understand or might not relate, or maybe just not even be able to thoroughly explain the perspective of the racial component of things, I feel like it doesn't limit the educational process. Also, it's hard when you have to go to advisors that don't look like you and I don't understand you or what you may have to deal with. So when every professor or majority of the professors in an institution are white, it then becomes an issue of, oh, I don't have a person to go to who looks

> like me to figure out what I need to do next in my academic career…It might be easier to talk to someone that looks like you.." –Tasha, Senior

In the example above, Tasha does not equate her black experience to her selection of major. Her experience is not defined or constrained to a field in particular, but largely the inequitable racial distribution at the university. It is possible that students in the Humanities and Social Sciences do not feel as bad as STEM major students. Tasha is not comparing her feeling to the lack of representation in her discipline outside of academia like Marie did previously. She described how frustrating it was for her to be in a learning environment where the professors are not always conscious of race in the classroom. Having faculty and staff that can relate with students is important because it may allow a deeper and meaningful connection. Tasha brought up an excellent point in her interview when she stated that it is important to have faculty you can identify with in addition to competent professors who understand their privileges and areas they can improve upon. She did not find it to be a hinderance to her studies or success outside of the undergraduate experience.

Another student is in a similar position when she is not seen for her individual skill set in the classroom. Being taught by a white woman, she does not feel valued or appreciated for the work she is doing in that class.

> "I'm often confused for another black girl in my class. Before I told you about this last week, it didn't really irritate me as much, but it happened again [this week]. And it is just really frustrating. And I recently wrote a paper about environments where gender take place. I wrote about my experience in that classroom. When I mentioned my experience in the classroom in regard to my gender and race. They've intersected to make me feel like, you know, I can be invisible in that

space and just be seen as like another black girl. “[One time,] she handed me this girl’s exam when she wasn't in class. [At first] I was like, are you handing it to me because you think I'm friends with her…and I can give it to her? Or because you thought I was her? And she was like, “Oh, no, I gave it to you by accident.” Like, it seems to me like you just see me as a black girl. I [have my own] name as well.” –Miley, Sophomore

Miley. 2019. “Photo Elicitation Describing an Interaction with a Non-STEM-based Professor.”

In this excerpt, Miley shared why she was upset that her professor has confused her with another black girl. This occasion has happened to her numerous times. Being confused with another student in the class devalues Miley’s efforts and deems her nonexistent and indistinguishable from others. Mistakes like this happen all the time but confusing the only two black students in the classroom throughout the semester can feel like professors choose not to care to tell black students apart from one another (Byrd et al. 2014).

A similar case is illustrated below by a junior student who transferred into the university. Hiring black professors at PWIs is essential in the relationship between black students and their

academia (Krupnick 2018). Their presence can serve as a motivation to preserving and getting their degree.

> "I do think that having black professors is important, especially for those that feel uncomfortable being the minority. I do feel like having someone that can potentially mentor you, that, you know, looks like you would definitely be helpful for [black students]." –Justin, Junior

The student above shared his feelings on the importance of being taught by a black professor. If that professor is willing to serve as a mentor to a black student, the opportunity to grow has multiplied in and outside of the classroom. The discomfort factor Justin spoke about is a genuine feeling he and other black students feel on a daily basis (Krupnick 2018). Being a part of the minority on campus is challenging and black students must navigate the institution every step of the way.

Participants were open to sharing instances in the classroom in which they stated their race obstructed their academics. Ayanah recounted the time when she was in an English course in which the n-word was said aloud while a white student was reading a poem aloud. This incident remained with the student as it happened in the 2019 Spring semester.

> "I [was] in African-American literature class and we were reading aloud. [A] student was reading, and the student was white, they said the N-word. And this class was heavily populated with a lot of black students. So that definitely raised an issue for everyone who was present that was black. [The black students] didn't do anything in that moment. It wasn't until after class when another black student, came up to [the white woman] professor, she ended up addressing our next class.

But in that very moment, nothing was done. I definitely feel like the classroom is where, you know, you would likely see race issues." –Ayanah, Junior

Ayanah. 2019. "Photo Elicitation Describing an Interaction with a Non-STEM-based Professor."

Ayanah shared how much this bothered her in the moment it happened in class. She was upset that the professor did not say anything and address the issue right then and there but was relieved when the professor talked about the class in the following meeting time. There is great debate about how to handle the n-word in academic settings (Price 2011). Should it be said at all? Should it only be said by the professor? What is clear from the excerpt above is that the professor did not know how to handle the situation nor prepare her class for how to handle any of their readings where the n-word was said. If the n-word is going to be in the literature read in the class, especially in an African American literature course, professors should be equipped to handle the group of students they will be teaching and how powerful the n-word is in the texts they are reading and in contemporary times.

The student below explains how he believes he is targeted in class by the professor due to the color of his skin. He does not consider being called out for very small things to be worth the attention the professor is putting on to them.

> "I was the only black person in my [language] class. Each time I tried to say something, it was pushed to the side or I was called out in class multiple times. For very small things, very miniscule things that I don't understand, like coming to class like four minutes late. Basically [notifying] to the whole class that [I was] late. People come late to class all the time [and she doesn't say anything about them]. And I was just four minutes late." –Pob, Senior

Being picked on in class is no small matter. When a professor is known for poking fun at students, it takes a different tone when they do it to everyone in the class. Focusing your attention on a single student, the only black student present, makes the student believe they are being mistreated and discriminated against due to the color of their skin. Pob was not sure why the professor chose to point him out for everything he does in class. The only thing he could think of was because he was black.

The next student, Vivia, shared her experience of being looked to in class as the one who had to speak on behalf of the black community because the Asian professor expected her to. Although she was expecting to talk about that topic during that class session, she was not expecting to teach the class on what she knew about the topic.

> "I know that one time in my Sociology class [during my] first year, I was asked a question [by my Asian professor] about the way certain communities are set up. I was like, "I don't know if I'm an expert." But I felt like the teacher kind of asked me the question as if I was an expert. I knew that [the topic] would be

> approached [in class that day], but I didn't know that he would start by asking some of the other black people in my class [questions like],” “How is this? You know what this is like?” –Vivia, Sophomore

Vivia recounted her time in Sociology class where the professor believed she knew the topic of the day because she was a black student. When the professor asked other black students to chime in, Vivia knew the professor should not have engaged with the material in this manner. Giving way for students from marginalized communities to speak on a subject that impacts them can be powerful and really allow them to contribute to the class discussion. However, when black students are asked to teach what they know about their community as an expectation, all power is stripped away from them, like in Vivia’s example (Wamstead 2020; Clair 2016).

The next participant revealed what it was like to present their research while enduring interruptions from the professor. She described how frustrating it was to not be able to explain her own work without the professor trying to help her.

> “[Everyone was presenting their projects] I was like the third or fourth person to go. When the rest of the people were [presenting] people had complete control over doing everything. But when it came to my turn, [the white woman professor] felt the need to interject all the time. Like she would be like, “Oh, Samathan, do you need me to answer that question? Do you need any help with that?” And I would be like, “No, I did my research just like the rest of the class.” It would be pretty embarrassing, feeling the need to be like, “No, I got it,” in front of my peers…And then after class, she was like, “You did really well. Like wow, you did so well.” It was like she didn't expect me to do well [on this presentation].” –Samathan, Junior

Samathan. 2019. “Photo Elicitation Description of a Non-STEM-based Professor.”

Samathan’s experience represented the challenge that black scholars face at all levels of academia. Having to be challenged by non-black individuals to prove your knowledge on a subject is incredibly common (Flemming 2018). It is representative of black people not being considered scholars in their own right without being validated by white opinion and fact (Flemming 2018). For her professor to interrupt her presentation displayed that the professor did not trust her to present her work on her own. Samathan was very proud to share her work but was unable to do it successfully because the professor thought she could help her.

OUT OF POCKET EXPERIENCES

Participants in the study shared experiences with me that really shocked them. Some of these incidents happened in the past and not during the current academic year and they are noted accordingly. The moments below describe how black students must navigate non-academic spaces. Analyzing these experiences helped understand the black undergraduate journey in a comprehensive manner.

Students expressed encounters with students that did not sit right with them. Some of these incidents occurred as observation, while others happened one-on-one. An example of a student experiencing something as an observation was Madeline. As a current senior, she recounted an incident from her first year.

> "I was on the phone [outside of my dorm] and I was walking [around]. [Then,] I just stood there because I ended my call. And then a group of two boys, two white boys, they were walking past me and [one of them] called the other white boy the n-word. And I just stood there, lost." –Madeline, Senior

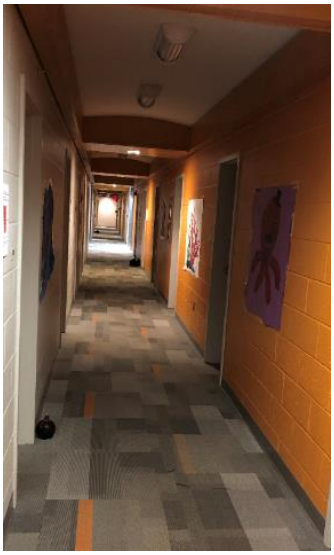
Madeline. 2019. "Photo Elicitation of an Observation of White Students."

Analyzing experiences outside of the classroom bring to light that black students still face barriers when it comes to their skin color when a faculty or staff member is not present. Hearing a non-black student say the n-word stunned Madeline. She did not interrupt their discussion but stood there in disbelief that a white student had said it loud and proud in front of her. This example exposes the realities black students experience outside of an academic space. In an environment where there is no staff member present, black students are forced to contemplate one of two actions: step up and say something or do nothing at all. In this case, Madeline chose

not to intervene and speak her mind. She had never seen these students before, and her lack of association with them may have impacted her decision not to confront them.

The next participant experienced an altercation that caused her to have her roommate be removed from their living quarters. The situation occurred between an Asian, international student and a black student during this academic year.

> "The discrimination that I felt was put towards me was [with my roommate]. I actually have this really pretty rug that I brought from my old campus. I consistently wash it because, you know, my feet is the only thing that goes on there. And I don't like people [who] would put their shoes on [it]. And so I felt like she would disrespect the space and have her shoes on [it]. And I would have to tell her, like, you know, I [would] appreciate [it if] you don't put your shoes on [it]. And it was a consistent thing. Being a Muslim African woman as well, besides just being African American, I know that, like, she didn't really like Muslim people. She's an international student and she's Asian. And, you know, obviously in this society, I feel that Asians, in fact, have more privilege [than] in someone who's like…myself. So, it kind of costs me to not pray in my own room at that given time. After that, [I couldn't live with her] anymore."
>
> –Camary, Sophomore



Camary. 2019. “Photo Elicitation Describing an Incident with an Asian Student.”

During this semester-long experience, Camary found it difficult to make her living space a home to be comfortable in it due to the behavior her roommate was showing. It made her question whether or not she could still live with her. In the end, she could not take the disregard for her belongings and asked her Residential Assistant (RA) to get involved and begin the move out process. When Camary stated she believed she was being discriminated against by a non-white student, it stressed how racial and religious discrimination can negatively impact black students. They believe they cannot be their true selves without their identity causing an issue for others.

Another student I interviewed, Lu, experienced a situation in her dorm building. While attending an event sponsored by a black-student group on campus, she was asked by white peers to take a photo of them.

> “[Taking this photo, I was] not triggered, but [it was an] incident [that] I wanted to suppress. This is the lounge closest to [my dorm]. This is where [an] event [was taking place to celebrate black identity]. A group of [white] classmates asked me

to take a picture of them protruding as the stereotypical black person. I wanted to suppress this [moment] because I really, really want to love this school. But it did make me feel some type of way. Made me a little bit upset about it. I want to love [this school], but if incidents like this continue on, I don't know if I can see myself here for the next three. [I told my friends what happened and] we basically talked about it and it triggered another whole different conversation about how it feel[s] being a black student in a predominantly white school [and] the stuff they went through." –Lu, First-Year

Lu. 2019. "Photo Elicitation Depicting an Incident with White Students."

Even while attending this event, meant to celebrate black students on campus, she could not escape white women pretending to be black (Aitkenhead 2017). What is critical about Lu's experience was that this interaction made her question her role at the institution. She could not envision herself there if incidents like this kept happening. According to Jaurique et al. 2016, if students do not feel like they belong part of their university, they will become distant and want to

transfer to a college where they are valued. Black students, especially black first-year students, should be embraced by their institutions who do not tolerate inappropriate behavior.

During another first year experience, Eris could not believe her eyes when she saw a Trump sign hanging from a student's dormitory window. Although the physical sign is not in the photograph, this is where the student originally saw it when they were on the way to class.

> "Once I stepped foot on this campus, I realized, wow, I really am the minority here. I got culture shock, straight away. There were little things that I've noticed on campus. I think my second week of school, which is crazy, I saw like hanging out of the window a Trump sign said, "Trump 2020." And I've never seen one before in my life. Just like in person, I've never seen it. And then I realized, well, it's very different. Lots of different people [are here on campus]. And I have to respect that. At the same time, I just felt kind of hurt. There are really people that do agree with what our president and what he has to say." –Eris, First-Year

Eris. 2019. "Photo Elicitation Describing an Observation of a Visual Microaggression."

As a first-year student, Eris examined her surroundings with a keen eye. After seeing the sign in the window, it disturbed her. She thought about what type of people would hang that sign

proudly for all to see on the campus. She could not believe that type of person would be attending her institution. This perspective is essential to understand because being new to campus, you may have assumptions about who attends the college. When that does not match your expectations, you can be startled by the reality. Politics play a huge role in the environments of college campuses and it impacted Eris' experience as a new student. This is a moment that can be counted as a visual microaggression (Levchak 2013). Visual microaggressions can make black students feel uncomfortable on their campuses when they are surrounded by racially sensitive or racist material.

Chapter 5: Discussion

MEANING

In this body of work, I aimed to answer five research questions. First, how have black people been oppressed through systematic racism as it pertains to education? In Chapter 2, I analyzed points in American history which contradict the Constitutional phrase, "we are all equal." In the eyes and at the hands of the law, black people have been forced into second-class citizenship and rarely have been treated like their white counterparts. Within the site of education, slaves were legally barred from learning to read and write, they were forced to attend dilapidated school houses during the Jim Crow Era and were not allowed to attend schools in their own communities due to segregation policies during the Civil Rights Movement (Brooker 2013; Smith 2017). Beginning with this history helped explain the contemporary barriers in education for black people the U.S.

Second, why are black college students still experiencing racism on college campuses if we live in a "post-racial" society? From the analysis of the participants, and through contemporary events examined in Chapter 2, the U.S. is not post-racial. We cannot be passed something without addressing, calling it what it is and finding ways to make our lives more equitable. To anyone that claims that our country is post-racial is not examining life from the perspective of others who are structural and institutionally oppressed. If we lived in a post-racial U.S., the students in my study would not have endured the things they have gone through. Black students would not be expelled at higher rates than white children, their hair would not be considered "nappy" or out of sorts and they would not be asked questions to explain on behalf of

the black community (Lattimore 2017; Wright 2018; Tanner 2020). To experience racism and racial discrimination in different levels of education means we are not post-racial.

Third, how does the history of PWIs affect how current enrolled students experience racial discrimination? Many universities in the U.S. are built using forced labor and are on stolen indigenous peoples' land (Harris 2015; Levin 2019). Recognizing this history is crucial to seeing if there are any similar patterns in the present times. At the institution examined, there are similar issues black students were dealing with in the 1980s and 1990s that are still prevalent today. An example of this can be seen with the limited number of Pan-African Studies courses that are taught in the college. Students were asking then, and they are still asking now for more courses to learn about their history. According to Conor Freidersdorf (2016), taking a black studies course can open the eyes of all students, not just black students, to the realizations of inequality, oppression and racism. It is important to see that benefits to black students are really a benefit to the entire campus.

Fourth, what are the experiences of black students when they experience racial discrimination on campus? In Chapter 4, I listed various excerpts from interviews I had with the students in my study. They detailed encounters I could never imagine, but that in the end were not totally surprising. The data collected from the 36 interviews exposed the realities of black students at this institution. Hearing from 19 students from all class years highlights that racialized experiences occur at PWIs no matter your class standing. Participants believed that their race negatively impacted their undergraduate academic journey when they sensed their voices were not being heard, when professors underestimated their abilities, when their white peers pretended to be black and when structural aspects of the university did not positively

engage in the black experience. The university examined needs to address the issues and concerns of the black student population enrolled to better improve their experience and make it a welcoming and safe space for all students in the future.

Fifth, how can institutions better support black undergraduates while they are completing their bachelor's degree? When students reported of incidents where they believed they were not being heard, it reflected a larger issue in society. Black people are not taken seriously, and they are often shut out from major decisions that can influence their livelihood (Flemming 2018). In the classroom or any other site on campus, it is imperative that black students are listened to just like their white peers. As stakeholders in their education, it would be worthwhile to the university administration to hear their concerns. Students have amazing ideas to improve the black student experience at PWIs. They include open communication between the campus and the university president, annual implicit bias training for all members of the institution, hiring more black faculty in all disciplines and not just the Pan-Af Program and opening the dialogue of black mental health and the stressors that come with attending a PWI. As Ceja et al. (2017) stated, engaging with the topic of race at every level of operation within a university can create connections to learn and grow from past wrongdoings. When the participants discussed their white peers saying the n-word and posing for photographs trying to replicate black culture, it took them by surprise. Seeing a Trump related sign at a small, liberal arts college seemed unreal. Being discriminated against due to racial and religious oppression was not what they expected. All of these incidents happened, and many more just like them. Participants could not believe that of all places, their school would be the place for these harmful and scarring things to occur. When universities admit a student, they do not fully know that student's intentions or opinions on race. When black students see this behavior, there are not many places they can go to express

their frustrations. PWIs must be held accountable for all of their students as soon as they become enrolled. If the university has a mission statement claiming their students learn in a diverse environment, that means all community members must respect the diversity that everyone brings. This can be done by having forums or townhalls that talk openly about community and world issues. It can be a time when the university comes together to work through challenging topics that affect the community in some way shape or form.

I argued that the increasing diversity enrollment of black students at PWIs does not positively affect the lives of the students enrolled there. The presence of more black students does not necessarily increase the amount of resources and pathways for black students to graduate successfully. Participant Ayanah said it best when she stated, “I know that over the years [my school] has accepted more black students. I feel like with accepting them, they haven't really created resources or spaces for them to feel included. So, it's one thing to heavily bring people in, but then to not do the work, to make them feel included is an issue.” This highlights how important it is to evaluate PWIs constantly instead of trying to boost diversity. It is unfair to black students to be enticed in without making provisions for them when they arrive on campus. When institutions bring students to their college, especially black students, it is crucial that support does not start and end with financial assistance. Resources such as strong opportunities for academic mentorship, career advice, counseling services and more are all essential in the college experience. Having someone in your corner to say they believe in you and in whom you can count on for support is important. If black students do not have these resources, it continues to isolate their experience.

LIMITATIONS

Although I did my best to gain student participants from all backgrounds and academic disciplines, many slipped through the cracks. It would have been helpful to have more students in the study that identified as International students, individuals that commute to campus and those that transferred into the university in addition to those who participated in extracurricular activities such as athletics and the arts. Student vantage points from these areas are important to include when analyzing race within higher education.

I was able to only give the participants a $10 gift card and I believe that limited the number of participants that ended up completing the study. For the work they needed to do, set aside at least fours in their schedule for two interviews and completing the process of photo elicitation, participants should have received a larger incentive to participate. It is possible that many students saw the poster to sign up with the PI and realized $10 was not enough to commit the time required.

If this was not a sole research project, it would be incredibly beneficial for it to conducted as a team-based project. With multiple people conducting interviews and analyzing data, more information could be gathered from students. Collaborating with others could have sparked new ideas, concepts or methods that could have been used to improve the study.

FURTHER RESEARCH

In the future, more research needs to be done when examining the experiences of students of color at PWIs. This study focused on the black student experience, but there are many marginalized groups who do not have the opportunity to share their voice in relation to academia. It is vital that black students within the STEM fields and/or considered international students are

asked about their undergraduate experience. It is imperative for these groups to know that there are people that care about them, their needs and futures beyond the undergraduate level. If they have no one to rely on, who can they go to for support?

Although I did not ask a direct question about socioeconomic status, my opener question to begin the first interview was, “What brought you to study here at this institution?” 89% of the participants told me that they came to the university because of the high amount of financial aid and scholarship they received. Students may have been blindsided by the large financial aid package and not have recognized other major issues they are now grappling with the university such as the low number of black professors and the limited number of courses that teach black history or culture. When institutions bring students to their college, especially black students, it is crucial that support does not start and end with financial assistance. It is unfair to black students to be enticed in without making provisions for them when they arrive on campus. The intersections of class and race should be studied in the future.

Appendix

Figure 1. Characteristics of Sample Participants.

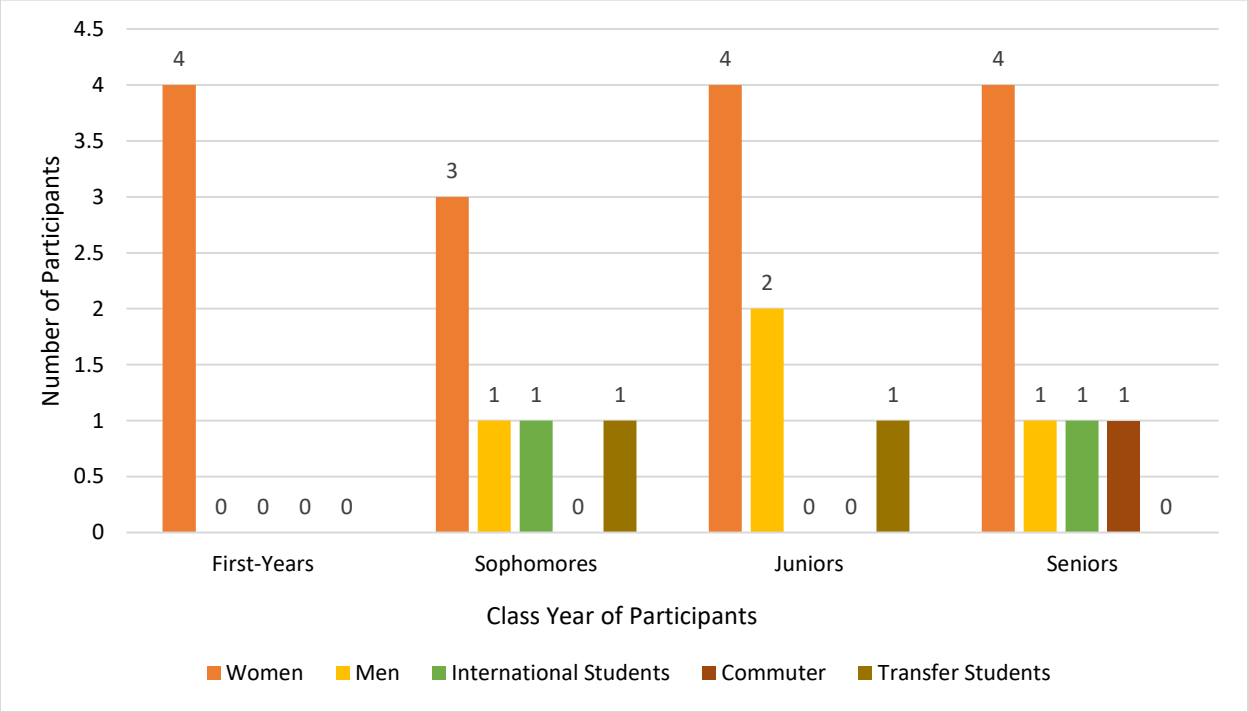


Figure 2. The Number of Times These Codes Were Used.

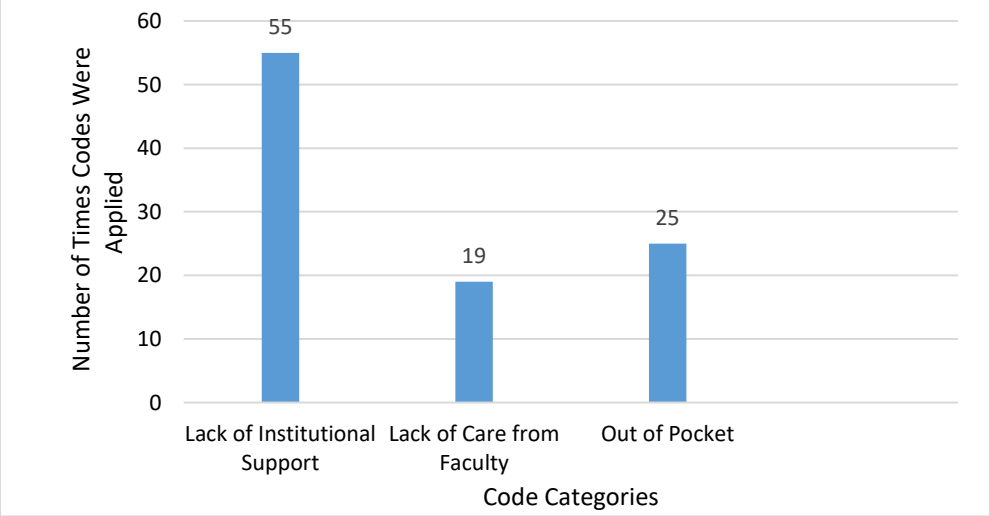


Figure 3. Racial Demographics of the University Examined and State Level Data.

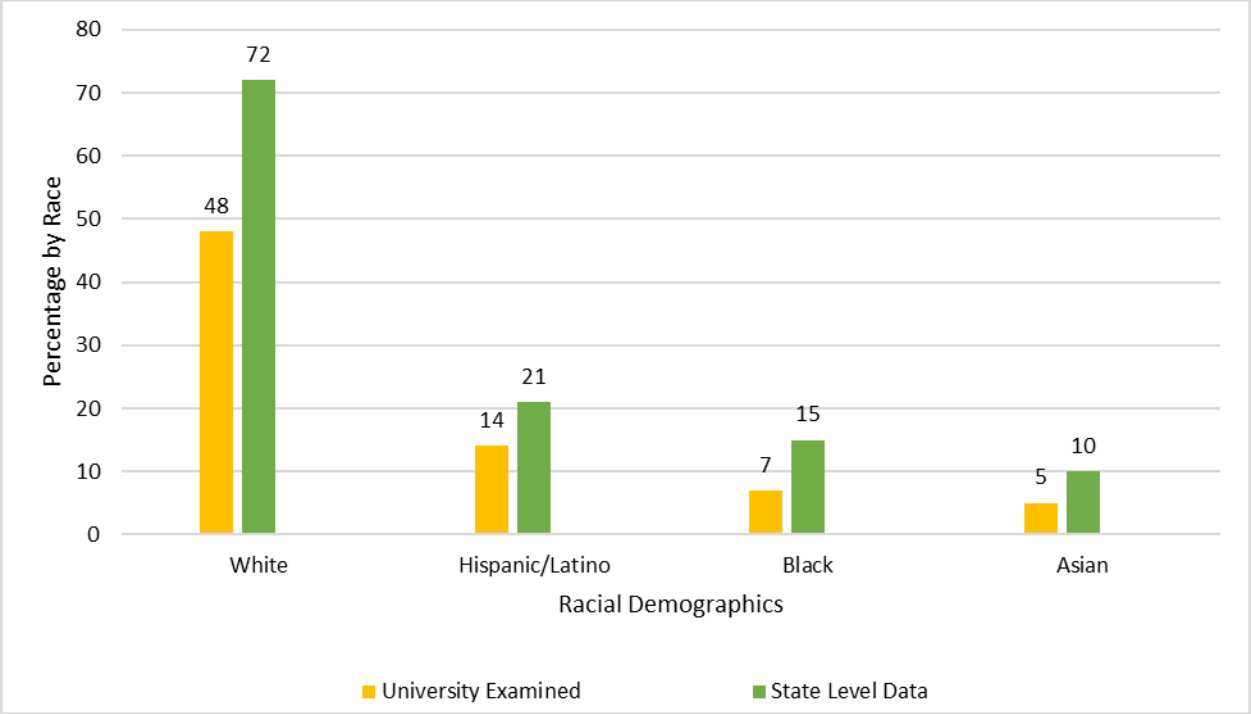


Table 1. Codes, Code Descriptors and the Number of Times it was Applied.

Code Name	Code Description	Number of times applied
Being regular	Students explaining how they just wanted to be "regular" and attend class without feeling like they had to explain their blackness/feeling like they could speak without being judged	7
Unable to be regular	Not being able to have the privileges of being a white student	71
Black/Black exp	Moments when black students express prejudice experiences from other black students	22
Changes that can be made	Changes that can be made to the university from black students	23
Desensitized	No longer feeling any type of way about the situation since it happens so often, or it happened a long time ago	18
Distressed	Moments where students felt distressed either by their own experiences of microaggressions or experiences from their peers (an uneasiness or change in emotion)	16
Empathetic distress	Showing distress for a peer after an incident which impacts themselves	29

Self-distressed	When someone feels distressed or shows any type of emotion for themselves from a situation	15
Feeling supported	Moments when black students have felt supported	3
Fin aid	Reason for coming to the university because they were given a good scholarship package	4
Didn't talk about aid	When a student doesn't mention financial aid as a reason for coming to the university	6
Image as Y1	Images based on first-year status	9
Image as Y2	Images based on sophomore year status	11
Image as Y3	Images based on junior year status	13
Image as Y4	Images based on senior year status	26
International	Feeling like their non-American experience isn't understood by their peers and their blackness is reduced to being African	19
Isolation	Students feeling alone or separated from their white peers because of their race	55
Lack of caring faculty	Anytime a student mentioned they felt like professors, staff, students and higher-level administration didn't care about the livelihood of black students	25
Lack of institutional support	Anytime a student said they felt like they weren't receiving any support from the institution	29
Out of pocket	Experiences/incidents described by students that shocked them	48
Faculty-participant	Out of pocket incident from one faculty member to a student	4
Peer-participant	Out of pocket incident from one/set of peers to participant	7
Staff-participant	Out of pocket incident from a staff member to a participant	12
Unsure aggravator-participant	An out of pocket experience that happened to a participant but unsure who it was done by	9
Pan-Af	Anytime a student mentioned the major, minor or program leadership dissipating and/or not being sure the state of it	11
Racial tension with self	When a participant expresses racial tension with self	10
Repping everyone	Feeling like their behavior or talking in class represented the entire black population and was very aware of that	68
STEM	Anyone identifying themselves as a STEM major finding it difficult to navigate this major, classes, departments or career	28
Non-STEM	Participants who are non-STEM majors	8
Tokenism	Being the only back person in the room	10
Transfer student	Someone who has transferred into the university	39
Transition to a PWI	Describing the whiteness/shocked by the whiteness	50

Underestimated	Students feeling they're doubted in academics, sports, clubs, etc.	46
Unsafe	Students feeling like Public Safety surveils them because of their race and doesn't protect them, but causes more issues for them	6
Campus	Feeling unsafe due to campus being unsecure	2
Public Safety	Feeling unsafe on campus due to an interaction with public safety	77

Table 2. Demographics of Participants.

Pseudonym	Class Year	Ethnicity	Residential Status	International Student	Transfer Student
1. Madeline	2020	Black	Commuter	--	--
2. Alexandra	2020	Haitian	Dorm	--	--
3. Pob	2020	Haitian	Dorm	--	--
4. Tasha	2020	Black	Dorm	--	--
5. Maryanne	2020	Haitian	Dorm	--	Yes
6. Ayanah	2021	Jamaican	Dorm	--	--
7. Darrell	2021	Black	Dorm	--	Yes
8. Tyrone	2021	Black	Dorm	--	--
9. Desi	2021	Jamaican	Dorm	--	--
10. Marie	2021	Black	Dorm	--	--
11. Samathan	2021	Guyanese	Dorm	--	--
12. Camary	2022	Black	Dorm	--	Yes
13. Vivia	2022	Black	Dorm	--	--
14. Denzel	2022	Black	Dorm	Yes	--
15. Miley	2022	Nigerian-American	Dorm	--	--
16. Cam	2023	Black	Dorm	--	--
17. Salley	2023	Black	Dorm	--	--
18. Eris	2023	Dominican	Dorm	--	--
19. Lu	2023	African American	Dorm	--	--

Table 3. Breakdown of Staff-Student Support in the Center for Counseling Services.

Number of Students enrolled in the College	1,668
Number of Students of Color enrolled in the College	434 (26%)
Number of Clinicians employed at the Center	6
Number of Clinicians of Color employed at the Center	2 (33%)
Ratio of Clinicians to the Students enrolled in the College	1:278

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