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Abstract

Researchers have consistently documented a range of racialized inputs and outcomes in higher education in the United States (U.S.). Those dynamics appear especially salient, and their consequences especially pronounced in the U.S. region often referred to as the Deep South. The current body of evidence, including the documented patterns of racial segregation in higher education, disparate opportunities and advantages, and inequitable outcomes, offers less insight on how Black students in the Deep South make sense of their experiences. This study used explanatory mixed methods to document racialized differences in campus experiences and to understand how Black students made sense of and navigated those racialized experiences. Our quantitative results point to disparities in Black students' experiences and perceptions of the campus climate. The qualitative findings indicate that Black students made sense of those disparities by conceptualizing racialized treatment as benevolent preparation for the 'real world,' by internalizing and reproducing hegemonic discourse, and by rationalizing their experiences as developmentally necessary. We offer implications for higher education faculty and staff, who must work to disrupt these racialized and White supremacist patterns in higher education.

Keywords

Race, Higher Education, Diversity, Inclusion, Critical Theory

Barriers remain for Black students' access to and inclusion in institutions of higher education in the southern United States (U.S. South; Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2006). A number of racialized policies and practices continue to create higher education systems in the U.S. South that are segregated by race (Henson & Munsey, 2014), and that produce racialized educational environments and experiences within institutions. In the U.S. region known as the Deep South, where we conducted the present study, sharp racial divides can be found both between higher education institutions, and within them (Strunk, Locke, & McGee, 2015). In this racialized educational setting, the ways Black students make sense of their experiences are fraught with tension.

Despite decades of work to integrate Southern institutions of higher education, they remain markedly segregated (Orfield, Frankenber, Ee, & Kuscera, 2014; Rothstein, 2013). Within those deeply segregated educational spaces, Black students in the South have repeatedly reported racialized experiences, including overt and subtle racism and institutional barriers to success (Harper, 2015). Further, state legislatures in the South have continued to provide unequal school funding and resources, with predominately Black schools chronically under-resourced and overcrowded (Scruggs, 2010). In a pattern that researchers have repeatedly and thoroughly demonstrated in the literature (Strunk, Locke, & McGee, 2015), Black students in the South often attend intensely segregated K-12 schools that are under-resourced, understaffed, and overenrolled, leading to disparate schooling outcomes and disparate rates of college readiness. Those students who reach higher education are often directed towards Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), which are also chronically under-resourced and understaffed, especially when compared to similar predominately White institutions (PWIs; Gasman, 2010; Sav, 2010). However, experiences among Black students in the U.S. South who are enrolled at public PWIs can be heavily racialized, with institutional racism leading to poorer educational resources, fewer out-of-class opportunities like internships and mentoring, and ultimately to lower persistence and graduation rates (Strunk, Suggs, & Thompson, 2015).

While some in higher education continue to deny that institutionalized racism exists, or that Black students encounter unequal education at all levels, including higher education, a scholarly consensus has emerged that inputs and outcomes for Black students are demonstrably inequitable compared with their White peers (Bolton, 2009; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Lampton, 2013; Sarcedo, Matias, Montoya, & Nishi, 2015; Strunk, Locke, & Martin, 2017), and that those differences are attributable to systemic factors rather than individual ones (Dittmer, 1995; Gordon, 2013; Lipman, 2007; Silver, 1964). As many scholars have also documented, Black students often perceive the inequality of their experiences and articulate injustices in their educational opportunities and realities (Bourke, 2010; Cornelius, 1983; Fuller, 2016; Johnston-Guerrero, 2017; Lipman, 2007; Span, 2002, 2009; Turner, 2016). Some researchers have explored persistence and navigation among Black students at PWIs (Acosta, Duggins, Moore, Adams, & Johnson, 2015); however, less is known about how Black students make sense of the institutional racism and other racialized encounters in higher education and navigate through them toward college graduation.

The purpose of this mixed methods study of Black students' experiences at a Deep South PWI was twofold. First, we sought to document whether Black students experienced the institution differently than their White peers and whether those disparities were related to other attitudinal and experiential college outcomes. Second, we explored how Black students at this Southern PWI made sense of their own experiences and observations of the campus they called home. We did not seek to locate disparities or their cause within students of color, but rather to understand how institutional systems and dynamics position students to engage with oppressive structures. We return to this idea in the conclusion to reflect on how faculty and administrators are complicit in structuring those systems of oppression.

Theoretical Framework

Critical theory and critical pedagogy guided our theoretical framework (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2009; Freire, 1970). Although researchers sometimes mobilize other frameworks for the study of race, for this study, we used critical theory and its educational arm, critical pedagogy. Critiques of the critical theoretical approach to race center on the ways in which this theory, with its Marxist heritage, emphasize economic and class struggle. However, the tradition is rich in its history of recognizing racism and White supremacy as the central organizing ideologies driving economic struggles in the U.S. (Leonardo, 2013). Thus, while the critical theoretical framing argues that race is "an idea, even an invention," it still centers racism, and "this framing of race attests to its power, even as an ideological relation and concept" (Leonardo, 2013, p. 6). As a Marxist theoretical tradition, it also adds recognition of the classed and economic forces that drive college-going decisions and individual sense of self as part of a marketplace.

Within this theoretical paradigm, we sought to identify differences between Black and White students' experiences of racial climate at a PWI and to explore Black students' rationalization of hegemonic White supremacy. We

assumed that power, privilege, and oppression were important forces in shaping the experiences of Black students within the PWI environment. Critical theories of education posit that individuals are both formed by and act to form their social contexts (Kemmis & Fitzclarence, 1986). This dialectical construction leads to contradictions, including that educational spaces serve simultaneously as sites of oppression and liberation (Giroux, 1981). Individuals also exist within, are shaped by, and shape power relations and social dynamics. This positions individuals as simultaneously agentic, but also bound up within the ideological and cultural context. Knowledges are created within social contexts that are shaped by power, domination, and oppression; there is no pure knowledge, nor can knowledge be separated from political or social realities (McLaren, 2009). As a result, the ways in which knowledges are constructed, reified, verified, dismissed, discredited, or disparaged either serve to reinforce or disrupt ideological domination.

The social construction of knowledges, perhaps especially in educational institutions, tends to reinforce dominant ideologies through hegemony. Hegemony is enacted through a set of vocabulary, language, and ideas in which "both rulers and ruled derive psychological and material rewards during confirming and reconfirming their inequality" (Gitlin, 1980, p. 253). Hegemony is, in part, carried out by "[seeping] into the popular 'common sense' and [being] reproduced there; it may even appear to be generated by that common sense" (Gitlin, 1980, p. 254). Dominant ideologies, including White supremacy, can thus appear to be instantiated in the 'common sense,' which conceals the operation of power and structures of domination (Thompson, 1987). Dominant ideologies, which, in the U.S. context, include White supremacy and heteropatriarchy, are interwoven as 'common sense' making them more immune to challenge. Consensual social practices reinforce dominant ideology and produce subordination to the dominant group. Through those consensual social practices, oppressed groups may unknowingly participate in their oppression (Giroux, 1981; Ryan, 1976).

This hegemonic function of education is also carried out via the 'hidden curriculum,' in which dominant ideologies and knowledges are reinforced through lessons and are delivered alongside the official curricular content (Giroux & Purpel, 1983). This 'hidden curriculum', exists independently of the actual content of a course as dominant norms, ways of knowing, and ways of validating knowledge. It is instantiated in the conduct of instruction, the classroom environment, and the ways in which learning takes place and is assessed (Giroux & Purpel, 1983). Regardless of formal curricular decisions, the hidden curriculum remains intact because it is maintained by the dominant ideology and resulting systems for legitimating and representing knowledge. In a practical example, this means that an individual teacher might attempt to avoid racism and cultural domination in the classroom, however, despite such efforts, the system of knowledge and power still privileges White knowledges and ways of being, so hegemony will still occur.

This theoretical framework guided our approach to the present study. We approached these data with the assumption that the hidden curriculum, dominant norms of Whiteness, and diffuse systems of power and surveillance shaped the contours of student experiences in ways that were racialized. Specifically, we were interested in examining differences in Black and White students' experiences of the campus racial climate, and to subsequently explore how Black students made sense of (or rationalized) and reproduced systems of White supremacist ideology in ways that could help them justify their lived experiences.

Objectives and Purpose

The present study is a mixed method investigation arising from a more extensive campus climate study carried out at a Southern PWI (Strunk, Suggs, & Thompson, 2015), which produced quantitative data that catalyzed qualitative interviews, following an explanatory mixed methods model. The purpose of the present study was: 1) to examine racial differences in the campus experiences of White and Black college students attending a PWI in the Southeastern region of the U.S., and 2) to understand how Black students contextualized themselves in the institution and made sense of their racialized experiences.

Method

Positionality

The first and second authors of this manuscript were faculty members commissioned to carry out a comprehensive campus climate evaluation. The remaining authors of this paper were doctoral students who assisted in analyzing the data and theorizing about their meaning. Those doctoral students did not participate in the original climate study and had not attended the institution being evaluated, and therefore offered newer perspectives to the study in the data analysis and write-up of the paper.

The two research professors who conducted the focus group interview both identify as cisgender, one as a gay White man and the other a heterosexual Asian woman. Both were also faculty members, which can create unequal power dynamics in interactions with undergraduate students. None of the students who participated in the focus group were in the department of the researchers,

took any of their courses, or interacted with them before this encounter. The researchers introduced themselves as allies, and explained that their purpose was to better understand the experiences of students of color on a primarily White college campus in the Southern U.S. While the researchers worked to create a trusting relationship in a comfortable setting with the participants, as suggested by Creswell (2013), it is also reasonable to assume that the participants' responses may have been guarded. This is understandable considering that the students were undergraduates interested in graduating, and ultimately, despite a social justice and equity agenda, the researchers conducting this focus group were an extension of the University system. Additionally, the researchers are not Black; one is White, and the other Taiwanese. This may have been a consideration for participants as they responded to questions about their racial identity. This could also be an additional contributing factor to changes in language and the overall tone of the interview after the interjection of race. This concept is explored further in the Findings and Discussion sections.

Study Design

The current investigation is an explanatory mixed methods study designed to begin with a quantitative survey followed by qualitative follow-up interviews to explain and understand the quantitative results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

Participants

Quantitative Survey. Data were gathered from a PWI in the U.S. Deep South. In all, there were 1,186 complete responses to the quantitative survey, which represented about 9% of the total student body. A total of 834 participants identified as White, 203 as Black/African American, 47 as Asian or Pacific Islander, 38 as multiracial, 28 as Hispanic/Latinx, ten as American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 26 participants identified as "other/not listed." Among students in the sample, 166 participants identified as first-year students, 120 identified as sophomores, 253 identified as juniors, 309 identified as seniors, 198 identified as Master's students, three identified as specialist students, and 136 identified as doctoral students. 55.9% of participants reported membership in a student group, club, or other campus organization. Further, 18.0% reported membership with a fraternity, sorority, or other Greek affiliated organization. Regarding religious affiliation, a total of 655 participants identified as Protestant, 206 identified as Catholic or Christian Orthodox, 47 as agnostic, 45 as atheist, 21 as Hindu, 11 as Buddhist, ten as Islamic, ten as Mormon, six as Jewish, five as earth and humanist traditions, and 159 participants claimed no religious affiliation.

Qualitative Focus Group. A focus group interview was then conducted with 18 Black undergraduate participants for a more in-depth follow-up to the quantitative survey data. Students were selected to participate based on their availability and indicated level of interest as noted in prior participation in the quantitative campus climate survey. Emails were sent to leaders of various student groups on campus and Greek organizations, and the study was broadly advertised on campus listservs. In particular, two Black student organizations on campus agreed to recruit participants and host focus group interviews, which met in one combined focus group session. All participants were either members of, or affiliated with, a Black student organization on campus. Among participants, there were eight women and ten men. All participants were in-state students except one student who was from the Northeast U.S.

Procedure

Quantitative Survey. Recruitment was accomplished by email communication through the Vice President of Student Affairs, explaining the purpose of the research and that the results of the study would be beneficial to the university. The Vice President then distributed the campus climate survey to all students currently enrolled at the university. Additionally, campus groups, clubs, announcements posted on the main campus' mailout, email, and word-of-mouth, were utilized to recruit students. Recruitment emails included an informational letter containing the elements of informed consent. Participants were then presented with the campus climate survey. After completing the survey, students were given the opportunity to enter a drawing for one of two $100 gift cards to the campus bookstore, which was offered by the Vice President of Student Affairs as an incentive.

Qualitative Focus Group. The qualitative focus group for this study was one of several focus groups conducted with various campus constituencies. We sent emails to leaders of various student groups on campus, to Greek organizations, and broadly advertised on campus listservs. In particular, two Black student organizations on campus agreed to recruit for and host focus group interviews. In each focus group session, we used a semi-structured thematic interview protocol. We asked students to talk about several areas including their campus experience, experiences with faculty, staff, and administrators, experiences with other students, and where they thought the university needed to improve. Each focus group lasted approximately 60-90 minutes, and was audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim.

Analytic Approach

Quantitative Analyses. To determine how perceptions of campus climate varied by race, we ran two one-way

multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) comparing the mean responses of students identifying as White to those identifying as Black/African American on survey items that referred to their experiences of racism at the university. We also analyzed student responses to questions about their perceptions of university commitment to diversity and inclusion and their feelings of comfort at the institution using (MANOVAs).

Qualitative Analysis. We analyzed all data via inductive collaborative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Strunk, Baggett, Riemer, & Hafftka, 2016). A paid third-party agency transcribed focus group interviews due to the large amount of raw data collected from the recorded session. Together, the research team then read through the transcribed data aloud and discussed various interpretations in each section before moving forward. In this manner, an inductive collaborative approach was used to better understand the raw data. Creswell (2013) suggested looking for meaning in the data through the recognition of patterns or themes through a direct interpretation, by chunking out particular segments or occurrences and organizing them into like categories. Similarly, we created themes and an informal coding system around our recognition of likenesses in the participants' descriptions of their experiences on campus (Saldaña, 2015). There were many overlaps in the language that was used to explain the participants' feelings about campus life. Additionally, the focus group format allowed for participants and researchers to either affirm or clarify statements as needed throughout the session, providing researchers with a more accurate depiction of the thoughts and feelings of the students. We paid close attention to the instances in which there was a shared feeling among the group, and participants agreed with one another and expounded on a previous statement, as recommended by Berg and Lune (2012).

Results

A total of two one-way MANOVAs were conducted. The sample was limited to Black and White students. The first MANOVA was conducted to examine differences between White and Black students' perceptions of the frequency of racially motivated campus incidents. We hypothesized that Black students would report a significantly higher number of racially motivated incidents compared to White students. The results indicated a significant difference in the number of incidents reported ($\Lambda = 0.98$, $F_{4,1073} = 4.50$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .017$). We used univariate analyses to follow-up on the significant multivariate test. Due to the number of comparisons being conducted, a Bonferroni correction was applied to adjust

for family-wise error, resulting in a test-wise Type I error rate of .013 (Keppel & Wickens, 2004). Black students reported more frequent threatening behaviors based on race than White students ($F_{1,1076} = 8.86$, $p = .003$, $\eta^2 = .008$). In terms of the source of racist behaviors, Black students reported more racist behaviors by campus administrators ($F_{1,1076} = 13.46$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .012$), and more racist behaviors by campus staff ($F_{1,1076} = 15.49$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .014$) than their White peers. However, there was no significant difference in reports of racist behaviors by other students ($F_{1,1076} = 5.91$, $p = .015$, $\eta^2 = .005$),

A second one-way MANOVA was conducted to examine if reported levels of comfort on campus would differ between White and Black students. There was a significant difference in reported comfort level based on race/ethnicity ($\Lambda = 0.97$, $F_{4,1085} = 7.50$. $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .027$). To follow-up on the significant multivariate test, we used univariate comparisons. Again, to control for family-wise error, we used the Bonferroni adjustment, setting test-wise alpha at .013. Compared to White students, Black students viewed their campus as being significantly less supportive of people based on their race/ethnicity ($F_{1,1085} = 16.33$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .015$). Black students also reported feeling significantly less comfortable on campus than their White peers ($F_{1,1085} = 4.16$, $p = .042$, $\eta^2 = .004$). There was no significant difference in perceptions that the university had made an inclusive climate a priority ($F_{1,1088} = .49$, $p = .484$, $\eta^2 = .00$), nor in perceptions that the university clearly articulated the values of inclusion and diversity ($F_{1,1088} = .94$, $p = .941$, $\eta^2 = .000$).

Findings

We identified emergent themes via iterative interaction with the data and cross-checking our interpretation within the research team. Emergent themes were organized based on codes that were salient throughout the focus group interview transcript. A total of three themes emerged to capture students' experiences: (1) Normalizing racialize experiences: "I can't say I ever experienced direct racism," (2) Reproducing hegemony and White supremacy: helping other students "adapt" and (3) Coping with hegemony: don't be "childish and petty".

Normalizing racialized experiences: "I can't say I ever experienced direct racism"

Participants simultaneously recounted experiences of racism while normalizing and downplaying the nature of their experiences. They noted difficulty in finding willing mentors, faculty interested in their success, and being

looked down on for seeking help. One student referred to this experience as "struggling when I didn't even have to." Black students narrated several experiences in which they appeared to be treated differently from White students. One student relayed being advised against entering a challenging program in a high-paying field before the advisor knew anything more than her name. Another found he was unable to get help from a professor in class while White students were. He later discovered that emailing got better results, which he suspected was because he had a "White-sounding name." Students described their treatment on campus as "a struggle" that made them "feel stupid" and was ultimately "hurtful." As students shared these encounters, they simultaneously minimized the nature of their experiences as being not severe enough to warrant a response. One student said "I don't know. I can't say that I ever experienced, like, direct racism since I've been here," which may be connected to a trend noted in the literature for students experiencing inequitable treatment to discount the severity of their experiences or question the legitimacy of their grievance (Sue, 2005). In a pattern documented elsewhere in the literature (Griffin, Cunningham, & George Mwangi, 2016), students justified and normalized the nature of their racialized experiences, emphasizing that it was their choice to attend a PWI to gain experiences with and exposure to "diversity." Specifically, one participant normalized such experiences by saying "…I think that, us knowing that we were coming to a predominately White university they expect you to understand that you are the minority… it's not going to be catered to you." Students simultaneously acknowledged and normalized the racialized nature of their college-going experiences.

Hegemony and White supremacy: Helping other students "adapt"

A theme that emerged in this study was students' degree of buying into the dominant White supremacist dialogue by inadvertently replicating the oppression they experienced with newer students. While some participants downplayed their experiences of racism, they simultaneously recalled experiencing forms of institutionalized racism, such as being asked to "talk White." One individual told to "talk White" relayed an episode in which he later told another Black student, "I'll answer your question when you say it correctly." In other words – this individual experienced policing of his speech patterns as institutionalized racism, and then later enforced that same practice on another, newer student. While the student enforcing these racialized norms did not hold the same power as White university personnel acting similarly, it still served to enforce the hidden curriculum into spaces that might otherwise be safe. This incident might also serve to extend the sense of diffuse networks of

surveillance and policing often sensed on college campuses (Welsh, Ross, & Vinson, 2010). Such experiences were described as ways to "adapt" to succeed in a PWI environment, and participants suggested that efforts to enforce racialized norms and practices on other Black students were protective. That is, if they wanted to help other students succeed, part of that would have to include reinforcing racialized dialogues around behavior, leisure, speech, and dress, even in the absence of White bodies. The hegemonic reproduction of racialized education was therefore justified as a challenge to "make you stronger." One student described this, saying,

> "…I tell people, especially depending on your major, you have to be able to… adjust… if you want to sit in a boardroom like this and lead and be at the head of that table… you're going to have to make some moves to say, 'That's what I want to do, let me change my language to where it's presentable to society.'"

Although other researchers have noted similar ideas in the form of code-switching (Delpit & Dowdy, 2002), the dynamic described by these students was somewhat different. Code-switching might involve a conscious decision to alter speech patterns for particular situations, and critical scholars have suggested the practice is only tenable when accompanied by reflection on the reasons code-switching is necessary (Bicker, 2018; J. Hill, 2008; K. Hill, 2011). Doing so strips the switch in language of its normalizing and totalizing power by suggesting patterns of speech might be a way to act subversively in racialized systems (Payne & Suddler, 2014; Young, 2009). These students described a different dynamic, in which the "presentable" linguistic tools became totalizing and enforced those norms even in contexts where the power dynamics would not require them.

In these students' narratives, racialized practices at school served as a training ground to prepare them to enter a capitalist workforce inhabited by primarily White bodies and encultured in White norms and White supremacist ideology. In participants' narratives, the educational institution, as a result, was seen as benevolent in enforcing racialized norms and policies and proscribing White norms of speech and behavior. "To be accepted" (or perhaps even to be allowed to exist) means "adapting" to White ways of being. In that sense, some Black students understood the PWI as a place where they would learn "marketable skills" and "societal norms" for succeeding in a marketplace dominated by Whiteness. In some cases, students even described choosing to attend a PWI because of those experiences.

Coping with hegemony: Don't be "childish and petty"

Students emphasized the importance of being 'adult' and being 'professional' rather than being reactive to racist experiences at the PWI. Students articulated an

understanding that advocacy against racism and racialized experience would be viewed as "childish and petty" and those activities ought to be set aside "when you get to a certain age." As one student noted, "You know, you should be trying to look out for the betterment of you as a person, not as a race, not as a gender, but as a person. Because eventually, we are going to be the future of America." All participants were resoundingly sure that they would eventually achieve success, graduate, and move into professional positions. They expressed a shared recognition of a future filled with experiences racism and marginalization, but also their intentions to successfully navigate a system created for their failure. One participant articulated this sentiment, saying,

> *"I was like, you know, this is what I'm going to have to deal with in corporate America, once I graduate. So why not? Why should I not get a taste of it now versus just being thrown into it? Especially because I knew what I was going to school for."*

The participants recognized that they were seeking out an experience that would position them as marginalized, minoritized bodies, but justified it by claiming ownership of those experiences and positioning them as instructive, perhaps even beneficent. Additionally, they expressed gratitude for these experiences of adversity, noting that these were mere glimpses of the realities of real-world settings and that their university environment, including their faculty members, were preparing them for systematic marginalization and oppression.

As participants shared their experiences of differential treatment compared to White students, they reflected that it was their responsibility to change the university's perceptions of the Black community. Specifically, "you have to show them something different instead." For example, one student described being portrayed as a stereotypical "angry black [person]" for questioning why he was treated differently than another student. Another described being accepted by others via acting like "nice Black people that smile all the time," but treated more poorly when "challenging" White colleagues and university personnel. As a result of these experiences, a student described "[turning] it on and off" in terms of "acting White" to get by at the university. Another added that she suddenly realized that she was "being White instead of being [myself]." For these students, coping by putting on a façade and minimizing experiences of marginalization represented a sense of maturity, development, and readiness for "the real world."

Discussion

This mixed methods study sought to answer how Black students attending a PWI experienced the campus climate differently from their White peers, and how they made sense of their racialized experiences. The Black students described making sense of hegemonic Whiteness by internalizing it, perpetuating it, and justifying it as a form of racial socialization into White supremacy at the university and beyond.

Our quantitative results showed that Black students identified more racially motivated incidents than White students on campus, including hearing racist comments from staff and administrators. Black students also reported feeling less comfortable, overall, on campus than their White peers. Additionally, in the qualitative focus group interviews, Black students clearly articulated a number of instances that we would describe as institutional racial violence, such as the erasure of Black norms, practices, speech, and identities, though they often minimized those instances. In minimizing those experiences, these students appeared to be claiming agency by reframing their oppression as an opportunity to be successful despite the racialized system. However, while attending this particular PWI, some Black students became more invested in the PWI's systems and practices, justifying them as beneficial and necessary for success in academic endeavors and future business and employment.

While the quantitative results revealed that Black students experienced more racist incidents and were less comfortable overall on campus, the qualitative findings illuminated how Black students made sense of those experiences. Black students became part of a hegemonic cycle, reproducing the racialized oppression they experienced for newer cohorts of students. They came to view the racialized treatment as necessary, valid, and as a sign of resiliency. Black students effectively became extensions of a racialized system within spaces that would otherwise be safe. Black students made sense of racialized experiences by conceptualizing of them as necessary training for the 'real world,' thinking of resistance to racialized experiences as immature or counterproductive. In an economic and political system that privileges White bodies and White ways of being, it may indeed be protective to take on those ways of being in order to "fit in" and "be accepted." In other words, there might be a real economic and social advantage to performing Whiteness in those contexts (Lipsitz, 2006; Mills, 2004). However, it seemed that the adaptation process occurred at the expense of the students feeling authentic to themselves. Participants noted the importance of having spaces to "turn it off" or "take off the mask" to be their authentic selves. In some instances, Black peers became extensions of a racialized system within spaces that would otherwise be safe.

The quantitative results and qualitative findings, in combination, demonstrate that students who described their institution as being supportive of diversity and inclusion feel more comfortable on campus. In their efforts to cope with

their experiences of racism, Black students seemingly had to rationalize their discomfort, lack of safety, and feelings of marginalization as a result of the university's efforts to support them and prepare them for the "real world." Black students attending this PWI developed coping strategies that extend beyond those required of many White students preparing for new educational experiences away from home. Typical college-going skills, like managing time and completing assignments, are compounded for Black students who are also confronted with racism and hostility in their daily interactions with peers and faculty. One coping strategy that students adopted was related to controlling and limiting behaviors and identity performances. For example, Wilkins (2012) noted that Black university men, in particular, invoke behaviors and dispositional actions that position them as being calm, controlled, and kind towards White people, to avoid being dubbed the "angry Black man." This allows Black men to avoid some adverse reactions to perceived Blackness but also involves an inauthentic performance of self. Jackson and Wingfield (2013) found that the stereotype of anger and even violence is a pervasive negative stereotype of Black men that many seek to avoid. The participants in the present study reported similar self-policing of behavior and affect, as well as policing the behavior and affect of peers to conform to White expectations.

The students described a variety of ways in which they responded to hostile exchanges within their learning environments. One of the most common coping strategies students utilized was finding fault in the isolated incident, and not in the institution, or the individual. For example, students would frequently dismiss displays of microaggressions and racism as an unintentional, individual act, distanced from themselves as a person and reflective of the oppressors' ignorant, but not malicious, mistake. These coping mechanisms have emerged in prior literature as well (Greer & Brown, 2011). Considering racist actions as "not that bad" allowed participants to deem racialized moments or structures as excusable or beneficent. Additionally, the students viewed their experiences within the PWI as temporary, and although similar experiences will be found in the permanency of the "real world," they may also result in greater gains. For the students in our study, there appeared to be solace in recognition of a racist White America. This knowledge meant that they could navigate the institutional experiences necessary to succeed, and then potentially be able to do the same after graduation. None of the participants were planning on returning to an environment that was predominantly Black, nor would their future endeavors be so extremely White. They, therefore, found themselves in a liminal space (Rollock, 2012), leading to complex navigations of norms and expectations.

Conclusion

When higher education institutions become racialized spaces without dialogue, discussion, or leadership to address privilege, power, and racism, students must take it upon themselves to make sense of their environment to adapt accordingly to survive. In our study, Black students responded to real economic and social pressures, though this often involved reinforcing hegemony. Participants seemingly became more comfortable in their PWI by adapting to the norms of the institution at the expense of being "true to [themselves]." Furthermore, they subsequently began to socialize their newer peers to acclimate to the institution and to justify their negative experiences as opportunities to be better equipped for the real world. While this particular Southern PWI may represent an especially salient and visible case of this kind of institutionalized racism and hegemony, colleges and universities elsewhere are encouraged to examine their practices and how they might be unintentionally socializing Black students to be successful within the context of White supremacy.

By failing to provide spaces to dialogue and help students understand privilege, power, oppression and the consequences of adapting to the campus climate, students have no choice but to rationalize their experiences based on the default hegemony and to perpetuate their survival skills to the next, incoming class of students. Students often reported incidents or recollections of racialized experiences in which the offending person, such as a professor, was likely unaware of the impact or perhaps even the nature of their actions. However, these slight, daily encounters had an additive impact on Black students' experiences and perception of the campus. These findings align with the literature on microaggressions (Young, Anderson, & Stewart, 2015), in which racialized campus climates function through small, every day, constant slights, insults, or encounters. These unintentional slights have a cumulative impact on how students understand the campus, their place within it, and sometimes lead to students internalize White supremacy and racist narratives. As described in this paper, those students sometimes inflict similar behavior on others, perpetuating hegemony and White supremacy. In light of the findings, administrators, programmers, and faculty and staff members are encouraged to recognize how they can contribute to changing the campus climate by recognizing their privilege and power to initiate discussions and conversations about race, racism, and White supremacy. In that same vein, authority figures in higher education would benefit from recognizing that inaction and even the most unintentional or subtle slight serves to maintain a campus climate that inculcates students to internalize, justify, and subsequently perpetuate the hegemony of White supremacy.

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