Experiences and Responses to Microaggressions on Historically White Campuses: A Qualitative Interpretive Meta-Synthesis

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According to the U.S. Department of Education (2011), only 59% of students who sought bachelors' degrees from four-year postsecondary institutions in 2006 completed the degree within six years, and among African American/Black students, only 40% finished college within six years. Despite efforts to quantify factors that contribute to low retention rates among African American students, less is known about the qualitative experiences of students who remain on campuses across the United States. This qualitative interpretive meta-synthesis examines the microaggressive encounters experienced by African American undergraduate college students (ages 17-22) at historically White, four-year colleges and universities to better understand how African American students experience, make sense of, and resist microaggressions occurring at the intersection of race and gender.

Key words: microaggressions; African American/Black; qualitative interpretive meta-synthesis; college retention; higher education

Literature Review

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2011), only 59% of students who sought bachelor's degrees from four-year postsecondary institutions completed the degree within six years, and among African American/Black students, only 40% finished college within six years. When compared to White, Latinx, and Asian peers, African Americans exhibit a notably higher risk for not achieving a four-year college degree. For more than three decades, many scholars have discussed the topic of retaining African Americans in higher education (Hurtado, 1992; Parham & Helms, 1985; Ponterotto, Alexander, & Grieger, 1995; Sedlacek, 1987; Thompson, Gorin, Obeidat, & Chen, 2006). Although minorities are increasingly seeking higher education, an achievement gap still remains. Students are unable to complete their educational quests, which, when coupled with the potential stressors of intergenerational poverty and changes in the skillsets needed to thrive in the American labor market, can contribute to "detrimental psychological consequences associated with low self-esteem and subjective well-being" that impede economic self-sufficiency (Sue, 2010a, p. 236).

While the issues of poor academic performance are multifactorial, Sue (2010) states that low academic achievement and high dropout rates can be grouped into two categories: (a) causation resides internally, within the individual, group, or culture; and (b) causation resides externally in the system of the academic classroom and societal environment. Although internal factors may contribute to academic underperformance, external factors such as discrimination based on social group membership(s), institutional racism, and the internal biases of college-level administrators have also been shown to impact retention. Numerous studies reported that African American students perceive the classroom climate and teaching styles of historically white, four-year colleges and universities to be hostile and uncomfortable for learning and engaging peers and faculty (Boysen, Vogel, Hubbard, & Cope, 2009; Watkins, Green, Goodson, Guidry, & Stanley, 2007). Thus, there appears to be tension between the college-level institutional practices of administrators/faculty/staff and the actual lived campus experiences of African American students.

Previous research suggests that negative encounters at the intersection of race and gender are a major factor contributing to lower college retention rates among African Americans. As an intersectional framework for understanding the cumulative impact of daily stressors resulting from one's marginalized group status, the study of microaggressions becomes an important tool for understanding the relationship between college experience, psychological well-being, and retention among African American students. Microaggressions are defined as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative … slights and insults" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 271). When conveyed carelessly without thought, derogatory and insulting microaggressions can impart harmful and negative behavioral, cognitive, and emotional scares that can negatively impact a person (Sue, 2010b). Stress related to racism is a daily occurrence for most African Americans (Carter, 2007; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). Microaggressions can occur in a variety of contexts, but the most damaging microaggressions are likely to transpire between power hierarchies: those who hold the most power and those who likely hold very little power (Sue, Capodilupo, Nadal, & Torino, 2008). College campuses offer an important space for examining keen power differentials and hierarchies between and among students, faculty, staff, and administrators.

College students experience myriad daily stressors such as academic issues, financial insecurity, and homesickness (Ross, Niebling, & Herkert, 1999). In addition to this, African American students face race-related stressors (Watkins, LaBarrie, & Apppio, 2010). Extant research indicates that racism continues to impact and mold the experiences of college students of color (Johnson & Arbona, 2006; Utsey, Chae, Brown, & Kelly, 2002). Due to the traumatic effects of racism on predominately White campus spaces, students of color find it challenging to navigate the stressful effects of racism (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Although there has been research on microaggressions and the experiences of African American college students who attend historically White, four-year colleges and universities, less is known about the ways students experience racial identity as a buffer against

racial microaggressions and the ways they make meaning of racial and gendered microaggressive experiences in these often hostile spaces. Despite efforts to quantify factors that contribute to lower retention rates among African American students, less is known about the qualitative experiences of students who remain on campuses across the United States. The purpose of this meta-synthesis is to examine the microaggressive encounters experienced by African American undergraduate college students at historically White, four-year colleges and universities. The goal is to understand how students experience, make sense of, and resist microaggressions occurring at the intersection of race and gender. A note on terminology: the authors use the term "gender" in lieu of "sex" to describe the manifestation of discrimination informed by the larger society's assumption that one's experience and presentation of their own gender follows the sex they were assigned at birth. Additionally, the terms African American and Black are used interchangeably.

Method

Qualitative Interpretive Meta-Synthesis (QIMS) was employed for this study. This method is a means to synthesize a group of studies on a related topic to create an enhanced understanding of the topic of study wherein the position of each individual study is changed from an individual pocket of knowledge of a phenomenon into part of a web of knowledge about the topic where a synergy among the studies creates a new, deeper and broader understanding (Aguirre & Bolton, 2013, p. 8).

Historically, the field of nursing is widely known for synthesis of qualitative research. However, Aguirre and Bolton (2013) adapted this approach for social work practice and research in the form of QIMS. Qualitative studies often include small sample sizes which are not representative of the sample and setting. In QIMS, the sample size is determined by the number of participants, not the number of studies. According to Aguirre and Bolton (2013), the components of this method include: (a) instrumentation; (b) sampling the literature; (c) data extraction; and (d) translation of data into a synergistic understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Instrumentation

The use of epoche, or bracketing, when investigators abrogate their experiences as much as possible (Husserl, 1970), is rarely ever perfectly achieved (Moustakas, 1994). In typical qualitative research, the authors are the main instruments in the study. Therefore, the following is a brief description of our credibility to conduct this study.

First Author. I am an African American/Black, cisgender, heterosexual woman who has encountered microaggressions rooted in racial and gender biases in multiple settings of higher education. As a student, I attended three highly selective, predominately White, four-year institutions. I encountered and fought to resist the perpetuation of microaggressions related to marginalized group status at these institutions and continued this work as my career advanced. Currently, as the only African American/Black tenure-track professor in my department, I also experience microaggressions in the form of challenges to my own qualifications and competency as an assistant professor. I also spend a significant amount of time advising and counseling minority students on college campuses attempting to navigate numerous sites of inequality.

Second Author. Like my coauthor, I am also an African American/Black, heterosexual woman who has encountered microaggressions rooted in racial and gender biases in multiple settings of higher education. During my undergraduate and graduate school years, I attended predominately White, four-year institutions. As a tenure-track assistant professor, minority students often come to me with microaggressive scenarios they have experienced on campus. Due to unavoidable power differentials, students often come to me for advice on how to appropriately address and resist these encounters.

Sample of the Literature

To locate scholarly articles for this QIMS, Google Scholar, LexisNexis, and Social Work Abstracts were searched for titles and abstracts containing a combination of the following terms: African Americans, microaggressions, PWIs (predominantly White institutions), focus groups, phenomenology, grounded

theory, ethnography, narrative, and qualitative. Inclusion criteria were that studies: (a) addressed microaggressions among undergraduate African American college students; (b) only sampled undergraduate African American college students attending PWIs; (c) were conducted in the United States, and (d) were qualitative in nature. No limits were put on publication dates. We searched titles and abstracts using combinations of categories of search terms related to African Americans (i.e., Black), microaggressions, predominately White institutions, and method (i.e. qualitative, phenomenology, narrative, interviews, focus groups, grounded theory, interviews, ethnography).

A total of 921 articles were retrieved and examined for inclusion. One hundred seventy-four duplicate studies were removed. With 747 studies remaining, the first and second author reviewed titles and abstracts to decide which studies should be viewed more closely. After this, 706 studies were removed for various reasons including: (a) the sample consisted of Black psychologists, university faculty, staff, pre-tenure professors; (b) the setting was a historically Black college or university; (c) the sample included college graduates; (d) the sample was LGBTQ specific; (e), the studies were conducted outside the U.S.; and (f) the studies used a mixed methods approach or were literature reviews.

With a sample of 41 studies, the authors both reviewed the full text of each article and removed 37 for the following reasons: (a) the study was not peer-reviewed; (b) the study focused on non-African Americans, doctoral students, Black graduate residential assistants, Black graduate students in college leadership positions; or (c) the study was a literature review or quantitative in nature. The resulting sample for this QIMS is composed of four studies published between 2001-2012 yielding descriptions of the experiences of 108 African American undergraduate students enrolled in PWIs. While a sample of four studies may appear small, other studies have been published in which the samples included three, (Frank & Aguirre, 2013; Smith & Aguirre, 2012), four (Bowers, 2013) and five studies (Brownell & Praetorius, 2015; Schuman 2016). Table 1 provides a detailed description of the demographics of each study.

Table 1. Demograpics of Four Studies Included in the Qualitative Interpretive Meta-Synthesis

Author, Year	Data Collection Strategy	N	Age	Recruitment, Setting, and Location
Baber (2012)	semi-structured interviews and journal entries	15	18+	mid-size, PW research institution in mid-Atlantic region
Jaggers & Iverson (2012)	focus group	23	18-23	residence halls of PWI in Midwest
Smith et al. (2007)	focus group	36	18+	Harvard University; Michigan State University; University of California, Berkley (UC Berkley); University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; University of Michigan; and the University of Michigan Law School
Solorzano et al. (2000)	focus group	34	18+	3 elite PW, research 1 universities

Data Extraction

This step involved extracting original themes from the four qualitative articles that were chosen for the QIMS (See Table 2). To ensure the integrity of each study, we used the exact language presented in the studies to represent the themes extracted. This guaranteed that the original researchers' interpretations were maintained in using this as data for this QIMS.

Table 2. Themes Extracted From Original Studies

Authors/Year of the Study	Themes
Baber (2012)	1. Established racial identity 2. Reconsidering identity through heterogeneous community experience 3. Conflict between ideologies 4. Resiliency against hostility 5. Uncovering complexity of identity
Jaggers & Iverson (2012)	1. "You're their first" 2. "You have to prove yourself " 3. "I'm gonna have worse consequences"
Smith et al. (2007)	1. Anti-Black male stereotyping 2. Marginality hyper-surveillance and control
Solorzano et al. (2000)	1. Racial microaggressions within academic spaces 2. Racial microaggressions within social spaces 3. The academic and social life of students 4. Academic and social counter spaces for socio-cultural meanings

Data Translation—Path to Synergistic Understanding

The next step was to synthesize and translate the themes that were extracted into a new synergistic understanding of how undergraduate African American college students experience and interpret microaggressions at PWIs. Synthesis involved evaluating which themes extracted were comparable to one another and collapsing these into related categories. Once themes were synthesized, the translation followed, which led to a new synergistic understanding of the phenomenon. Noblit and Hare (1988) define translation as an activity that:

> maintains the central metaphors and/or concept of each account in their relation to other key metaphors or concepts in that account. It also compares both the metaphors and concepts and their interactions in one account with the metaphors or concepts and their interactions in other accounts. (p. 28)

To ensure the accuracy of our findings, we used several methods of triangulation in addition to the triangulation inherent in the original studies: a) studies were from different disciplines (i.e., triangulation of sources); and b) we triangulated with each other during a four-month period (i.e., triangulation of analysts). An integral part of this process involved us keeping each other aware of our personal experiences and biases, as African American doctoral educated women who have experienced and still experience microaggressions at PWIs.

Results: Synergistic Understanding

The purpose of this QIMS was to understand how African American university students experience and make sense of racial and gender-based microaggressions at PWIs. Analysis of the four studies identified six overarching themes: (a) isolation; (b) lack of institutional support; (c) intersections of race and gender-based fatigue; (d) countering the internalization of microaggressions through the cultivation of affirming Black spaces; (e) responding to tests of Black "authenticity" and criminality; and (f) balancing performances of Black masculinity at home and on campus. Following is an interpretive discussion of each theme.

Theme 1: Isolation

The first theme that emerged from the literature is isolation. Operating in silos with no one to identify with produced an atmosphere of loneliness. Students shared their feelings of racial tension and perceived low expectations. One student said:

> They look at you [and think], "Oh that's another dumb Black girl in the class." That's how they make you feel … So you don't feel like [saying], "Well, maybe it isn't me" 'cause you second-guess yourself. You're by yourself. If you have more African American students there, then there would be more of a voice, beside your one single voice… [I]f there's more backup [other African American students] there, then you'll feel more comfortable … Then you [won't] say, "Maybe I'm stupid! Maybe I don't understand what's going on." (Solorzano et al., 2000, p. 66)

Table 3. Translating of Themes

New Overarching Theme	Original Themes and Authors (see Table 2)
1. Isolation 2. Lack of Institutional Support	Jaggers & Iverson, 2012; Solorzano et al., 200; Smith et al., 2007 Solorzano et al., 2000
3. Intersections of race and gender-based fatigue	Baber, 2012; Solorzano et al., 2000
4. Countering the internalization of microaggressions through the cultivation of affirming Black spaces	Baber, 2012; Solorzano et al., 2000
5. Responding to tests ofblack "authenticity" and criminality	Baber, 2012; Jaggers & Iverson, 2012; Solorzano et al., 2000;
6. Balancing performances of Black masculinity at home and on campus	Baber, 2012; Jaggers & Iverson, 2012

Similarly, another student described the way their institution arbitrarily paired the small number of Black students with the larger population of White students in an effort to foster unity. Without additional supports from the institution, the student discussed the tensions that resulted from this institutional practice:

If you're from an all-White school or if you're from a Black hood school, they'll throw you in there together, to try to force you … to be in harmony, but that's not what happens." Patrick added, "It gets real uncomfortable … Everybody else is Caucasian... having fun … but we're just kicked out of the box. (Jaggers & Iverson, 2012, p. 192)

Theme 2: Lack of Institutional Support

In line with feelings of isolation, across the studies, students also reported feeling a lack of support from their respective institutions when microaggressive encounters occurred. In fact, students described being unprepared for the ways administrators, faculty, and institutional agents (i.e., resident advisors, campus police, academic advisors) would themselves espouse microaggressions in their encounters with students. One student recalls an encounter with a faculty member who believed he cheated on a math exam because of the high score he earned. The student explained:

> … I was doing really well in the class, like math is one of my strong suits … We took a first quiz … and I got like a 95 … he [the professor] was like, 'Come into my office. We need to talk,' and I was like," Okay.' I just really knew I was gonna be [told], 'great job,' but he [said], 'We think you've cheated … We just don't know, so we think we're gonna make you [take the exam] again.' … And [then] I took it with just the GSI [graduate student instructor] in the room, and just myself, and I got a 98 on the exam." (Solorzano et al., 2000, p. 66)

Heightened surveillance and distrust were not only the purview of professors. Students also felt overly targeted by the efforts of campus police. When recounting an experience with campus police responding to an anonymous call describing someone entering the computer lab as "suspicious," a male student said:

> … He told me that it was his job to follow up on those types of calls. I told him that they should have their callers define 'suspicious.' Anyway, that shit pissed me off. I guess someone saw a Black man walk into the computer lab and assumed I was there to steal instead of study. (Smith et al., 2007, p. 564)

A similar experience was shared by another student who discussed the overwhelming police response to Black students playing football in a designated campus space for outdoor activities. He said:

> And so now, we're up to three police cars. We're still discussing that [students play football in Underhill lot] and then, finally, here comes a fourth car, one of the vans or whatever, the UCBP vans and they swoop up. Then there are two bike cops who come over. So now, there are like a total of four or five cars and then we have two cops on the bike, all here for us [Black male students], who are not displaying any type of violence or anything like that towards [one another or authority], but we're upset. (Smith et al., 2007, p. 566)

*Theme 3: Intersections of Race and
Gender-based Fatigue in the Classroom*

Across the many institutions of higher education included in this analysis, students used the language of intersectionality to make meaning of the resulting fatigue they felt on a daily basis. Classrooms were a particularly psychologically draining space for students because of the sheer frequency with which they experienced racially insensitive comments and actions in a given academic term. A student succinctly described the notion that Black students constantly needed to prove their competence to faculty and White peers, regardless of their proven record of academic success. She said, "… they [professors] don't know what I got last semester, so I feel like I have to prove myself again." (Baber, 2012, p. 75)

Relatedly, other students felt drained by the mere anticipation of potential microaggressive encounters with institutional agents. One student described constantly feeling like they needed to be on "guard" when speaking with most people in positions of power on campus. The student said:

> "It's not fair on the African American students. [I have] to be on my guard every time I go in to talk to a professor, every time I go in and talk to the advisor, every time I go and talk to *anybody*. I'm like, are they here really to help me or are they going to lead me down the path that I don't want to go down? (Solorzano et al., 2000, p. 69)

Inherent in these stories was the narrative of exhaustion and fatigue. Students were tired of having to prove their entitlement to the rights they perceived were automatically conferred to their White peers.

Theme 4: Countering the Internalization of Microaggressions through the Cultivation of Affirming Black Spaces

Students in our sample expressed the need for locating affirming Black spaces where they could relate to people with similar racialized experiences and affirm their identities. Feeling comfortable, having one's experiences validated, and being able to freely express oneself without the fear of offending someone was an imperative need. One student said:

> It's just more of a comfortability (sic) because they have similar views, you can talk about the things they relate to and you don't have to try and … nobody has to hold themselves back from speaking to you because they feel like they're going to offend you or anything. (Baber, 2012, p. 73)

In addition to needing to be connected with a group of like-minded individuals, students expressed their desires to join formal organizations that were created specifically for African Americans. Students viewed these organizations as an encouraging scholastic environment. This student commented:

> You know how you have African American crews, African American fraternities, and so forth. And then my sophomore year here, I was thinking about joining an African American sorority, and [a White fellow student] said, "Why do you want to join an African American sorority? Are those other sororities not good enough? You think that we're only White?" I said, "I don't think they're only White. It's just that … I don't want to say [they're] anti-African American, but I don't feel welcome in your sorority." And she said, "What do you think we are, the Klan?" [and] I was like, "Okay, we're not going to go there. (Solorzano et al., 2000, p. 70)

Students noticed an increase in their social capital once they joined organized groups. They also witnessed improvements in their grades and overall self-esteem. Another student said:

> … the benefit that I have gained from [a study group of African American students] is that my involvement in the African American community has grown, and that's where I found a lot of my support. Even in terms of academics, I go study with

the "homies" all the time. Go to [certain student lounge] and you're going to see a million African American faces, and it's going to be cool…You might not get that much studying done, but it's a cool little network that's created because classes are so uncomfortable. (Solorzano et al, 2000, p. 71)

Students found it particularly difficult when faculty and staff were unable, or unwilling, to relate to their experiences. Finding someone who looked like them was a necessity. Due to the numerous microaggressions experienced on campus with peers, some students felt as though they could only relate to and be understood by African American faculty and staff. This student shared the following:

… I just feel more comfortable dealing with African American people in every aspect … counseling, financial aid. I just look for the first African American face I find because I feel like they're going to be more sympathetic. (Solorzano et al., 2000, p. 70)

Theme 5: Responding to Tests of Black "Authenticity" & Criminality

In addition to having their academic integrity scrutinized, students also had to combat preconceived notions associated with Blacks being hyper-criminal and one-dimensional. Routinely being watched and dismantling negative preconceived notions were often too common among this group of students. This student shared his experience:

You have to prove yourself that you are not this criminal Black man that [will] be raping people at three o'clock in the morning … and it shouldn't really be like that, 'cause it's already a preconception that "oh man, it's a Black man, watch you don't prop your door open too long 'cause your 32-inch LCD is gone." (Solorzano et al., 2000, p. 70)

Black male students felt as if they were constantly being tested, even in spaces that should have provided respite. When recounting the ways White males "tested" Black males in the dorms, a student said:

> White males like to test you. They hear the music and watch BET and they want to know "Are you as hard as 50 Cent?" and they'll do stupid stuff to test my manhood. They'll ask you, "Do you want to go out for some chicken with me?"… I've had a White person [a roommate] who I told him "you know, brother, we can share everything; just don't touch my shoes though." [Later] I'm in a [residence hall] lounge, and this man runs down the hall in my shoes. So I went real ethnic on him in the room and I got into a lot of trouble, but that's what he wanted. They [White males] want you to push your limits. (Jaggers & Iverson, 2012, p. 193)

Another student had a similarly poor encounter with his White roommate. He said:

> I had a Caucasian roommate. [On] my second day, he misplaced his wallet. He'd put it inside his laptop so then he woke up tripping. Basically he was trying to plot that I'd done took his wallet … That's why I'd rather room with a Black person; somebody I'm more comfortable with that's not gonna jump and just try to automatically assume I'm trying to steal his wallet. (Jaggers & Iverson, 2012, p. 193)

Resisting one-dimensional racial perceptions was an experience many students said they had been battling since high school. While male students experienced assumptions of delinquency, Black women often faced challenges to their outward presentation of self (e.g., hairstyles, dress, music taste, etc.). One student described the way her friend contested the idea that Black women could not enjoy music by White artists such as John Mayer. She said:

> When he said it, we were the only two Black people there and it was this whole group of White people. And all of the White people were really, really uncomfortable … I wasn't going to cause a scene … But, when (Imani's peer) was yelling at him, she was saying everything I thought. She was like, 'How dare you tell me about being Black? You don't even know! You don't know anything about me! Because I like John Mayer, I'm not Black?' And he was like, 'I was joking!' But that's not funny. It's not appropriate. (Baber, 2012, p. 75)

Theme 6: Balancing Performances of Black
Masculinity at Home and On Campus

The final theme, balancing the performance of Black manhood when retuning home for academic breaks (Baber, 2012; Jaggers & Iverson, 2012) and while on campus (Baber, 2012; Jaggers & Iverson, 2012; Smith et al., 2007; Solorzano et al., 2000) was discussed as a way students, particularly men, navigated tenuous spaces in the included studies. While this QIMS looks at the on-campus experiences of students, it is important to note that home-based challenges to manhood while on academic breaks reduced the likelihood that male students could let their guard down and discuss stressful campus encounters with family and friends. When discussing the ways he had to navigate the stresses of college while at home, one of the participants said:

> You make friends along the way. But most of us are coming here as the only male in their family going to college. There's no support. You can't call nobody back home and say 'well, I'm struggling'… because they going to tell you 'I never went to college; what am I supposed to tell you. ' Adam added, "We got to make it on our own … We have to keep struggling and pushing forward." (Jaggers & Iverson, 2012, p. 194)

Another male participant described his recent need for more racial diversity when returning home and the desire to connect with people who looked like him in order to maintain sanity while visiting home. The student said:

> I want more diversity now, because my family goes to a mostly White church, and it's not very diverse. I can't relate with them sometimes. I began to realize that I don't even like these people that much, so I want to kind of find a new church where its more people like me. (Baber, 2012, p. 74)

Black males experienced the burden of double-consciousness (Du Bois, 1953) because they felt they needed dual identities to vacillate between home and academic spaces.

Black male students said they needed to be tough when returning home and not complain about their negative campus encounters, but once returning to campus they had to constantly

renegotiate the appropriate level of toughness that would keep White students from harassing them, but also not land them in disciplinary proceedings or feed into negative stereotypes about Black manhood. One participant stated, "And, we're saying at the same time, we're feeling restricted because if we act in a way that we want to react-number one, we're going to jail; number two, it's just going to feed into the stereotype that they think we're supposed to be violent or whatever" (Smith et al., 2007, p. 566). Finally, another male said: "They [Whites] expect me to act like what they see on TV. They expect me to hurt them, take their money. I'm not that type of person. What I hate the most is how I have to combat these negative stereotypes of what they expect me to be. It's real draining." (Jaggers & Iverson, 2012, p. 193)

Discussion

Through an iterative process of constant comparison among the four articles in this QIMS, six reoccurring themes emerged as they related to understanding the ways Black undergraduate students at four-year, predominately White colleges/universities experienced and resisted microaggressions occurring at the intersection of race and gender. For the discussion, these themes were converged into two larger groups: experiencing microaggressions and resisting microaggressions. The results from this study contribute to a wider body of research, which suggests that the stress of microaggressions impacts one's psychological, physical, emotional, and mental health. Important for this study, racial microaggressions have been linked to significant physical health risks among minority populations (Brondolo et al., 2008; Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999), cognitive disruption stemming from stereotype threat that can lead to academic underperformance (Steele, 1997), and increased levels of anxiety and rage that lead to exhaustion and depression (Jackson et al., 1992; Sue, 2003). Thus, the effects of microaggressive encounters can have long-lasting effects that stay with students even after they leave their respective college campuses.

Experiencing Microaggressions: Isolation, Lack of Institutional Support, and Intersections of Race and Gender-based Fatigue

These three themes are discussed together because they highlight the singular idea that feelings of loneliness and exhaustion permeated the college experiences of underrepresented Black undergraduates across the synthesized studies. The results highlight the ways having to prove one's intelligence, credibility, authenticity, and right to campus resources (e.g., computer labs, dormitories, cafeterias, and classrooms) on a consistent basis created heightened psychological strain for students. Among the most important messages in the results was that while students may have gone on to matriculate, they may have done so with significantly more mental and physical strain than their White peers. This ultimately may have impacted the quality of their college experience and created stressors that research indicates remain with racial minorities beyond the time of encounter (Sue, 2010b). Thus, retention should not be the only bar for determining whether microaggressions are impacting students' educational experiences. While students may exhibit resilient ways of creating affirming spaces, they still feel the burden of institutional racism and sexism. Moreover, they are particularly hurt by racist interactions with college faculty and staff, people they believe should be held to higher standards than their contemporaries. A major revelation of this meta-synthesis aligns with previous work which suggests that institutional characteristics, not student-level traits, contribute most to students' experience of a particular campus (Alon & Tienda, 2005; Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009).

Resisting Microaggressions: Countering the Internalization of Microaggressions through the Cultivation of Affirming Black Spaces, Responding to Tests of Black "Authenticity" & Criminality, and Balancing Performances of Black Masculinity at Home and On Campus

These three themes are discussed together because they highlight the resilient ways Black students countered pervasive microaggressions by unapologetically seeking refuge in the identification of Black faces and the creation of Black spaces. Students openly challenged the racialized assumptions of

Whites on campus in discussions about what it means to be Black, and navigating a life of double consciousness between the expectations of home and campus life. These results suggest that Black students are actively enacting coping mechanisms to thrive in spaces that have, and continue, to deny their full humanity. These findings are significant because they refute the work of college "mismatch" supporters such as Sander (2004) and more recently, Supreme Court Justice Anton Scalia, who argued that Blacks should attend "slower" colleges better suited to their diminished academic capacity. Instead, results suggest we look at the ways academic institutions are failing to support a vibrant and resilient student population that actively strives to remain in college and often academically outperforms their White peers when provided with the necessary supports. A major revelation of this study was that Black students' success at historically White, four-year colleges and universities occurred in part by adopting a hyper-racial conscious identity in academic spaces that often purported to be colorblind. Thus, it is not unanticipated that Black students in this study who came from diverse backgrounds and had given little consideration before college to issues of race and gender noted the need for seeking out people that looked like them once in college.

Implications

The identification and convergence of these six aspects of college experience provide durable and identifiable sites for policy and practice intervention by college administrators, staff, and faculty committed to improving the physical, social, and psychological conditions of Black students attending historically White, four-year colleges and universities. By identifying these reoccurring themes in student experience, college staff can more easily identify existing policies and practices that may be oppressive, combat them with new policy, and work to identify the role individuals play in the creation of a truly inclusive undergraduate experience for students who have been historically marginalized from four-year educational settings.

Sue (2010a) suggests that in cases of perceived racial discrimination, racial minorities tend to provide more accurate accounts of the situation and are also more often correct in their

assessment of being recipients of discriminatory events, as compared to White bystanders. Therefore, a significant step in creating inclusive campuses is first listening to and believing the accounts of bias put forth by marginalized populations on predominantly White campuses. Acknowledging the occurrence of microaggressions is a crucial step that prefaces any future progressive policy and/or practice intervention.

After this acknowledgment has been made, mandatory professional development training and evaluation on the topic of microaggressions that are linked to tenure and promotion are an important policy direction that can help faculty and administrators identify the ways they may be unintentionally, or intentionally, perpetuating inequality within student interactions. Additionally, acknowledging and publicly rewarding the programmatic work of faculty and administrators who support minority students (e.g., additional stipends, course reductions) can generate new knowledge about how academic institutions can be responsive to students in ways that enhance their own educational outcomes, bolster retention which supports institutional status and funding, and encourage minority students to create programs and outlets that reassert power over their own identity and consciousness. Similar training and incentives for staff (e.g., resident advisors, dormitory staff, campus police, student health) on the perpetuation of microaggressions would also serve to remove institutional barriers Black students face on college campuses inside and outside of the classroom setting.

Research implications are numerous, particularly as they relate to using qualitative work resulting from QIMS to enhance evidence-based practice in the fields of education and social welfare. Currently, few studies of college-going capture the ways specific institutional characteristics (e.g., housing assignment, course scheduling, group assignments, etc.) drive certain policies and traditions that serve to isolate marginalized students. The synergistic findings of this qualitative interpretive meta-synthesis suggest a move towards research that foregrounds the characteristics of institutions to locate mechanisms that support Black student success, retention, and well-being in an effort to use evidence to create policies that support marginalized populations.

Limitations

While this QIMS provides a closer look into the lives of African American college students and their interpretation of racial microaggressions at historically White, four-year colleges and universities, some limitations are present. Although we systematically reviewed all known exploratory articles on this topic, only four fit our inclusion criteria. Thus, our sample, while larger than the original studies individually, was still constrained by missing variables. One major limitation of this study is that not all available studies were used. Dissertations and theses were not included in the review. Had we included these, we could have possibly located additional studies that may have led to a broader understanding of the phenomenon. However, we chose to remain with only scholarly journal articles, since these undergo the blind, peer-review process.

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