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All Eyez On Me: The Socialization Experiences of African Americans at Predominately White Institutions

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Institutions

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Abstract

The review of literature section is to analyze the socialization experiences of African Americans that attend predominately white institutions (PWIs). African Americans are defined as Americans of African and especially black African descent for this research. The term "African American" and "black" will be used interchangeably. The paper highlights an overview of the social experiences of African American college students, distinguishes external, non-academic factors that contribute to the black college experience, and describes how African Americans experience social collectiveness within a predominately white campus. It also moves to identify how this interaction shapes African Americans' perception of 'blackness' amongst the cultural group. The social experiences that are demonstrated in the paper consists of an examination of the academic disparities amongst African American students, the perceptions of black and white students, the campus climate, and the student-faculty interaction. The external, non-academic factors that are emphasized include student identity development, the black inferiority complex, socioeconomic status, and residential background. The matter of which African Americans experience social collectiveness is examined through concepts such as 'acting white', the alienation from African American students, and maintaining the black community. An analysis is conducted which highlights the social and academic benefits of furthering research on the socialization experiences of African American students at predominately white institutions.

Keywords: African American college students, predominately white institutions (PWIs), black inferiority complex, identity development, socialization, black college experience

Review of Literature

"It seems like all eyes are on you when you're the only Black in a class" (Woldoff, Wiggins,

&Washington, 2011, p.1061)

It is so interesting to me how my entire four years of attending a predominately white institution can be described in sixteen words. As a matter of fact, the song "All Eyez on Me" by Tupac Shakur makes me think about my college journey even more. The song emphasizes how Tupac felt he was always being watched by the police and by people he didn't trust. I sometimes felt like this walking on campus and sitting in my classes. I felt like everyone was wondering what my next move would be: would I act like the stereotypical black girl with an attitude or would I not pay attention in class because I do not care about my education?

I believe that my experiences as an African American female attending a PWI has shaped how I view interracial relationships and my racial comfortability. I have a confession to make on behalf of my college journey: If it was not for my teammates who gave me my sense of community and purpose, I would have transferred to another university because I did not feel socially and racially comfortable on my college campus. Yes, I grew up being the only black person in my class, but attending an all-white institution with less than five percent of African American students, made me feel even more isolated. I was blessed to be surrounded by a group of African American women who gave me a support system and reaffirmed my racial identity. This made me wonder what other African American students experienced attending a PWI. What is their experience attending a predominately white university? What factors play a role in their experiences? Holmes, Ebbers, Robinson, & Mugenda (2001) highlights how the social and academic stressors handled by these students are overlooked and undermined by stating:

"African Americans in predominately white institutions have had to couple the normal concerns of first-year students (being away from home for the first time, sharing a room with a stranger, establishing new relationships, etc.) with those of having to adjust in an intellectual and social community that is unprepared to accept their cultural differences" (p.44).

Studies have shown that "the perception remains that predominately white institutions have not been successful in fully integrating African American and other minority students in the mainstream of the education system" (Holmes et al., 2001, p.42). The most common factor that is associated with the persona of the African American college experience is the lack of academic readiness. Holmes et al. (2001) reassures this claim by stating that "there is sufficient evidence to validate the premise that some minority students experience difficulty at white institutions because of deficient academic preparation and personal problems related to identity issues" (p.44). After understanding this concept, it is not surprising to discover that "African American students at PWIs have higher dropout rates and experience lower academic achievement than Black students attending HBCUs" (Karkouti, 2012, p.65). Numerous researchers have identified strategies to solve this academic gap amongst the students by implementing institutional services and programming initiatives such as, formulating tutoring centers and creating summer bridge programs. Aside from the academic perspective when viewing the African American student population, there has been very little literature relating specifically to the social factors that these students experience.

Socialization Experiences

There has been a growing interest within the higher education community concerning the collegiate experiences of African American students attending predominately white institutions (PWIs). Historically, African Americans have combated institutional and societal restrictions in their access to higher education. It was not until federal legislation was passed before African Americans were offered an equal opportunity to enroll in colleges and universities. "Since *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents* (1950) decision and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 established de jure access to all institutions of higher education regardless of race, African American students have increasingly enrolled at PWIs" (Baber, 2012, p.67). Woldoff, Wiggins, and Washington (2011) discovered the following:

"As time passes, many Blacks continue to enroll in PWIs rather than historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) but will be less likely to graduate than Black students who attend HBCUs. Once enrolled into institutions of higher education, Blacks soon find that they must learn to adjust both socially and academically to their new environment, which at most institutions means being surrounded by Whites" (p.1050).

Woldoff et al. (2011) define the term adjustment as the "students' ability to adapt successfully to the expectations of college" and points out that black students' college adjustment is "associated with effective student integration within the institution" (p.1050). These researchers also mention that the term adjustment can address both an academic and a social domain. "Research has shown that social adjustment significantly affects students' overall

college adjustment and that problems with social adjustment can be detrimental to Black students' success at PWIs" (Woldoff et al., 2011, p.1050).

Academic disparities amongst black college students. Substantial research that is dedicated to black students attending predominately white institutions focuses on the academic disparities within this cultural community. Walpole (2008) reveals that, black students "remain decidedly underrepresented on the nation's campuses and continue to lag behind Whites and Asian Americans in college enrollment, academic achievement, and degree attainment" (p.237). Karkouti (2016) discovers that "African American students at PWIs have higher dropout rates and experience lower academic achievement than Black students attending HBCUs" (p.65). Walpole (2008) asserts that in comparison to black students attending HBCUs, African American students attending PWIs have lower grade point averages (GPAs). This academic gap amongst black students moves beyond the undergraduate level. "Black students continue to be underrepresented in 4-year colleges and universities, and that underrepresentation continues in graduate and professional degree programs as well" (Walpole, 2008, p.238). Black students have faced multiple academic advantages prior to their enrollment into college. Woldoff, Wiggins, and Washington (2011) presents the following:

"In addition, many college-bound African Americans have attended underfunded, poorly performing high schools that are below state standards in terms of standardized test scores and are plagued by a shortage of long-term, qualified teachers. As such, many African Americans are unprepared for the college application process, taking longer to apply and searching for information about college from different sources than their White counterparts" (pp.1049-1050).

Perceptions of black and white students. "Despite increasing enrollment rates for African American students at PWIs, establishing relationships and maintaining engagement on campus continues to present unique difficulties" (Baber,2012, p.67). Due to various residential backgrounds, black students have different amounts of exposure to people from various ethnic groups, specifically white students, which interferes with their cultural comfortability levels with these students. "Many black students are not used to being in classes with the large number of white students they encounter on a predominately white college campus. Many, in fact, are accustomed to attending schools where they comprised the majority" (Davis et al., 2004, p.422). Davis et al. (2004) asserts that "more than 70% of black students went to schools with more than 50% minority enrollment, and 36.5% of these students went to schools with a minority enrollment of 90-100%" (p.422). "Black students who have previously resided in rural, predominately White environments fare better than those who come from more segregated, urban contexts" (Woldoff et al., 2011, p.1071). Davis et al.(2014) reveals in their study that "connection with white students appeared to be easier for participants who had previously attended a white high school, supporting the idea that preparation for racist treatment enhances the possibilities of coping" (p.438). Woldoff et al. (2011) highlights in their research study several first-person experiences of African American college students who revealed their perceptions of white people. One participant in the study conveyed their limited access to the white community by stating: "Back at home, if I did see a White person, I didn't talk to them or nothing. No White person to this day has ever stepped foot in my house" (Woldoff et al., 201, p.1062). Another participant had similar experiences asserting the following: "I never hung around a White person a day in my life. I saw White people on TV, and that was pretty much it" (Woldoff et al., 2011, p.1062). This participant further elaborated on how they viewed white

people during their childhood by stating: "I would kind of stare, especially when I was younger, thinking like, 'What are they doing here, anyway? They don't belong here" (Woldoff et al., 2011, p.1062).

Whereas African American students are socially impacted by their negative perceptions of non-black students, white students are also conditioned by society to construct stereotypes about the African American community. "All students, having absorbed years of indoctrination by families, peers, and mass media, come to the university with stereotypes about people different from themselves" (Davis et al., 2004, p.422). By the age of five years old, children establish definite stereotypes about other racial groups. In relation to African American children, they are made aware of the negative stereotypes constructed by the white community in comparison to other ethnic groups (Davis et al., 2004). There are different cultural developments amongst black and white students, in terms of their socialization process with diverse individuals. Davis et al. (2004) discovered the following:

> "For example, research by Judd, Park, Ryan, Brauer, and Kraus (1995) suggested that white college students are socialized to avoid stereotyping blacks and thinking about racial differences whereas black college students are socialized to emphasize racial group membership and to notice differences between themselves and whites"(p.422).

Woldoff et al. (2011) demonstrates in their study, that the "few White students in the study who reported interacting with Black students were found to have internalized negative beliefs about the Black community and Black culture in general, particularly accusing Blacks of self-segregating" (p.1051).

Campus climate. The geographical location of predominately white institutions plays a major role in the socialization experiences of college students. Historically, predominated white institutions have not always supported students from various ethnic groups. "According to Thelin, PWIs have a history of exclusionary practices and limited access opportunities for minority students, meaning that White students constitute the majority of their student bodies" (Karkouti, 2016, p.65). These types of institutions are known to be "monolithic", as it relates to the social and cultural environment. Numerous authors hold that PWIs do not promote minority student learning because these institutions are often Euro-centric (Davis et al., 2004). "Harper and Hurtado (2007) explained that minority and White students who attend the same institution often perceive their campus racial environment in different ways" (Karkouti, 2016, p.65). "The researchers found that White students were the most satisfied among other racial groups with the social environments and were unfamiliar of the negative dispositions that Black, Latino, and Native American students held toward their institutions" (Karkouti, 2016, p.65). "The literature on campus racial climate indicates that African American students' college experiences at PWIs is positively associated with racial stresses" (Davis et al., 2004, p.66). "Adjustment to a White community atmosphere, not to mention a rural one, brings with it challenges to adapting to life in another culture and can result in what anthropologist Kalervo Oberg (1958) called 'culture shock'" (Woldoff et al., 2011, p.1048). Woldoff et al. (2011) addresses in his study how the physical characteristics of an environment impacts students' campus perception by stating the following:

"The community in which an institution is located has a tremendous influence on minority students' feelings of acceptance. Many colleges and universities in the United

States are located in rural areas and small towns, which may provide a very self-

contained, isolating, and foreign experience for Black students, many of whom are from

urban environment. Additionally, the main attractions featured at many such institutions,

such as wilderness and outdoors activities, may be less appealing to Black students, who

may be shocked at the lack of public transportation and access to urban amenities,

conveniences, and ties to a community with a sizable Black citizen population" (p.1052).

The *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* published a report in 2007 claiming that "geographic

location unquestionably plays a major role in Black student graduation rates" (Woldoff et al.,

2011, p.1048). Karkouti (2016) supports this claim by highlighting that "Black students are

increasingly enrolling in the military because they view the environment as more sensitive and

hospitable than PWIs" (p.66).

      Student-faculty interaction. The types of relationships that African American college

students establish with professors influences their connection to the institution and determines

the likelihood of their success in completing their four years at the institution. "Research shows

that student-faculty interaction is associated with positive outcomes in persistence, satisfaction,

achievement, and intellectual and social development, among other academic and social

variables, with greater contact having more favorable outcomes with students" (Cody, 2017,

p.5). **"**Student-faculty interaction at the collegiate level, refers to the interchanges that occur not

only in the classroom, but outside as well" (Cody, 2017, p.5). African American college students

struggle to build relationships with white professors because of the negative stereotypical

attitudes presented towards them by their instructors. Davis et al. (2004) asserts that "if faculty

are operating on the basis of negative stereotypes in the classroom, whether consciously or not,

students may become acutely uncomfortable, mistrustful, or demoralized" (p.422). Cody (2017) emphasizes that African Americans have experienced verbal harassment by their professors. "This harassment, and other overt and covert microaggressions can not only influence Black American student's comfort and attitudes toward their placehood in institutions of higher education, but importantly, perceptions of their interactions with and trust for faculty" (Cody, 2017, p.7). African American students have also experienced discrimination from university administration through their lack of attention towards campus hate crime incidents. In Davis et al. (2004) study, the researchers point out how a predominately white institution's administration "was not perceived as being particularly interested in investigating racist graffiti on campus buildings or other racial incidents" occurring on campus (p.427). This lack of attention towards the African American students conveys that the institution devalues their safety and racial comfortability on the campus. Researchers indicate that "black students reported insensitive attitudes of Caucasian faculty and students, along with lack of support, as the most frequently reported stressors they faced" (Davis et al., 2004, p.437).

External, Non-Academic Factors

Researchers tend to gravitate towards the academic disparities that contribute to the African American experiences at colleges and universities, but fail to emphasize other factors that influence the college journey. Components such as identity development, socioeconomic status, and residential background, dictate the socialization process for college students and their integration with the institution.

Identity development. Racial identity development is an evolving construct influenced by society, individuals, and experiences that forms a concept on how individuals perceive

themselves within their race. How an individual identifies themselves dictates their behaviors, thoughts, values, and lifestyle. African Americans, historically, have evolved within their ethnic group and continue to accept and reject racial constructs that have been created by the dominant group: white americans. African American college students experience racism on their campuses in a multitude of ways. Davis et al. (2004) presents the racial ignorance of white students towards black students on a college campus. Participants from this study highlighted specific racial incidents such as nooses hanging from trees, white students referring to black students as "Niggers", the hanging of the Rebel flag in residential housing, and condescending treatment of professors/university staff towards black students in the classroom (p.427). Woldoff et al. (2011) address how discrimination of African American students by institutions interferes with their social acceptance amongst their peers by stating the following:

"Additionally, though overt racism is no longer the social norm within our society, subtle displays of discrimination still serve to convince Blacks and other minorities that their presence is not wanted in particular locations. Whether blatant or subtle, racism has proven to be an impeding factor in Black student integration into the college environment" (p.1052).

Racism devalues the essence of what it means to be an African American and conveys negative constructs that impedes on the evolving racial identity of students of color. It forces individuals to reconsider their presence on predominately white campuses because they are not socially accepted. "The experience of prejudice and racial discrimination has caused non-Whites, and Blacks in particular, to withdraw from various institutions" (Woldoff et al., 2011, p.1051).

The cultural mistrust felt by black students determine how these individuals construct their sense of self, their placement in society, and determine their social interactions with others. "Cultural mistrust is an attitudinal response to historical and personal oppression in which people of color do not trust Whites in institutional, personal and social contexts" (Sanchez, 2018, para.2). "This mistrust developed from an American history of traumatic events – waged on an individual and systemic level – through centuries of state-sponsored enslavement, verbal and mental persecution, psychological degradation, legally affirmed racial discrimination, and psychical maltreatment of people of African descent" (Cody, 2017, p.4). Cultural mistrust is a fluid mindset that is impacted by external factors. "Wijeyesinghe and Jackson (2001) notes that studies on racial identity development are like taking a 'snapshot of a moving picture' (p.2). Concepts of race and racial identity are constantly evolving for individuals and societies in response to significant sociocultural events" (Baber, 2012, p.68). Baber (2012) continues to affirm the complexity of identity development by pointing out that it is a "cyclical process where students shift within and among dimensions simultaneously, influenced by several communities – past and present communities, Eurocentric and ethnocentric communities, and home and campus communities" (p.77).

Colleges and universities have unique social spaces because it allows individuals to socialize with others holding diverse backgrounds, let it be social, racial, or intellectual, just to name a few. Students bring with them experiences and beliefs constructed by their social spaces prior to college, and are forced to transform their ideals due to conflicting perceptions inflicted on them by individuals in higher education. The social foundation that is established within the institution will either improve or hinder the social dynamics amongst African Americans and whites in society.

Black inferiority complex. The African American community has historically been viewed as the "inferior" race primarily because of skin color, but has also extended to their disparities within finances, academics, and access to social spaces. Cody (2017) declares that "the academic differences noted between Black and White Americans is best explained from a social-psychological perspective, or an examination of deeply ingrained psychological constructs that influence how students interact and perceive themselves in the school setting" (p.4). Black students are repeatedly cognizant of how white individuals are perceiving them, and tend to focus more on this persona, than focusing on their academic achievement. They are culturally forced to "invalidate negative prejudices about the academic ability of black students" (Davis et al., 2014, p.439). Davis et al. (2014) highlights in their study that African Americans do not "want to be the spokesperson for the black race", "but they did want to do all they could to improve the negative impressions the university community might hold concerning the ability of black students to succeed" (p.439). Researchers articulate that the black inferiority complex affects black students' academic success by stating the following:

> "The sense of being seen through the lens of a negative stereotype as unworthy leads to fear of doing something to confirm that stereotype, decreased class participation, increased anxiety, and often poor academic performance in spite of ample ability and preparation" (p.439).

African American students are fighting against the negative stereotypes constructed by society and are attempting to formulate their own identity. If predominately white institutions are

validating the negative judgements against African American students through their interaction with students, then black student success rates will continue to dwindle in the future.

Researchers have pointed out that black students tend to have a need to prove themselves to white people to feel validated in the classroom. After analyzing their study, Davis et al. (2014) argues "the idea that whites saw blacks as a group and individually as less capable until proven otherwise. Participants described how they had to work harder to overcome such preconceived ideas and succeed in spite of the obstacles presented" (p.432). "In the classroom the need to prove oneself led to more effort and more stress on the part of black students who saw classroom interaction as crucial for their success" (Davis et al., 2004, p.433). This feeling of unworthiness by black students hinders their academic success at PWIs. Davis et al. (2004) affirms this claim by stating:

"Having to prove one's worthiness represents a potentially serious barrier to success for black students in a predominately white university. Unique to minority or marginalized groups, the assumption of unworthiness is associated with a particularly detrimental factor – stereotype threat – that seems to impair performance of even the most skilled achievement-oriented and confident black students" (p.439).

Baber (2012) reiterates that the struggles of overcoming the black inferiority complex by referencing the words of an African American student in his study:

"Umm, its hard to escape this Black inferiority mentality and if it's been beat in your head for so long and if you've been at the bottom for so long it's hard to come up so I

think this dialogue academically about Blacks that aren't doing well has not been

translated into cultural or social activism" (p.76).

As strong scholars, black students feel they must rise to the occasion in terms of over-achieving

in the classroom to make up for the lack of respect the racial group receives towards academic

excellence. This pressure influence can serve as a motivator to black students or it can function

as another cultural stressor in the college experience.

 Socioeconomic status. Society tends to underestimate the diversity of socioeconomic

backgrounds amongst African American students who attend predominately white institutions.

Researchers tend to clump all African Americans together when conducting research on their

experiences on white campuses. Students with different socioeconomic backgrounds have

different academic experiences on white campuses. Walpole (2008) demonstrates that black

students from low SES "reported less contact with faculty, spent less time studying, reported less

participation in student clubs and groups, worked more, and achieved lower grades than their

high SESs peers and than all students while in college" (p.243). "The low SES students spent

less time with faculty outside of class and at faculty members' homes, but were slightly more

likely to work with faculty on research or to assist in teaching" (Walpole, 2008, p.243). The SES

differences held amongst black students have placed some individuals with more social power in

comparison to other students. Baber (2012) discovered the following:

 "The experiences of students suggest that African American students from the high-SES

 backgrounds benefit from a position of privilege, when compared to African American

 students for lower-SES backgrounds; however, it appears that African American students

from high-SES background have additional sources of stress that their White peers may

not have" (p.78).

Socioeconomic status also affects student interaction with professors. Moore & Toliver (2010)

discovers that "the socioeconomic background of the students is a correlated factor regarding

students' overall perception of the Black faculty members and their perceived efficacy in the

faculty role" (p.938). Studies have shown that African American students have different levels of

motivation to excel in their academic aspirations. Hugh B. Price's novel *Achievement Matters:*

Getting Your Child the Best Possible Education (2003) "documents that some upper-middle- and

middle-class Black students are not as motivated academically as one might expect on the basis

of class background and opportunities made available to them by their families" (Moore &

Toliver, 2010, p.940). Walpole (2008) affirms that socioeconomic status does not have a direct

influence on graduate school attendance, and seemed instead to mediate students' outcomes

through academic achievement, degree aspirations, and career orientation" (p.248).

   Residential background. African Americans that attend PWIs have hometowns across

the United States and other countries. Where black students are raised impacts their perceptions

of white people, their interaction with professionals, and their comfortability amongst different

racial groups. Woldoff et al. (2011) claims the following:

   "Some Black students have been raised in relatively close proximity to their college of

   choice, have spent little time in urban settings, and are accustomed to predominately

   White institutions. Others travel from different regions, identify with urban lifestyles, and

   have grown up in segregated Black neighborhoods" (p.1049).

"Research has shown that residential location affects individuals' social contact with racial-ethnic groups, such that those from segregated areas are less likely to have frequent or meaningful contact with people of different races and ethnicities" (Woldoff et al., 2011, p.1053).

 According to researchers, there is social tension amongst in-state black students and out-of-state blacks who attend PWIs. Woldoff et al. (2011) affirms the cultural tension held by in-state and out-of-state black students by stating the following:

> "Notably, both in-state and out-of-state students reported negative perceptions of each other (e.g., out-of-state students are ill prepared for college, materialistic, and tougher; in-state students act like 'hicks' and are not considered 'authentically Black'. These negative perceptions divide the undergraduate Black community and feed into out-of-state students' sense of otherness" (p.1060).

Due to varying residential backgrounds, these African American students hold different comfortability levels when interacting with white students. "Students who came from more integrated or White community backgrounds reported having far less adjusting to interacting with non-Blacks on campus" (Woldoff, 2011, p. 1064). An out-of-state African American participant from Woldoff et al. (2011)'s study asserted that "in-state (students) have an easier time connecting and having White friends…they're used to being one of five Black people in a school or town…its different for us" (p.1059). In-state black students have their own perception of out-of-state students as well. An in-state black student in Woldoff et al. (2011)'s study demonstrates her "frustration with out-of-state students' vocal complaints about the predominately White population and cultural environment on campus" by stating that "out-of-

state Blacks know what they're getting themselves into before they come here, so there's really no reason to complain" (p.1060). Woldoff et al. (2011)'s study discovered that "in-state students had their own claims about lack of sophistication, but these targeted out-of-state Black students, whom they perceived to be superficial, lacking in priorities, and unprepared for college" (p.1070). There has also been discussion between the groups pertaining to the different lifestyles both in-state and out-of-state black students' practice. "Darlene, an out-of-state student, pointed out that in-state students are ignorant about urban contexts and ways of life" (Woldoff et al., 2011, p.1067). In-state black students were described as more family-oriented, and out-of-state blacks were described as more independent (Woldoff, 2011). "Out-of-state students often mocked in-state students' strong ties to their families and their affection for their hometowns" (Woldoff, 2011, p.1068).

Blackness and Social Collectiveness

"Acting white". The phrase "acting white" is commonly used in the black community when an African American's behavior does not align with the "black culture". Woldoff et al. (2011) examines the concept of "acting white" and how it alters the social experience amongst black students by stating the following:

"The accusation that African American students are acting White has been studied as a label that some Blacks use against others as an insult, suggesting a weaker racial identity. Interestingly, most research has forwarded the 'acting-White hypothesis' to understand the labels that young Black students place on their peers who perform well in school. In the context settings, some research shows that Black students are supportive of their

Black peers who 'act White' as long as these high achievers are well rounded socially

and use their status and leadership roles to advocate for Black students" (p.1065).

Black students who establish strong friendships with white people are accused of "acting white"

(Woldoff et at., 2011). The behavior of "acting white" involves mannerisms such as clothing

style, speech patterns, and life experiences, that replicate how whites socialize themselves within

society. The upbringing of black students is an essential component to how African Americans

define one's "blackness". Woldoff et al. (2011) highlights that "out-of-state Black students often

tell stories of urban hardship to create a sense that there are impenetrable cultural divisions

within the Black student population" (p.1066). "Out-of-state students most commonly questioned

in-state Blacks' authenticity because of the rural location and large White population of their

hometowns, which were seen as affecting in-state students' speech patterns and clothing styles"

(Woldoff et al., 2011, p,1066). Woldoff et al. (2011) demonstrates how black students perceive

the speech patterns of black students who are described as "acting white" by stating the

following in an interview: "I can never get over the way some of them talk. Some of them may

pass for normal Black folk until they open their mouth…Sometimes, I think they try to talk extra

proper and White so they can be accepted" (p.1067). African Americans are evaluated by their

style of dress to determine the authenticity of one's "blackness".

      Alienation from black students. African American students at predominately white

institutions are not as cohesive as the university portrays within their recruitment brochures.

There lies social hostility within the racial group because there is a "survival of the fittest"

mentality, where everyone is pulling each other down to be considered "the best". Due to the

various divisions amongst the black population, African Americans experience their racial group

as smaller on campus (Woldoff et al., 2011). "Alienation and feelings of exclusion often deter Blacks from staying in higher education altogether" (Woldoff et al., 2011, p.1052) Woldoff et al. (2011) presents examples of how black students display their jealousy in comparison to other black students by making the following statement:

> "That's the way I feel, is just everybody has a chip on their shoulder and I get the vibes like the black female is my own worst enemy. And I'm not trying to, I don't give that off I don't think, but its kind of like we can't, if somebody's doing something good then its like, oh, they're trying to be this or they're trying to be that. It's not oh, they're really doing a good job" (p.429).

Black students sometimes hold back establishing relationships with other black students because they have preconceived notions about who they are. Another black student explains their frustration with other black students by stating the following:

> "I don't feel like other black students are ambitious enough, and I think some of them act very stereotypical and I really don't like that at all. I mean you know how white people say you act certain, loud and everything like that, and they are like that…It's kind of annoying to me, kind of embarrassing for me to see them act like that, so I do not want to hang around them" (Woldoff et al., 2011, p.429).

Woldoff et al. (2011) declares that many out-of-state black students reported that they "seek out friendships with in-state students as a last resort", instead of creating relationships during their first interactions with each other (p.1070).

Maintaining the black community. "Adjustment to the college setting is crucial to retaining African American students, and research suggests that meeting other African American students is a key part of adjustment" (Woldoff et al., 2011, p.1071). Sadly, predominately white institutions are not creating social spaces for African American students to create their relationships with people that look like them. Davis et al. (2004) mentions that black students "indicated a need to connect to other black students and faculty" (p.431). "Faculty of color who constitute 17% of total full-time faculty in the U.S. remain underrepresented due to the discriminatory recruitment policies employed by universities and colleges" (Karkouti, 2016, p.59). Black faculty on white campuses create a positive impact on the socialization experiences of African American college students. "Their common African American culture and experience enables them to relate to students with genuineness, authenticity, and creativity in ways that White faculty members are not equipped to do" (Moore & Toliver, 2010, p.933). "Research contends that Black professors provide credibility, positive role models, and support in and out of class" (Moore & Toliver, 2010). The participants in Davis et al.(2011)'s study "described their need to be in classes with black instructors and perhaps even more, to be in classes with a sizeable number of black students" (p.432). Studies show that African Americans communicate with black faculty differently in comparison to white faculty. Black faculty make it their duty to emphasize "the need for Black students to know that historically, institutions of higher education have not placed a high value on them, their abilities or their academic contributions" (Moore & Toliver, 2010, p.939). Moore & Toliver (2010) discovered "different communication styles that

uniquely characterized interactions between Black faculty members and students" (p.938).

Studies have shown that black students desire to be surrounded by more black students by stating comments such as, "I need my Black people" (Woldoff et al., 2011, p.1062).

Analysis

Researchers should continue investigating the socialization experiences of African Americans at predominately white institutions because it has the potential to bring clarity and resolutions to a multitude of societal issues.

The exploration of this subject will encourage white institutions to hone in on the social comfortability levels of their underrepresented student population. To a certain extent, colleges and universities lack the knowledge on how to provide these social resources to their students because one, there is limited information presented on this topic, and two, institutions have not established meaningful relationships with students to allow them to be vulnerable about their social discomfort, especially if race plays a factor. Yes, colleges and universities have established cultural centers on campus that aim at providing support services for underrepresented students, but these services will only be as effective as the relationships that are established between minority students and faculty. If PWIs have a low percentage of minority professors and administrators, then it makes it just as hard for these relationships to be created. I am not discrediting the authenticity of relationships created between non-minority faculty and African American students, because I myself have established meaningful relationships with white faculty within my department. It is just different connecting with people who can see parts of themselves within you, from a racial perspective. It also comes down to how intentional institutions are with monitoring the effectiveness of these cultural centers on campus. I have

visited numerous colleges, and I have seen cultural centers as just empty corner rooms with the words "MULTICULTURAL CENTER" above the entrance, and I have seen cultural centers that honor all ethnicities through wall art and historical quotes from well-known minority leaders.

The relationships that are established in these spaces are what matters most, but let's not negate how students visually and socially perceive these social spaces. Personally, I did not engage in cultural spaces, such as the Center for Multicultural and Diversity Education, at my institution because I did not feel socially comfortable around certain African American students. I felt that the black students at my college were judgmental and not welcoming to other students who did not associate with their primary social group. Luckily, I found my sense of community within athletics. As a collegiate track athlete, I was able to establish meaningful relationships with my teammates (most of the team consisted of African American men and women), athletes from different sports, and the faculty and staff within the athletic department. I felt comfortable venting about my problems with the black athletic administrators at my institution. I spent countless hours sitting in their offices during my free time. The staff created comfortable environments where I felt accepted, seen, and heard. If it wasn't for the strong African American presence within athletics, I do not think that my college experience would have been as socially and culturally impactful. That is why I believe that with the expansion of research on the social experiences of African American students at PWIs, higher education institutions will understand how to create welcoming cultural spaces for college students.

Higher education institutions can then move to establish campus initiatives with an aim of transitioning their Euro-centric, monolithic campus to a more cultural conscious environment that accentuates multiculturalism. The racial stresses of minority students will be lessened, and will allow them to excel academically and thrive in a new supported social space. Combating

institutional racism can not be resolved overnight, but if colleges and universities become cognizant and knowledgeable of the mental battles their minority students experience with being black, then they can help ease the social and racial pressures minorities experience daily. Professional development opportunities for faculty can then address topics such as microaggressions, cultural mistrust, and subtle racism to alleviate the social tension between white faculty and black students. An increased presence of African American faculty within learning spaces such as these will only enhance the training and the learning experience for future African American students. Throughout my entire four years of undergraduate, I only had one African American professor; the other handful of black staff worked in the African American Studies department. I would have liked to have seen an African American presence within other departments to know black people serve in fields other than subjects pertaining to black history. I feel that if potential African American students knew that their institutions held numerous minority faculty that served in a diverse pool of departments, then they would be more devoted to attending in the future. I certainly would have. Not only will new research benefit the institution's image, but it will also push its faculty, staff, and students to not visualize all African Americans as the same, but as individuals with separate stories to tell.

Identifying factors that are hindering the socialization experiences of African American college students at predominately white institutions will enhance the academic and social advancement of African American students. Presenting new findings to help institutions restructure the environments to better serve the minority population will give these students confidence that the institutions will prepare them academically, socially, and racially in the future. New information will ultimately lead to an increase in minority enrollment and retention in higher education. These students can essentially feel welcomed, wanted, and supported.

Creating a safe space for African American students will mend the racial community together and eliminate the cultural stigma that has been tagged on the backs of all black students. It is an opportunity to break the chain of oppression and to start seeing black students for who they are, and not the historical story of their social injustice. They can pour into one another, reinforcing positive affirmations to contribute to their racial identity development. White students will benefit from this union as well because they will soon gain a new perception of African Americans, and feel more comfortable establishing relationships with them. This new-found sense of togetherness will help deconstruct the oversimplified concept of "blackness". Overall, new knowledge that is contributed to advancing academic access on behalf of African Americans will open doors for other marginalized groups, eliminate negative racial constructs, and improve the social climate of all institutions of higher education.

To promote a positive African American experience at PWIs, I recommend for institutions to focus on the visibility of their cultural organizations on campus. I suggest colleges and universities monitor the effectiveness of these organizations by producing an annual survey addressing students' social and racial comfortability levels. With the survey results, PWIs can identify social trends and address these issues with faculty and staff at professional development events. This will also be an opportunity for students to mention any suggestions that can be incorporated in their initiative to promote positive social environments. I also recommend institutions to encourage cultural organizations to host social events geared towards bringing black faculty and students together, such as social mixers and meet-and-greet events. PWIs can enhance how African Americans are perceived at their institutions by providing authenticity through their recruitment efforts. I suggest PWIs collect the college experiences of current African American college students through interviews, and to present their findings through

admissions advertisement. I recommend that future research acknowledges how the geographical and socioeconomic differences amongst African Americans influence their social experiences at predominately white institutions. I think it would also be interesting to gain more information on the African American experience of black faculty who work at predominately white institutions. Future researchers should investigate the intentionality with how African American communities surrounding PWIs influence retention rates and student perception of African American heritage with black college students. I also recommend future researchers to explore how white faculty perceive African American college students who attend PWIs.

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